BEHAVIORAL AND EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO CONFLICT AS BOTH A ROMANTIC PARTNER AND A PARENT

by

CHRISTIN ELIZABETH HUGGINS

(Under the Direction of Jennifer A. Samp)

ABSTRACT

Conflict is a regular occurrence for parents due to the high levels of interdependence between family members as well as the strong emotions often elicited in family relationships. Applying a family systems approach and building upon the conceptual framework of the Spillover Hypothesis, this dissertation examined parents' communicative management of conflict across the marital and parent-child subsystems of the family. More specifically, this dissertation sought to clarify how a parent's verbal conflict strategies and nonverbal expressions of emotion during conflict with one's spouse may influence one's communicative management of conflict with one's adolescent child. The episodic outcome of conflict as associated with the use of specific verbal conflict strategies and expression of emotion was also explored. One hundred parents engaged in two conflict discussions: (1) a dyadic interaction with one's marital/romantic partner and (2) a triadic interaction with one's partner and adolescent child. The verbal conflict strategies and nonverbal expressions of emotion of one target parent were coded for each interaction, while the parent self-reported the degree to which he/she perceived each conflict was resolved as a consequence of discussion. Results provided support for the transference of a parent's verbal conflict behaviors, both constructive and destructive, across family subsystems.

For nonverbal expression of emotion, a positive association was demonstrated for the expression of anger from the marital to the parent-adolescent conflict. Finally, for the marital conflict specifically, the use of the negotiation approach predicted increases in perceived conflict resolution, while the direct fighting approach predicted decreases in the perception that the conflict was resolved. Surprisingly, expression of anger in the marital conflict was positively associated with perceived conflict resolution. The results of this dissertation contribute to the understanding of parents' communicative management of conflict across family subsystems, suggesting parents utilize a variety of constructive and destructive responses to manage problematic interactions with their romantic partner, which can influence responses to conflict with their adolescent child.

INDEX WORDS: Conflict, Conflict Resolution, Conflict Tactics, Emotion, Emotion Expression, Family Communication, Marital Conflict, Parent-Adolescent Conflict, Spillover

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2014

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DEDICATION

As my dissertation is focused on communication as both a romantic partner and a parent, it is only fitting that I dedicate this dissertation to those in my own family who fill those roles.

To my husband, Noah:

For your unwavering support and encouragement. You are the love of my life. I couldn't have done this without you. You always believed in me and sacrificed so much to make my dissertation, my degree, my dream; a reality. You have put up with more than anyone else ever could and have shown me unconditional love through the often turbulent times of my doctoral program. We're a team, and we made it.

To my parents, Caroline and Jimmy:

For your constant love and enduring support. You both have inspired me to keep pushing and have shown through your own hard work and determination that every effort will be worth it. You never doubted me for a moment, even when I doubted myself. Moma, you have always been my loudest cheerleader. I know that I can count on you to be just as excited and filled with joy as I am, no matter how minor or major the accomplishment. I am so thankful to have you two as my encouragers, my prayer warriors, and my parents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not be possible without the support and guidance of many individuals. First and foremost, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to my advisor, Jennifer Samp, who has guided me through my graduate career. You have fostered my growth as both a scholar and an individual over the past six years. Your challenging me to push myself beyond my limits and encouraging me to continue when times got tough have allowed me to reach this point in my career. Thank you for always being available to address my concerns and for providing the opportunity to serve as the UGA site project manager for the grant. I am certain that this experience is invaluable and will serve me well in the future. Finally, thank you for cultivating my enthusiasm for close relationship conflict research and sharing my passion for this dissertation project in particular.

I would also like to thank my dissertation committee for your efforts to help me refine this project. Jen, your guidance from my first graduate research methods course until now have shaped my understanding and approach to close relationship research. Thank you for motivating me to enhance my understanding of emotion, which has contributed considerably to this project. LJ, your methodological instruction and willingness to answer questions, no matter how small, has been invaluable to this project and throughout my graduate career. Steve, your course in marital dysfunction and intervention played a critical role in motivating my inquiry of marital and parent-child communication. Thank you for always encouraging me to think outside of the current project to how these efforts can contribute to future endeavors.

Appreciation of the efforts of many who have contributed to the larger grant project both at the University of Rochester and here at the University of Georgia is vital. From the University of Rochester, I would like to thank Melissa Sturge-Apple and Patrick Davies for their contributions to the grant project. I would especially like to thank Melissa for her willingness to address any questions I had throughout the course of the project as well as her enthusiasm for the efforts of this dissertation. To Karin Gasaway, thank you for your timely correspondence and hours invested in the collection of data. This dissertation would not be possible without the contributions of several undergraduates at the University of Georgia who served in various capacities: Briana Barkett, Marc Deas, Logan Johnson, Abbey Miner, Ryan O'Keeffe, Alexis Oubre, Jessie Powell, Emily Salerno, Mike Thornton, and Meghan Welch. Special thanks go to Jessie Powell for her reassurance and willingness to go above and beyond.

I must also express my gratitude to those who have walked beside me through my graduate years at UGA. To my "ladies cohort," Laura Kollar and Athena Murray, thank you for your camaraderie over the past four years. I will miss our lunches commiserating over the trials and joys of graduate school. To Stacy Westerman, Brittany Brown, Emily Winderman, Megan Fitzmaurice, Mary Lee Cunill, Sarah Comer, Sarah Tuck, and Emily Scheinfeld for always being willing to listen, for encouraging me, and for infusing my doctoral program with joy. I would also like to thank my graduate colleagues for being such a wonderful community of individuals who have aided me in this endeavor in countless ways.

It is also essential to thank Elise Berryhill who provided me with the skills to create a healthy work-life balance and whose gentle guidance was essential to my ability to reach this goal of completing my dissertation.

I also extend my deepest gratitude to my friends and family. Thank you for providing an escape from the often isolating work of a graduate student. Your support and optimism have been essential to my success. A special thank you to my mema, Opal Daniel, who has never lacked a love of learning. She is recognized as a woman of strong character by all who know her, and I aspire to follow her example.

Finally, this dissertation would not be possible without the families who participated in the study. I am grateful for their willingness to take part in a time-intensive project that seeks to better understand the dynamics of marital and parent-adolescent communication during conflict.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Conflict is a normative, prevalent aspect of marital and parent-child interactions (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Kitzmann, 2000; Robles, Shaffer, Malarkey, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2006), which results from the high levels of interdependence and emotional involvement characterizing these relationships (Canary, Cupach, & Serpe, 2001; Sillars, Canary, & Tafoya, 2004). Points of transition in the family such as the newlywed years (Sillars et al., 2004), adjustment to parenthood (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Sillars et al., 2004), and raising adolescents (Belsky & Hsieh, 1998; Cui & Donnellan, 2009) present occasions for increased frequency and intensity of conflict. During adolescence, the communicative behaviors used by parents to manage conflict in the marital and parent-child subsystems may be particularly consequential to family relationships, more so than the simple presence or frequency with which conflict occurs (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Davies & Cummings, 1994; Kitzmann, 2000).

Working from a family systems perspective, conceptually the behaviors enacted and emotions expressed by a parent to communicatively manage marital conflict can be transferred to a subsequent conflict interaction with one's adolescent child (Erel & Burman, 1995; Kitzmann, 2000; Rinaldi & Howe, 2003). Yet, explicit examination of parents' micro-level communication behaviors across family subsystems is limited. Prior research has focused on the transference of global relationship quality from the marital to parent-child subsystem, while work focused on communication specifically has aimed to establish the substantial influence of parents' conflict communication on child adjustment (e.g., Davies, Sturge-Apple, Winter, Cummings, & Farrell, 2006; Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006). Interest in child developmental outcomes has

encouraged study of parents' communication in families with young children such as toddlers (e.g., Barry & Kolchanska, 2010; Kolak & Volling, 2007) and elementary age children (e.g., Katz & Gottman, 1996; Kitzmann, 2000). Thus prior efforts, though informative, are not specific to the individual communication behaviors and emotions expressed during conflict and may also not be representative of conflict dynamics and parent behavior in families with adolescent children (Branje, Laursen, & Collins, 2013).

Previous investigations of communication in marital and parent-child conflicts also tend to define communication in such a way that confounds verbal conflict behaviors and nonverbal expressions of emotion (Sillars et al., 2004). Though much communication scholarship presents emotion as a central aspect of conflict (Dillard & Kinney, 1994; Guerrero & LaValley, 2006; Jones, 2001), limited work explicitly examines expression of emotion within conflict interactions (for exception see Huggins & Samp, 2013b). Therefore, the current project addresses a gap in family conflict communication research by precisely focusing on parents' micro-level communicative management of both marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions, through the analysis of individual verbal conflict tactics and explicit examination of nonverbal expressions of emotion.

In this dissertation, I apply a family systems approach to understand how a parent's verbal conflict strategies and nonverbal expression of emotion during conflict with one's spouse may influence one's communicative management of conflict with one's adolescent child. To begin, I review Family Systems Theory as the theoretical perspective for the project along with the Spillover Hypothesis as the conceptual framework for understanding how a parent's communication in the marital relationship may influence his/her communication in the parent-child subsystem. Then, I present a review of research outlining the verbal conflict strategies

parents may enact during problem discussions as well as the emotions relevant to close relationship conflicts. Propositions for the transference of verbal conflict strategies and emotion expression across family subsystems are put forth.

Family Systems Theory

Family Systems Theory (FST) is a general approach to understanding and studying the family as a system of integrated elements (Emery, 2014; Minuchin, 1985). According to this theoretical perspective, one must study the family as a composite system to fully understand relational dynamics (Hinde & Stevenson-Hinde, 1988; Minuchin, 1988). Interdependence of individual members within a family is emphasized such that functioning in a single subsystem (e.g., marital relationship) influences and is influenced by relationships in other subsystems (e.g., parent-child relationship, sibling relationships) (Davies, Sturge-Apple, & Cummings, 2004; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). To fully understand Family Systems Theory as the theoretical framework for the current project, it is essential to delineate the six primary assumptions of this perspective originally put forth by developmental psychologist Minuchin (1985).

First as a system, the family is an organized unit in which the individuals that make up that unit are interdependent. The assumption of interdependence has implications for the current research, which examines a parent's communication. According to FST, complete understanding of an individual cannot be obtained without placing that person in the context of overarching family dynamics and as interdependent on other members of the family. As such, I examine a parent's behavior across interactions in two family subsystems to consider the influence one's marital relationship may have on his/her behavior in the parent-adolescent relationship within the family.

The second principle of FST defines the family as a complex system comprised of subsystems: primarily the marital, parent-child, and sibling subsystems. Here, I examine the marital subsystem, which is considered the foundation of the family (Erel & Burman, 1995). Additionally, conflict or other disturbances that may occur in the marital subsystem can have substantial effects on other family relations including parent-child interactions (Crockenberg & Langrock, 2001; Kitzmann, 2000; Rinaldi & Howe, 2003). As such, I also examine communication within the parent-child subsystem.

Third, causal relationships in the family are bi-directional rather than linear due to the interdependence of family members (Minuchin, 1985). Claims regarding causality cannot be made within the family because of the reciprocal relationship between family members; rather the relationships are proposed as correlational (Emery, 2014). Scholars may then explore the relationships between individual members of the family and between subsystems but must be careful when making causal claims about the direction of the relationship (Emery, 2014). Following this assumption, I focus on the behaviors of parents because of their primary position in the family but acknowledge the potential for children and the parent-child relationship to influence the parent as an individual. Yet, it must be noted that this dissertation deviates from the traditional application of FST, by analyzing behavior within an interaction rather than global relationship functioning. Therefore, the order of the conflict interactions (i.e., marital first, parent-adolescent second) may allow for implications for a parent's behavioral and emotional responses in the marital conflict to influence his/her communicative responses in the parent-adolescent discussion because of the chronological order of these interactions.

Fourth, similar to other mechanisms, families prefer homeostasis and therefore have features in place that regulate and maintain stability when changes or disturbances arise.

Minuchin (1985) states, “The basic concept [of family homeostasis] is of an error-activated process by which behavior departing from the expected range of a family’s patterns is controlled, via corrective feedback loops, to reestablish familiar equilibrium” (p. 290). This process can have both constructive and destructive consequences for the family, such that both positive and negative behaviors may be maintained within the system. Therefore, it is valuable to understand if parents consistently enact specific communicative behaviors and express particular emotional content of messages across family subsystems, as the identification of communicative consistencies could assist in determining the behaviors and emotional responses that may lead to adaptive or maladaptive conflict outcomes and family functioning.

A counterpart to the homeostasis tenet is the fifth principle of FST, morphogenesis, which states that change is an intrinsic aspect of open systems; meaning alterations to the family system are a regular occurrence. To cope with these changes, families must evolve in such a way that requires every family member to adapt for the transition to be successful (Minuchin, 1985). The current focus on parents raising an adolescent child considers a point of potential instability for a family that may require adaptation to reestablish stability. The volatility of adolescence may also increase the propensity for conflict in the family such that prior research indicates raising an adolescent is a point of transition for families which often results in increased frequency and intensity of conflict (Belsky & Hsieh, 1998; Cui & Donnellan, 2009).

The final principle of FST is that family subsystems are often divided according to particular boundaries. Interactions across boundaries, such as those of interest here, may be implicitly regulated by typical patterns of behaviors that are maintained by members of the subsystem and by implicit rules for interaction. Like other aspects of the family, constant adaptation of the boundaries between subsystems is inevitable and requires consistent evolution

to internal and external changes. The ways in which family members and family subsystems influence one another may take many forms and result in divergent outcomes for individual family members and the family as a whole.

The basic assumptions of Family Systems Theory point to a range of approaches for studying conflict between family members and across family subsystems. Minuchin (1985) points to the benefits of investigating singular family members because of the individual information each person contributes to family interactions and the system overall. For example, prior communication scholarship has explored the influence of perceived parent conflict style on a young adult child's perceived sense of shared family identity with the target parent (Beck & Ledbetter, 2013). Beck and Ledbetter (2013) found the association between family communication patterns and a young adult child's shared family identity with the parent was mediated by the child's reports of the parent's approach to conflict with him/her (Beck & Ledbetter, 2013). Even still, this work utilized retrospective self-reports, which limits understanding of family dynamics when compared to analysis of the communicative responses of individual family members during recorded conflict discussions.

Minuchin (1985), as a developmental psychologist, points to the need for examination of developmental transitions as well. Times of transition in the family are also of interest to communication scholars as transitions provide the potential for difficult, potentially volatile conflict interactions. Much scholarship utilizing FST to understand conflict within the family has focused on young children such as toddlers (Kolak & Volling, 2007) and early elementary aged children (Katz & Gottman, 1996; Kitzmann, 2000; Stroud, Durbin, Wilson, & Mendelson, 2011) often overlooking adolescents. Indeed, Fosco and Grych (2010) concur that research focused on parents and youth (i.e., children 12 to 18 years old) is limited despite the

characterization of adolescence as a time where children seek autonomy from parents, which may heighten the potential for conflict between parents and children. Adolescent children may also develop greater understanding of conflict dynamics during this time (Fosco & Grych, 2010) and may therefore present parents with a greater challenge when conflicts arise. This dissertation seeks to contribute to the understanding of family conflict dynamics during a potentially turbulent time for families. Therefore, the current project examines a parent's communication across family subsystems during the transitional period of raising an adolescent child, which is understudied in communication research. I now turn to review the primary mechanisms by which the marital subsystem may influence the parent-child subsystem.

Processes Linking Marital and Parent-Child Subsystems

Many scholars have espoused the benefits of taking a systems approach to the study of family dynamics, yet empirical examinations of the family as a system are limited (Emery, 2014). Three primary hypotheses explaining the reciprocal relationship between the marital and parent-child subsystems describe various processes linking these relationships: the Cognitive-Contextual Model, the Emotional Security Hypothesis, and the Spillover Hypothesis. These three perspectives primarily focus on the outcomes of interparental conflict.

The Cognitive-Contextual Model, developed by Grych and Fincham (1990), focuses on child maladjustment as a result of marital conflict. This model asserts that interparental conflict is a stressor for a child that activates a child's attempts to cognitively cope with and understand the conflict situation (Grych, 2005). A child's coping behaviors may include problem- or emotion-focused coping, regulation of emotion, distraction, or intervening in the situation (Grych & Fincham, 1990). According to this perspective, cognition is primary and affect is secondary although still influential to child adjustment. In all, the Cognitive-Contextual Model seeks to

explain outcomes of interparental conflict from the viewpoint of a child's ability to cope with the conflict rather than the parents' communicative behavior during conflict.

Conversely the Emotional Security Hypothesis (ESH), advanced by Davies and Cummings (1994), asserts exposure to marital conflict creates emotional *insecurity* for children, which decreases their ability to both effectively cope with conflict and to regulate emotion in the presence of daily stressors. For example in a longitudinal analysis of children ages 5 to 18, Cummings and colleagues concluded that interparental discord increased both internalizing and externalizing problems in children, which was mediated by the child's level of emotional security (Cummings, Schermerhorn, Davies, Goeke-Morey, & Cummings, 2006). Additional research implementing ESH focuses more specifically on the role of a parent's communication across the marital and parent-child subsystems as a factor influencing child adjustment (Davies & Cummings, 1994). For example, Davies and colleagues (2006) examined over 200 families with a kindergarten-aged child using a longitudinal design where parents engaged in two interparental conflict interactions and a parents-child clean-up task. Results indicated that a parent's displays of hostility and withdrawal during the interparental conflict interaction were positively associated with child distress responses and emotional reactivity to conflict one year later. These findings demonstrate the potential for conflict communication within the marital dyad to have an influence on other individuals and relationships within the family.

Though the Cognitive-Contextual Model and the Emotional Security Hypothesis provide a glimpse of the potential for a parent's communication during marital conflict to have implications outside of the marital dyad, these perspectives do not specifically address a parent's communication behaviors across the marital and parent-child subsystems. However, the third perspective of the Spillover Hypothesis moves beyond these approaches by asserting that mood,

emotion, and behavior can be transferred across family subsystems (Engfer, 1988; Erel & Burman, 1995). Therefore, the Spillover Hypothesis is utilized here as the conceptual framework for understanding how communication behaviors enacted by a parent may be used consistently across marital and parent-child conflict interactions. As there is little research specific to both verbal and nonverbal communication across family subsystems, I have elected to use the Spillover Hypothesis as the guiding principle for examining parents' use of verbal conflict tactics and nonverbal emotional responses across the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts. Even though this perspective has not been applied specifically to conflict communication in the past, the applicability of the Spillover Hypothesis to both verbal communication and nonverbal emotional expressions renders this perspective germane to the current project. The Spillover Hypothesis and its relevance to the current context are discussed in detail below.

Spillover Hypothesis

The Spillover Hypothesis proposes parents' marital functioning influences their parenting behavior in dyadic interactions (i.e., parent-child) and their coparenting behavior in triadic interactions (i.e., parent-spouse-child) (Stroud et al., 2011). Though much research has investigated how marital relationship quality may influence the parent-child relationship generally, identification of specific mechanisms of spillover is limited (Fosco & Grych, 2010; Jouriles & Farris, 1992; Stroud et al., 2011) particularly with regard to communication behavior. The conceptualization of spillover as the transference of moods, emotions, and behaviors from one family context to another (Erel & Burman, 1995; Katz & Gottman, 1996; Repetti, 1987) suggests the Spillover Hypothesis can be applied to conflictual interactions across subsystems to better understand dynamics of family conflict communication. However, previous applications

of the Spillover Hypothesis focus on global relationship functioning rather than specific communication behaviors and expressions of emotion. Therefore, though conceptually consistent with the hypothesis, this dissertation deviates from traditional applications of the Spillover Hypothesis by utilizing this perspective as the conceptual framework for examining parents' individual communicative responses to conflict interactions across family subsystems. Considering, close relationship conflict is an emotional experience that is communicatively managed through the use of various verbal and nonverbal behaviors; it is of interest to identify both a parent's verbal conflict strategies and nonverbal expressions of emotion in marital conflict that may also be used strategically in parent-adolescent interactions.

Marital Conflict and Parent-Child Relationship Quality

Previous applications of the Spillover Hypothesis to the conflict context have traditionally focused on how marital conflict may alter the overall quality of the parent-child relationship and the quality of parenting behavior in a dyadic context (i.e., parent-child). Regarding the influence of marital difficulty on general parent-child interactions and relational quality; Almeida, Wetherington, and Chandler (1999) used a daily-diary method and found the experience of stressors and tensions in the marital relationship on one day was positively correlated with difficult parent-child interactions the following day. Additionally, Fosco and Grych (2010) examined the influence of triangulation, parents pulling children into interparental conflicts, on perceived parent-child relational quality. The authors assessed responses of adolescent children between the ages of 14 and 19 to questionnaire measures administered over two data collection sessions six months apart. The results indicated adolescent-reported involvement in parental conflict at Time 1 was negatively associated with parent-child relationship functioning at Time 2 (Fosco & Grych, 2010). Though these studies center on the

association between marital conflict and parent-child relationships generally, the results indicate the potential for spillover of specific behaviors from the marital to the parent-child subsystem.

Marital Conflict and Parenting Behavior

Results of examinations analyzing the association between interparental conflict and parenting behavior specifically are consistent with the Spillover Hypothesis. For example, a meta-analysis of over one hundred effect sizes conducted by Krishnakumar and Buehler (2000) points to the negative association between marital conflict and parenting behavior, which was stronger for older children in middle childhood or adolescence as compared to younger children. These findings indicate difficulty in the marital relationship, as evidenced by conflict, may decrease one's ability to effectively parent. The connection between marital conflict and parenting for those raising adolescents is also supported by the work of Feinberg, Kan, and Hetherington (2007). The authors analyzed the conflict behavior of parents coparenting a child between the ages of 9 and 18 in both a marital and a parent-child interaction. Consistent with the Spillover Hypothesis, Feinberg and colleagues (2007) found higher rates of coparenting conflict predicted higher levels of parental negativity in the parent-child interaction, particularly for fathers.

The association between communication in a marital conflict and a parent-child interaction has been demonstrated for parents with younger children as well (i.e., early elementary age). Katz and Gottman (1996) examined a videotaped marital conflict interaction followed by a triadic family interaction where children were (1) asked by parents to recall a story previously read aloud by the researcher and were (2) taught by the parents to play a videogame. Parents' communication behavior during the marital interaction was coded for hostility by outside observers. For mothers, hostility in the marital interaction was positively associated with

the use of sarcastic humor in the family interaction (Katz & Gottman, 1996). For fathers, manifest hostility in the marital conflict was significantly correlated with low positive interaction involvement and high intrusiveness in the family interaction. As such, these findings demonstrate the potential for negative behavior and emotional tone in a marital conflict to decrease positive parenting and increase negative parenting behavior.

Jouriles and Farris' (1992) examination of married individuals with sons between three and seven years of age also points to the potential for marital conflict to increase fathers' negative parenting behavior. Parents were randomly assigned to engage in either a marital conflict discussion or a non-conflict marital interaction, followed by a parent-son task. Fathers assigned to engage in a marital conflict were more likely to use vague and confusing commands in interactions with their sons than were fathers in the non-conflict condition. Though these findings should be applied with caution to the current project, as these studies were specific to parents with young children, the work of Katz and Gottman (1996) and Jouriles and Farris (1992) indicates the potential for verbal behavior and nonverbal emotion expression in a marital conflict to influence individuals' communication behavior in discussions with a child. Despite these findings, the individual communicative behaviors enacted during marital conflict that are transferred to parent-child interactions have not been identified (Kitzmann, 2000). Scholars have acknowledged the need to examine spousal communication by focusing on how dynamics in the marital relationship may spillover to other family relations as a means of identifying and disrupting destructive patterns of behavior (Erel & Burman, 1995). Though previous investigations have examined behaviors enacted and emotionality during conflict, many studies utilize global assessments of conflict behavior and emotion expression.

Evidence of transference of behavior and emotion across subsystems is provided in Kitzmann's (2000) study of parent's conflict behavior and emotional expressivity in both a marital and parent-son triadic interaction. Kitzmann's (2000) investigation closely approximates the focus of the current project by providing evidence of the capability for conflict behavior and emotional expression to be transferred from a marital conflict to a parent-child interaction. For example, Kitzmann (2000) argues that child outcomes from marital conflict are mediated by changes in effective parenting behavior such that marital conflict decreases spouses' abilities to effectively parent their child. To test this association, parents engaged in either a marital conflict interaction or a non-conflict interaction followed by a triadic family discussion with their elementary-aged son. The triadic family interaction however, was designed to be a neutral discussion rather than a conflict. The results demonstrated that fathers in the marital conflict condition displayed significantly less support/engagement toward their sons than did fathers in the marital non-conflict condition (Kitzmann, 2000). Also, the couple level expressed negativity in the marital interaction (regardless of condition) was negatively correlated with both fathers' ($r = -.25$, $p < .05$) and mothers' ($r = -.49$, $p < .05$) support/engagement in the triadic interaction. Regarding the spillover of emotion, the degree of expressed negativity in the marital interaction significantly increased negativity ($r = .27$, $p < .05$) and decreased positivity/warmth ($r = -.27$, $p < .05$) in the family interaction. A particular strength of Kitzmann's (2000) work is the explicit focus on parenting behavior and emotional response within the triadic interaction rather than child adjustment or outcomes. Yet, assessments of parents' behavior in the marital interaction were global rather than specific to individuals' verbal conflict strategies as well as emotion being assessed according to valence rather than the results corresponding to the expression of specific emotions.

Global assessments of conflict behavior and dimensional approaches (i.e., positive vs. negative) to emotion expression may be insufficient to fully describe parents behavioral and emotional responses to conflict across subsystems as well as the outcomes associated with particular conflict management behaviors and expression of discrete emotions. Indeed Gottman's work (1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992) demonstrates that various forms of negativity can result in divergent outcomes. In addition, as evidenced above much marital and family conflict research dismisses the potential benefits of managing conflict in a positive, constructive manner instead focusing exclusively on negative approaches. The current project refines investigation of parents' conflict communication by exploring the association between a parents' use of both positively and negatively valenced individual behaviors and emotions that may be enacted during live marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions. The remainder of this chapter outlines the conflict strategies and discrete emotions relevant to close relationship conflicts.

Verbal Strategies for Communicative Management of Conflict

Working through problematic discussions allows for relational growth and has the potential to demonstrate one's capability to successfully navigate difficult topics. However, individuals do not always approach conflict in a constructive manner, play by the rules, or display sportsmanship when immersed in discussion of a problematic topic (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Thus, the ways in which conflict is managed may be more threatening to individuals and relationships than simply the presence of conflict (Segrin, Hanzal, & Domschke, 2009) or the frequency with which it occurs within the relationship (Hanzal & Segrin, 2009; Noller & Feeney, 1998; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). Indeed, marital distress is often considered the result of enactment of destructive conflict responses (Fincham & Beach, 1999),

with prior work distinguishing relationships as functional or dysfunctional according to sequences of communication (Sillars, Wilmot, & Hocker, 1993).

The potentially threatening nature of verbal conflict behavior applies to families as well. For example, Kitzmann (2000) states the ineffective management of conflict is detrimental to both family relationships and individual well-being. More specifically, maladaptive conflict engagement by a parent may threaten marital relationship functioning (Kitzmann, 2000), child adjustment (Crockenberg & Langrock, 2001), and the mental and physical health of parents (Kitzmann, 2000). In light of the potential for a parent's use of strategic conflict behaviors to result in detrimental outcomes for family members and their relationships, it is important to understand how conflict management behaviors have been conceptualized in previous research.

Conceptualization of Conflict Communication Behaviors

Much communication scholarship has considered the behaviors an individual may employ to strategically manage interpersonal conflict. Prior efforts to categorize conflict communication behaviors have resulted in an array of taxonomies (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Seminal conflict scholarship classified behavior using a single dimension of cooperation and competition (Deutsch, 1973), with future work organizing behavior into three-part (Sillars, Coletti, Parry, & Rogers, 1982; Sillars, Pike, Jones, & Murphy, 1984) and five-part taxonomies (Thomas, 1988). Past research utilizing these taxonomies has focused on an individual's general orientation to interpersonal conflict known as his/her conflict style (Canary & Lakey, 2013; Kuhn & Poole, 2000), which is a broad level description of the communication that can occur during conflict interactions (Sillars & Canary, 2013).

One's conflict style has traditionally been defined by one's locus of concern, either self- or other-oriented (Blake & Mouton, 1964; Thomas, 1976; 1988). Using this conceptualization,

an individual may approach conflict in a variety of ways as determined by his/her level of assertiveness (i.e., concern for self) and cooperation (i.e., concern for others) (Canary & Lakey, 2013; Thomas, 1988). Combining one's level of concern for the self and concern for the other has resulted in general approaches to conflict, such as the five-part typology of conflict styles (i.e., competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, accommodating) (Beck & Ledbetter, 2013; Thomas & Kilmann, 1978). The conflict styles approach has been widely applied in interpersonal communication scholarship and has identified that individuals have a tendency to address conflict in a similar manner across situations (Canary & Lakey, 2013; Kuhn & Poole, 2000; Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998). These findings are consistent with the perspective of the Spillover Hypothesis that parents may utilize similar behaviors when in conflict with one's marital partner and in conflict with one's adolescent child. Yet, using the broad level of conflict style to understand the communicative behaviors one may employ during problematic discussions is limited by the conceptualization of conflict style according to concern for one's own or another's desired outcome (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994).

Several scholars have noted problems with using conflict styles to understand and represent how individuals strategically manage conflict (Canary & Lakey, 2013; Sillars & Canary, 2013; van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Difficulty arises in the assumption that a person's level of caring for one's self or one's communicative partner consistently leads to his/her use of a particular conflict behavior. For example, Canary and Lakey (2013) note that conflict style research indicates a low concern for self and a low concern for others should lead to the use of avoidance. However, an individual may avoid because of a high concern for the self and the other, such as shifting topic of discussion to keep from hurting a partner's feelings. In addition, van de Vliert and Euwema (1994) assert that concerns are located within the

individual and therefore cannot be readily observed or used as a descriptive feature of conflict messages. Therefore, scholars suggest an alternate means of explaining how individuals manage interpersonal conflict by examining specific communicative acts or strategies employed during conflict.

Reviews of marital and family conflict communication have advocated the use of van de Vliert and Euwema's (1994) taxonomy of conflict behaviors as it subsumes prior organizations of general conflict styles and represents the messages individuals may produce when in conflict (Canary & Lakey, 2013; Koerner, 2013; Sillars & Canary, 2013). Thus, before continuing to explore a parent's use of conflict behaviors across family subsystems, provision of a full understanding of the current conceptualization of verbal conflict strategies is needed.

Taxonomy of Verbal Conflict Strategies

Individuals may communicatively manage conflict through the use of a variety of verbal strategies: behaviors employed in response to a perceived incompatibility of goals (Bevan & Sparks, 2014; Koerner, 2013; van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Though Sillars and colleagues' (2004; Sillars & Canary, 2013) recommend using van de Vliert and Euwema's (1994) taxonomy, Sillars also suggests a slight alteration in the labeling of the dimensions used to distinguish conflict behaviors in order to be more specific to the features of messages. As such, I utilize the dimensions of directness (i.e., activeness) and valence (i.e., agreeableness) to distinguish the verbal conflict strategies parents may employ during marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions.

The directness dimension identifies one's level of engagement in the conflict, ranging from direct (i.e., active) to indirect (i.e., passive). Features of direct communication include active discussion, responding to and soliciting information, and confronting the conflict.

Conversely, avoiding or passively approaching the conflict characterizes indirect conflict engagement. The valence dimension indicates the degree to which the message is positive and pleasant as opposed to negative and unpleasant. Thus, communication can range from cooperative (i.e., agreeable) to competitive (i.e., disagreeable). Cooperation is manifest by behaviors indicating acceptance, understanding, and unity with one's communicative partner. In contrast, competition is demonstrated by opposition, rejection, and tension toward another (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Combining the directness and valence dimensions results in four general approaches to conflict management: *negotiation* (active/agreeable), *direct fighting* (active/disagreeable), *nonconfrontation* (passive/agreeable), and *indirect fighting* (passive/disagreeable) (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994).

Sillars and colleagues' (Sillars, 1980; Sillars et al., 1984) conventional categorization of verbal conflict behaviors includes the categories of integrative, distributive, and avoidant behaviors, which has often been applied to close relationship conflict (Bevan, 2013; Bevan & Sparks, 2014). However, the taxonomy proposed by van de Vliert and Euwema (1994) deviates from and elaborates Sillars' categorization with the addition of a fourth strategy resulting from a more clear distinction of the traditional avoidant approach along the agreeableness (i.e., valence) dimension. Rather than being distinguished simply by its directness, avoidance is considered as more complex with the potential to be enacted positively or negatively based on the current classification (Sillars et al., 2004). Differentiating avoidance according to valence may allow for greater specificity of the implications of enacting indirect approaches within conflict interactions, as the findings of past research are inconsistent (Sillars et al., 2004). For example, avoidance has been considered as both beneficial and detrimental to relationships with functionality differing according to relationship type and context (Fitzpatrick, Fallis, & Vance, 1982; Gottman, 1994;

Roberts, 2000). Below, I review the four primary conflict approaches and outline the strategies contained within each approach.

Direct Approaches

Taking an active and direct approach to conflict reflects an explicit acknowledgement of the problem and an orientation toward conflict engagement (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). According to the valence dimension, individuals may engage one's partner in a positive, rational or a negative, hostile manner (Overall, Fletcher, Simpson, & Sibley, 2009). Van de Vliert and Euwema's (1994) taxonomy is focused primarily on the manifest behaviors associated with active agreement and disagreement, yet scholars taking a cognitive approach to the study of interpersonal communication have also considered the motivations behind the use of these behaviors. For example, individuals taking a positive approach to conflict engagement are considered to focus on relationship- or partner-oriented aims, while a negative orientation centers on coercing or demanding one's partner to benefit oneself (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 1999; Klinetob & Smith, 1996). Each approach and its corresponding verbal conflict strategies are described below.

Negotiation. Engaging in conflict interactions in such a way that expresses positivity and cooperation characterizes the conflict approach of negotiation. According to Sillars (1986), *analytic* and *conciliatory remarks* are strategies that make up the negotiation approach. Negotiation is considered a constructive means of conflict management as analytic and conciliatory remarks express a high concern for oneself and one's partner, and work toward resolution by collaborating with one's partner through the provision and solicitation of information (Bevan, 2013; van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). In addition, conflict strategies included in the negotiation approach may contribute to the mental and physical health benefits

individuals may receive from a marital relationship (Robles et al., 2006) and may lead to adaptive physiological responses to conflict (Karney & Bradbury, 1995).

Analytic remarks. Analytic remarks are specifically focused on providing nonevaluative statements and soliciting information from one's partner. Nonevaluative messages may provide description, disclosure, or qualification of the topic and specific events surrounding the conflict. In addition, one may seek information from a partner or state receptiveness for constructive, personal criticism (Keck & Samp, 2007; Sillars, 1986). Using analytic remarks for conflict management may allow a parent to rationally work through both a marital and parent-adolescent disagreement by providing information and clarification of the problematic issue.

Conciliatory remarks. The verbal behaviors comprising conciliatory remarks take the direct, positive approach one step further by moving beyond simple provision of information without judgment. Instead, conciliation includes positively toned messages that convey support and understanding of a partner as well as shared interests (Sillars, 1986). Acceptance of responsibility and making concessions are also behaviors for constructive management of conflict classified as conciliatory remarks. Concessions may include a display of flexibility and a willingness to make changes in an effort to achieve a solution that is acceptable to all parties (Robles et al., 2006; Sillars, 1986). Conciliatory remarks are similar to the constructive and active approach outlined by Overall, Sibley, and Travaglia (2010) that seeks to improve the discussion and relationship by providing alternative solutions to the problem.

Direct fighting. The direct fighting approach is indicated by behavior that addresses conflict in an upfront and aggressive manner (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Direct fighting includes the strategies of *confrontative remarks* and *personal attacks* (Sillars, 1986). Most scholars assent directly competitive and hostile approaches to conflict management are

destructive to relationships as confrontative remarks and personal attacks are often motivated by self-interested concerns (Bevan, 2013). Therefore, the enactment of these actively negative behaviors may be indicative of maladjustment (Sillars et al., 2004). In fact, directly aggressive approaches to conflict have been cited as often lowering levels of relationship satisfaction (Canary, 2003; Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006; Overall et al., 2009) and having the potential to lead to marital dissolution (Gottman & Levenson, 2000).

Confrontative remarks. Confrontative remarks are verbal behaviors that are generally aggressive toward a partner (Sillars, 1986). Specific behaviors include open denial of personal responsibility for the conflict and transferring fault of the conflict from oneself to one's communicative partner. Individuals may also express aggressive commands, threats, jokes, and questions to another. These messages may implicitly blame the other for the conflict and demand a change in his/her behavior. Hostile remarks or statements that affirm the presence of conflict while demonstrating discontent with another are also included as behaviors signally directly, aggressive conflict engagement. Though not explicitly included in the verbal behaviors outlined by Sillars (1986), hostile remarks were added to the confrontative remark strategy because these behaviors actively derogate the partner and were prevalent in the interactions observed for the current project.

Personal attacks. Hostile behaviors aimed precisely at one's communicative partner are considered personal attacks. This strategy includes direct criticism of another's character and behavior. Rejection is also part of the personal attack strategy and occurs immediately following a statement made by one's communicative partner. A rejecting statement is a response of disagreement with and enmity toward the partner (Sillars et al., 2004). Finally, presumptive

remarks are also personal attacks and include ascribing thoughts, motivations, or feelings to a partner that have not been acknowledged by him/her (Sillars, 1986).

The distinction of confrontative remarks and personal attacks is similar to the designation of issue and outcome fighting outlined by van de Vliert and Euwema (1994). Issue fighting is focused on stating one's frustrations and the specific problems that need to be addressed. Outcome fighting, on the other hand, includes statements made to "defeat the opponent" and secure one's desired end to the conflict (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994, p. 677). Therefore, confrontative remarks may be used to directly address the issue of discussion, while personal attacks address the partner in such a way as to win the conflict.

Indirect Approaches

Passive conflict management represents an indirect means of addressing conflict (Sillars et al., 2004; van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Communicators using the indirect approach seek to avoid the conflict issue (Overall et al., 2009; Sillars, 1986) and often present a moderate concern for both individuals in the relationship (Bevan, 2013). As is true of active conflict engagement, passive approaches can be both positively and negatively valenced (Sillars et al., 2004; van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). The positive, indirect approach focuses on cooperation with one's communicative partner while avoiding direct discussion of the issue. However, the negative and competitive indirect approach overtly denies the presence of conflict while purposefully evading discussion of the issue (Sillars, 1986). Specific strategies that make up the cooperative and competitive aspects of the indirect approach are outlined below.

Nonconfrontation. Conflict behaviors that present a pleasant and cooperative display through passive engagement in discussion are categorized under the approach of nonconfrontation. Verbal strategies included in the nonconfrontation approach are *topic*

management, noncommittal remarks, and *irreverent remarks* (Sillars, 1986). Because of the non-hostile management of difficulties, these strategies have the potential to be persuasive during conflict (Sillars et al., 2004). Approaching the issue in an indirect, cooperative manner may imply an individual desires issue resolution but would prefer to passively wait for changes to occur or improvement of the issue as opposed to actively engaging in problem-solving for conflict resolution (Overall et al., 2010).

Topic management. Individuals engage in topic management by either shifting the topic of interaction before all parties express their point of view or preventing talk of the conflict issue before it is discussed. Though topic management allows individuals to steer the course of the interaction away from the conflict topic, discussion may still occur and require additional means of avoidance.

Noncommittal remarks. Noncommittal remarks include abstract statements that do not directly verify or discount the existence of the conflict (Sillars, 1986). Behaviors considered as noncommittal remarks can also include irrelevant questions and abstract statements that are not directly applicable to the topic under discussion and do not directly address the expressed conflict. In addition, statements specific to the process of conflict rather than the issue of focus are classified as noncommittal remarks. By utilizing this strategy, individuals may create an appearance of addressing the issue by providing abstract information, generalizations, or hypothetical scenarios, but these behaviors are a means of averting direct discussion and conflict engagement (Overall et al., 2009).

Irreverent remarks. Finally, individuals may also engage in friendly joking, not at the expense of one's relational partner (Sillars, 1986). Irreverent remarks are as a means of avoiding discussion of the issue, while still doing so in a positive manner. In all, the approach of

nonconfrontation presents a façade of engagement in conflict discussion allowing partners to present a cooperative and agreeable approach to conflict by talking with one another without actually discussing the issue of concern.

Indirect fighting. In comparison to nonconfrontation, the indirect negative approach does not provide a pretense of cooperation with another (Sillars et al., 2004; van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Rather, indirect fighting circumvents discussion of the issue without concern for one's communicative partner, suggesting a lack of desire to move the discussion forward or to even acknowledge existence of the conflict (Sillars, 1986). Though considered passive, the efforts of individuals utilizing this approach are in opposition to the desires of the partner and are therefore considered to be more active than nonconfrontation (van de Vliert & Euwema, 1994). Sillars (1986) identifies indirect fighting as comprised of *denial* and *equivocation*, which are reflective of disengagement from the issue (Caughlin, 2002; Overall et al., 2009).

Denial. Denial of conflict may include messages that directly and indirectly refute the existence of the conflict (Sillars, 1986). An individual may directly state that the proposed topic is not a conflictual issue. For example, if a dyad is discussing the problem of overspending on eating out, direct denial could be: "Overspending is not a problem." In addition, one may implicitly reject the topic as problematic by providing a rationale for why the conflict topic is not an issue (Sillars, 1986). Implicit denial could include: "I have been very diligent with budgeting." Though the implicit denial may offer reasoning for why overspending should not be a problem, the statement does not address the larger issue of overspending on eating out that may be unchecked by the current budgeting. As a whole, both forms of denial work to present the topic of conflict as irrelevant or not an issue of concern (Sillars et al., 2004).

Equivocation. When one member of the couple wishes to engage in direct discussion of a problematic issue by soliciting information, the individual may be met with minimal responses from his/her partner known as equivocation (Sillars, 1986). The current conflict strategy includes evasive remarks, which are responses to a question that do not affirm or deny the presence of conflict such as "okay," "I don't know," or "sure." Each of these statements provides a response to a communicative partner without acknowledging the other's concerns. Evasive remarks neither move the discussion toward resolution nor provide information to be used by another to continue conflict engagement. Ambiguous remarks may also be included as a means of equivocation such as, "That could be something that a person might resent, but I don't know." In all, denial and equivocation are considered passive aggression in that individuals enacting these behaviors are working against the potential efforts of the partner by refusing to acknowledge the issue.

Using van de Vliert and Euwema's (1994) taxonomy of conflict behaviors, I have identified the specific strategies a parent may employ during conflict with both his/her spouse and with his/her adolescent child. Though prior family conflict research has examined the influence of marital conflict on individual and family outcomes, previous efforts have scarcely explored the spillover of conflict behaviors from marital to parent-adolescent interactions. In the following section, I review prior research pointing to the potential for verbal conflict behaviors to be transferred from one family subsystem to another.

Use of Verbal Conflict Strategies Across Family Subsystems

As discussed previously, the spillover hypothesis asserts moods, emotions, and behaviors in one family subsystem may be transferred to other family relationships (Erel & Burman, 1995; Repetti, 1987), while conflict style research indicates individuals approach conflict in a

consistent manner across social interactions (Canary & Lakey, 2013; Kuhn & Poole, 2000). Prior research indicates that behavior during marital conflict influences a parent's conflict behavior during interactions with his/her child (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). In fact, marital hostility has been noted as positively associated with problematic parent-child relationships (Katz & Gottman, 1996), while marital tensions can lead to subsequent parent-child interactions being particularly difficult (Almeida et al., 1999; Margolin, Christensen, & John, 1996). Yet, investigations supporting the spillover hypothesis have often focused on global assessments of parental conflict behavior generally rather than individual conflict behaviors. As such, more precise examination of the specific behaviors within marital conflict that may be also be used in parenting interactions is needed (Fosco & Grych, 2010). Therefore, this dissertation examines the potential consistency of parents' use of verbal conflict strategies across family subsystems.

Empirical evidence of the use of similar conflict approaches across family subsystems was analyzed by Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring (1998). The authors examined dyadic level conflict resolution styles across family dyads using late adolescent children's reports of compromising, attacking, and avoiding conflict behavior. Reese-Weber and Bartle-Haring (1998) found that the approach to interparental conflict was directly related to the conflict style used in dyadic, parent-adolescent conflict. For example, compromising in the interparental relationship was positively correlated with compromising in the parent-adolescent relationship. In addition, attacking and avoiding in the interparental relationship were positively correlated with the use of these same approaches and negatively correlated with compromising in the parent-adolescent dyads (Reese-Weber & Bartle-Haring, 1998). Though these results suggest that parents' approach to conflict with their marital partner is similar to their approach to conflict with their adolescent child, these findings are based on retrospective self-reports of the

adolescent child's perception of the behaviors used in each family subsystem rather than observational analysis of live conflict interactions which are the focus of the current project. In addition, conflict behavior was assessed at the broad level of conflict style rather than the individual conflict strategies utilized.

To more precisely assess the congruence of conflict behaviors enacted in problematic discussions with one's marital partner as compared to those used with one's child, Rinaldi and Howe (2003) assessed parents' and children's self-reports of the conflict management strategies they employed within various family subsystems. Sixty parents raising a child in the fifth or sixth grade were recruited to complete the study. All family members completed a questionnaire measure of constructive and destructive conflict tactics used by oneself and every other family member in both marital conflict and parent-child conflict interactions. To determine congruence of parental conflict behavior across subsystems, parents' self-reports of conflict strategies in each subsystem were used. Results indicated parents' self-reported use of constructive strategies in marital conflict was positively correlated with self-reported use of reasoning in the parent-child conflict ($r = 0.66$, $p < .001$). Additionally, self-reported use of both verbal aggression ($r = 0.49$, $p < .001$) and avoidance ($r = 0.52$, $p < .001$) were positively correlated with reported use of these same behaviors in parent-child conflict interactions. These findings point to the ability for conflict behaviors to be transferred across subsystems but are limited by the use of retrospective self-reports rather than observational analysis of communication during conflict.

Using an observational assessment of conflict behavior, Lindahl and Malik (1999) studied 113 families raising sons between the ages of seven and 11 years old to determine how martial conflict behavior may influence parenting in a triadic family discussion. Parents engaged in a marital conflict interaction where they discussed one of three primary problems in their

marriage. In addition, all families sought to resolve a family conflict focusing on a child-specific topic that involved all three family members. Observational measures of parent behavior were rated for both interactions but varied in level of analysis across discussions. Couples' conflict style was assessed at the dyadic level for the marital conflict interaction, whereby coders determined whether the couple's conflict management was harmonious, disengaged, or destructive. Harmonious couples exhibited cooperation and warmth, whereas disengaged couples were often indirect, passive, and withdrawn from the discussion. Finally, destructive couples directly addressed conflict, often in overtly negative ways such as the use of personal attacks. For the triadic interaction, parents' conflict behaviors directed toward the child were rated individually for mothers and fathers. These behaviors included verbal rejection, coercion, and emotional support along with verbal and nonverbal displays of withdrawal.

The authors found that mothers from destructive conflict couples were more likely to withdraw during the family triadic conflict than were mothers from harmonious couples. In addition, fathers categorized as part of a couple with a destructive approach to marital conflict were more coercive and rejecting in the family conflict than fathers from marriages with a harmonious or disengaged approach to conflict (Lindahl & Malik, 1999). Finally during the family conflict, fathers from marriages with a destructive approach to conflict and who were also maritally distressed were less emotionally supportive and were more withdrawn than fathers from harmonious or disengaged marriages. Overall, results of Lindahl and Malik's (1999) study indicate that parents who manage marital conflict in maladaptive ways are likely to use negative conflict management behaviors with their children as well. Yet, these findings do not directly address the congruence of a parent's particular communication behaviors across the marital and parent-child conflicts because the assessment of conflict behavior differs across subsystems.

As the spillover hypothesis asserts behaviors may be transferred from one family subsystem to another, it stands to reason that the verbal conflict strategies a parent uses to communicatively manage a marital conflict discussion should influence the verbal strategies he/she employs to subsequently manage conflict with one's adolescent child. Based on family systems theory, the Spillover Hypothesis, and previous research; I propose that parents who utilize a specific conflict approach will exhibit the conflict strategies comprising that approach in conflict with their adolescent child. Thus:

H1: A parent's use of the verbal conflict approach of *negotiation* during conflict with one's marital partner will be positively associated with the use of (a) analytic remarks and (b) conciliatory remarks when in conflict with his/her adolescent child.

H2: Use of the *direct fighting* approach by a parent in conflict with one's spouse will be positively associated with one's use of (a) confrontative remarks and (b) personal attacks during conflict with one's adolescent child.

H3: A parent's use of the verbal conflict approach of *nonconfrontation* within marital conflict will be positively associated with his/her use of (a) topic management, (b) noncommittal remarks, and (c) irreverent remarks in the parent-adolescent conflict.

H4: Use of the approach of *indirect fighting* by a parent during marital conflict will be positively associated with his/her use of (a) denial and (b) equivocation during the parent-adolescent conflict.

Verbal Conflict Strategies and Perceived Conflict Resolution

Parents' use of the nine conflict strategies outlined above may result in diverse episodic outcomes when employed during marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions. The episodic outcome of focus here is perceived conflict resolution, as prior research points to the

potential for conflict strategies to influence individual's perceptions of whether the conflict was resolved as a result of discussion (Huggins & Samp, 2013a). Indeed, the serial argument process model indicates that the conflict strategies an individual uses during a problematic discussion will influence the perceived resolvability of the issue (Bevan, 2013; Bevan & Sparks, 2014). However, prior research has primarily focused on retrospective self-reports of conflict (Bevan, Finan, & Kaminsky, 2008; Hample, Richards, & Na, 2012; Malis & Roloff, 2006) rather than examining the outcome of a live conflict episode. Finally, previous work has also focused on conflict between romantic partners as opposed to family conflict interactions. I outline below how the use of individual conflict behaviors may influence parents' perceptions of conflict resolution in both a marital and a parent-adolescent conflict interaction.

Negotiation. The approach of negotiation is comprised of analytic and conciliatory remarks, which are considered to promote conflict resolution by collaborating with one's partner through soliciting and providing information during the interaction (Sillars et al., 2004). Prior retrospective, self-report research indicates a positive association between negotiation behaviors and beliefs that the conflictual issue may be resolved in the future (e.g., Bevan et al., 2008; Hample et al., 2012; Malis & Roloff, 2006). When considering family conflict specifically, the negotiation approach is regarded as an indicator of non-distressed marital couples (Gottman & Levenson, 1992) and may demonstrate an increased potential for resolving marital conflict. For example, Lindahl and Malik (1999) found that marital couples identified as having a harmonious approach to conflict, much like the direct, positive approach of negotiation; typically resolved the conflictual marital issue by the conclusion of the interaction. In addition, scholars have noted the ability for positive conflict strategies to increase discussion satisfaction and successfully achieve desired outcomes (Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993; Lewis & Rook, 1999).

Considering the consistent positive association between the negotiation approach and perceived resolvability in prior self-report research, I propose an analogous association between the specific conflict behaviors comprising negotiation and perceptions of resolution in the marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions.

H5: Use of (a) analytic remarks and (b) conciliatory remarks will be positively associated with one's perception of conflict resolution in both interactions.

Direct fighting. Direct, negative conflict management behaviors are commonly considered to be detrimental to the functioning (Canary, 2003; Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006; Overall et al., 2009) and ultimate trajectory of close relationships (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). Yet, individuals continue to engage in these behaviors, perhaps in the hope of achieving beneficial relational outcomes. For instance, the conflict strategy of confrontative remarks may indicate commitment to one's relationship (Solomon, Knobloch, & Fitzpatrick 2004), a desire for relationship improvement (Fincham & Beach, 1999), and investment in the conflict (Overall et al., 2009). However, as confrontative remarks and personal attacks are often motivated by self-interested concerns (Bevan, 2013), the enactment of these directly negative behaviors may be indicative of maladjustment (Sillars et al., 2004) and relationship distress (Sanford, 2010). Direct fighting strategies may also increase negative outcomes to conflict such as rumination (Bevan et al., 2008) and decreased perceptions of communication competence (Lakey & Canary, 2002). Indeed, enactment of directly negative conflict behaviors may inhibit perceptions of conflict resolution (Heavey et al., 1993; Overall et al., 2009). However, prior research of romantic relationship conflict by Huggins and Samp (2013a) concerning demand behavior indicated a non-significant relationship between blaming a partner and pressuring the partner to change with one's perception of conflict resolution. Yet, qualitative differences may exist

between college-aged, romantic dating partners and marital couples raising an adolescent child. Following the work of prior marital conflict research, I assert that use of confrontative remarks and personal attacks will be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution.

H6: A parent's use of (a) confrontative remarks and (b) personal attacks will be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution in the marital and parent-child conflict discussions.

Nonconfrontration. Non-hostile management of conflict through the use of nonconfrontation strategies has the potential to be persuasive during conflict (Sillars et al., 2004). Approaching a conflictual issue in a passive, cooperative manner may imply an individual desires issue resolution but would prefer to wait for changes to occur or improvement of the issue as opposed to actively engaging in conflict resolution (Overall et al., 2010). Still the level of comfort provided by the use of nonconfrontation does not motivate behavior change or conflict resolution, and as a result conflict about the issue may continue (Overall et al., 2009). Prior research points to the enduring negative effects of avoidance on marital satisfaction (Canary, 2003; Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006; Sillars et al., 2004). Additionally, romantic partners' self-reported avoidance (i.e., hesitating, changing topics, and delaying discussion) has been negatively associated with perceived conflict resolvability in past research (Bevan et al., 2007; Malis & Roloff, 2006). These findings suggest that despite the positive tone of nonconfrontation strategies; the use of topic management, noncommittal remarks, and irreverent remarks may be negatively associated with perceptions of conflict resolution during marital and family conflict. Therefore, it is proposed:

H7: The use of (a) topic management, (b) noncommittal remarks, and (c) irreverent remarks will be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution in both interactions.

Indirect fighting. The passive conflict strategies of denial and equivocation comprise the indirect fighting approach. As denial and equivocation reflect a lack of investment in the relationship and concern for one's partner, these strategies are considered ineffective means of resolving problematic issues (Malis & Roloff, 2006) and may be predictive of destructive relational outcomes (Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth, 1995). Indirect fighting strategies are reflective of disengagement from and passive acknowledgement of the conflict issue (Caughlin, 2002; Overall et al., 2009). Rather than directly addressing the issue to facilitate change or resolution, indirect fighting tactics are a covert method of resolution (Overall et al., 2009). Denying the existence of the conflict and providing ambiguous information limit the ability of either partner to move the discussion toward resolution. Instead, these behaviors stifle effective discussion (Wright & Roloff, 2009). For example, Huggins and Samp (2013a) established that withdrawal from the discussion by disengaging and refusing to discuss the issue was negatively associated with perceptions of resolution. As such, these strategies may decrease perceptions of conflict resolution, as the topic is never directly discussed. Thus, I predict the use of denial and equivocation in the marital and parent-child conflict discussions will be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution.

H8: The use of (a) denial and (b) equivocation will be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution for both interactions.

A list of all hypotheses pertaining to verbal conflict tactics can be found in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Verbal Conflict Tactics Hypotheses

H1: A parent's use of the verbal conflict approach of *negotiation* during conflict with one's marital partner will be positively associated with the use of (a) analytic remarks and (b) conciliatory remarks when in conflict with his/her adolescent child.
H2: Use of the *direct fighting* approach by a parent in conflict with one's spouse will be positively associated with one's use of (a) confrontative remarks and (b) personal attacks during conflict with one's adolescent child.
H3: A parent's use of the verbal conflict approach of *nonconfrontation* within marital conflict will be positively associated with his/her use of (a) topic management, (b) noncommittal remarks, and (c) irreverent remarks in the parent-adolescent conflict.
H4: Use of the approach of *indirect fighting* by a parent during marital conflict will be positively associated with his/her use of (a) denial and (b) equivocation during the parent-adolescent conflict.
H5: Use of (a) analytic remarks and (b) conciliatory remarks will be positively associated with one's perception of conflict resolution in both interactions.
H6: A parent's use of (a) confrontative remarks and (b) personal attacks will be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution in the marital and parent-child conflict discussions.
H7: The use of (a) topic management, (b) noncommittal remarks, and (c) irreverent remarks will be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution in both interactions.
H8: The use of (a) denial and (b) equivocation will be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution for both interactions.

Emotion Expression and Conflict

Conflict within the family is necessarily an emotional experience (Guerrero & LaValley, 2006; Jones, 2001) as close interpersonal connections have the potential to elicit some of the strongest emotional responses from individuals (Berscheid & Ammazzalorso, 2001; Fehr & Harasymchuk, 2005; Sanford, 2012). Considering emotions are often activated in the face of challenges and perceived interruptions to goal achievement (Frijda, 1987; Sanford, 2012), the high levels of interdependence in marital and parent-child relationships set the stage for conflictual interactions to be particularly emotionally charged. Prior examinations of emotion in the context of close relationship conflict have often studied the developmental and adjustment outcomes associated with the experience and expression of emotion, rather than the communicative expression of emotions within and across particular conflict episodes (Driver & Gottman, 2004; Graber, Laurenceau, Miga, Chango, & Coan, 2011; Sanford, 2007).

Though emotions may alter the course of conflict through the cognitive process of emotion experience (Jones, 2001; Sanford, 2012), the communicative *expression* of emotion is equally important to consider because of its potential to affect episodic conflict outcomes (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Papp, Kouros, & Cummings, 2010; Sanford, 2012). Working with the assumption that emotion experience and expression are related but distinct concepts (Guerrero & LaValley, 2006), current project centers on parents' *nonverbal expression* of discrete emotions within and across family subsystems. Before discussing emotion expression within the context of conflict, I review the theoretical perspective from which the current project operates with regard to the conceptualization of emotion.

The Cognitive Appraisal Perspective of Emotion

Conceptualizations of emotion can differ widely based upon the theoretical perspective chosen to study a researcher's phenomena of interest (Turner, 2009). From the varied approaches available, the cognitive appraisal perspective of emotion is often applied to the study of interpersonal relationships and conflict (Guerrero & LaValley, 2006; Planalp, 2003), as such it is well suited for application to this context because of the goal-based nature of both emotion and conflict according to this perspective (Dillard & Kinney, 1994; Frijda, 1987; Guerrero & LaValley, 2006). For a full understanding of the cognitive appraisal perspective of emotion experience, I present the generally agreed upon assumptions of the approach, which include emotion experience as (1) the result of cognition, (2) a response to goal interruption or facilitation, (3) discrete, and (4) associated with specific action tendencies (Frijda, 1987; Guerrero & LaValley, 2006; Lazarus, 1991; Planalp, 1999).

First, the cognitive appraisal perspective of emotion asserts that cognition precedes emotion experience (MacDowell & Mandler, 1989; Segrin & Dillard, 1991), such that stimuli are presented in the environment that are perceived by the individual, appraised for harm/benefit, and are followed by emotion production (Dillard & Kinney, 1994; Frijda, 1993). Therefore, the core of emotion experience is the interpretation of a stimulus through an appraisal process, which requires cognition to function (Frijda, 1988; 1993; Lazarus & Smith, 1988). Lazarus (1991; Lazarus & Smith, 1988) proposes two types of appraisals: primary and secondary. Primary appraisals determine the relevance or importance of the situation, while secondary appraisals assist in determining one's resources for coping with the stimulus event (Lazarus, 1991). Accordingly, the combination of primary and secondary appraisals provides the emotional significance of the situation, leading to the appropriate emotional response. In all, the consensus

among cognitive appraisal theorists is that emotion experience is part of a conscious, cognitive process in which individuals make assessments of environmental stimuli in connection with one's personal goals and desires (Dillard & Kinney, 1994; Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991).

The second principle of the cognitive appraisal perspective is that emotion experience is a response to goal interruption or facilitation, which refines the understanding that emotions are the result of a cognitive process. For instance, the appraisal process is a cognitive comparison of the state of an individual's environment in connection with his/her goals, desires, and motives (Dillard & Kinney, 1994). The perceived degree of overlap between the situation and one's goals elicits differential emotions (Dillard, 1994; Dillard & Harkness, 1992). If the situation is goal congruent or facilitates achievement of one's desires, a positive emotion will result. However, if the event is incongruent with an individual's goals or inhibits goal attainment, a negative emotion is experienced (Dillard & Kinney, 1994; Frijda, 1988). Taken together, the conceptualization of emotion as elicited by a stimulus that promotes or hinders goal achievement and the definition of conflict as resulting from a perceived incompatibly of goals (Canary, 2003), suggests emotion is a fundamental component of interpersonal conflict (Guerrero & LaValley, 2006; Jones, 2000).

Third, scholars taking a cognitive approach to emotion assert that emotions are discrete; they can be discriminated according to their content and the associated appraisal (Frijda, 1993). Emotions can also be distinguished according to the affective component of valence, whether an emotion is positive or negative (Guerrero & LaValley, 2006; Ortony & Turner, 1990); however, it is the discrete approach that distinguishes the cognitive appraisal perspective. It should also be noted that discrete emotions each have a specific set of actions that are activated in response to the experience of the emotion (Frijda, 1987; 2005). Thus from the cognitive appraisal view,

discrete emotions are experienced and then elicit behavioral responses (Dillard & Peck, 2001; Fitness & Fletcher, 1993; Frijda, 1988).

The final assumption is focused on the behavioral responses to emotion experience through expression and action (Planalp, 2003). The cognitive perspective posits a systematic causal relationship between the structure of the appraisal mechanism and an individual's readiness to act (Frijda, 1987). Engagement in specific actions is one of the distinctive features of emotions with actions corresponding to an individual's goals for the interaction (Dillard, 1994; Dillard & Peck, 2001; Frijda, 1987; Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989). For example, Frijda (1987) proposed associations between discrete emotions and modes of action such that sadness was distinguished by indifference, while anger was associated with an "agonistic tendency" (p. 135).

In total the assumptions of the cognitive appraisal perspective propose emotion experience is the result of cognition, a response to goal interruption or facilitation, categorized as discrete, and associated with behavioral responses. These assumptions provide a clear conceptualization of emotion for the current project. Here, I focus specifically on the *expression* of emotion; therefore, working from the final tenet of emotion experience as eliciting behavioral responses.

Expression of Discrete Emotions

Emotion expression, both nonverbal and verbal, is the observable outcome of emotion experience (Andersen & Guerrero, 1998; Lazarus, 1991; Planalp, 2003). When expressed during conflict, emotions have been linked to general relationship functioning and behaviors enacted during conflict (Gottman, Levenson, & Woodin, 2001; Papp et al., 2010). Yet, previous efforts are limited in their exploration of the spillover of discrete emotions from the marital to the

parent-child conflict context and are also limited in their investigation of the association between emotion expression and perceived conflict resolution within family subsystems. Therefore, the current project extends prior work by focusing on how parental emotion expression during conflict may be consistent across family subsystems as well as examining the association between emotion expression and perceptions of conflict resolution. Below, I review emotions that are of interest to the current study because of their relevance to close relationship conflict. Emotions are distinguished according to valence (i.e., positive vs. negative) (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002) and their potential to be beneficial or detrimental to the progression of conflict (Guerrero & LaValley, 2006).

Positive, constructive emotion. Expression of positively valenced emotion has the potential to enhance relationships and is indicative of relationship closeness and functioning (Driver & Gottman, 2004; Papp et al., 2010). Affection is a fundamental positively valenced emotion (Graber et al., 2011; Ortony & Turner, 1990), and its expression is essential to the maintenance of interpersonal relationships through promotion of intimacy and bonding (Floyd, 2002; Floyd & Pauley, 2011; Mongrain & Vettese, 2003). Though affection may be considered as distinct from conflict interactions, Graber and colleagues (2011) suggest affection can be expressed in both "love tasks" and conflict interactions. Nonverbal affection expression includes a slow quiet voice, smiles, forward lean, and displays of empathy through mirrored expression (Coan & Gottman, 2007; Frijda, 1986; Gonzaga, Keltner, Londahl, & Smith, 2001). Affection expression promotes perceptions of high relationship quality, mental and physical health, and may aid in individuals' recovery from stressful events (Floyd & Pauley, 2011; Floyd, Pauley, & Hesse, 2010; Graber et al., 2011).

Negative, destructive emotions. When expressed, emotions categorized as negatively valenced are considered to be detrimental to close relationships (Martini & Busseri, 2012). Several negative emotions are relevant to the marital and parent-child conflict contexts including anger (Martini & Busseri, 2012; Sanford, 2007), contempt (Gottman & Levenson, 2000), disgust (Gottman, 1994), and sadness (Guerrero, LaValley, & Farinelli, 2008; Sanford, 2007). Each of these emotions has been linked to detrimental episodic and/or relational outcomes when expressed during problematic discussions. Each emotion is reviewed in detail below.

Anger. Anger is an assertive emotion that is often strongly expressed (Aune, Buller, & Aune, 1996; Graber et al., 2011) and may be the most powerful emotion expressed during close relationship conflict (Papp et al., 2010). Individuals may express anger as a means of conveying discontent with the actions of another including misbehavior, injustice, or transgressions by a partner (Coan & Gottman, 2007; Guerrero et al., 2008; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). Nonverbal expression of anger may include a loud voice/yelling, narrowed eyes, a tense jaw-line and neck, thinning lips, and clenched teeth (Coan & Gottman, 2007; Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002). The expression of anger is damaging to relationships as the experience of anger is often associated with behavioral expressions of aggression (Bodenmann, Meuwly, Bradbury, Gmelch, & Ledermann, 2010; Guerrero & LaValley, 2006; Sanford, 2012), which is consistent with the action tendency associated with anger experience of moving toward or attacking one's partner (Frijda et al., 1989; Lemay, Overall, & Clark, 2012). Finally, aggressive expression of anger has been associated with negative relationship outcomes such as relationship distress, dissatisfaction, and perceived incompetence (Guerrero & LaValley, 2006).

Contempt. Coan and Gottman (2007) assert contempt expression can be "extremely detrimental to interpersonal relationships" (p. 274). As the experience of contempt results from a

disdain and disrespect for another, expression of contempt is indicative of relationship dysfunction and is predictive of relationship decline when expressed during marital conflict (Coan & Gottman, 2007; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). Contempt is nonverbally expressed through lack of respect, insulting tone, coldness and speaking from a position superior to that of a relationship partner (Coan & Gottman, 2007; Gottman, 1994). Specific facial displays associated with expression of contempt include pulling one's mouth to the side and eye rolls (Coan & Gottman, 2007; Ekman & Friesen, 1986). Prior research points to expressions of contempt as a primary indicator of marital distress, such that a fourteen-year longitudinal study of marriage found contempt expression predicted marital dissolution as well as decreased physical health (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 2000). More specifically, husband facial expressions of contempt predicted declines in the physical health of the wife four years later (Gottman, 1994). Together these findings point to the deleterious effects of contempt expression on relationships.

Disgust. The experience of disgust is often the result of moral objection or revulsion to the ideas or behaviors of another (Gottman, 1994; Rozin, Haidt, & McCauley, 2008). Disgust may be outwardly expressed through nonverbal displays similar to one's reaction when presented with an offensive smell (Coan & Gottman, 2007). Specific facial expressions of disgust include wrinkling one's nose, raising one's upper lip, sticking out one's tongue, and frowning (Coan & Gottman, 2007; Gottman, 1994; Rozin, et al., 2008). Additionally, vocal tones of being sickened or repulsed are indicative of disgust expression. Though disgust may be displayed infrequently during conflict, when expressed disgust has the potential to have a strong impact on relationships such that Gottman and colleagues (1994; Gottman et al., 2001) demonstrated a positive

correlation between wives' facial expressions of disgust and total time of marital separation over a period of four years.

Sadness. Sadness results from the experience of hurt by a partner (Sanford, 2007) or perceptions that the relationship is not meeting one's expectations (Guerrero et al., 2008; Papp et al., 2010). Expressions of sadness may be difficult to identify, as the action tendency associated with sadness experience is indifference (Frijda, 1987). As such, the passive emotion of sadness may be expressed through withdrawal rather than overt behaviors (Guerrero et al., 2008; Papp et al., 2010). External expression of sadness includes nonverbal behaviors of a lowered head, silences, indirect eye contact, sighing, pouting, and crying (Coan & Gottman, 2007; Segrin, 1998). Sadness can have negative effects on a marriage when nonverbally expressed by a husband during conflict. For example, Gottman et al. (2001) note that a husband's facial expression of sadness was correlated with a decrease in the wife's fondness toward the husband and a decrease in both husbands' and wives' perceptions of the couple as a unit.

During conflictual interactions, parents may express a wide array of emotions; yet, I have identified and defined the discrete emotions of interest to the current project as expression of each of the reviewed emotions may be consequential to conflict dynamics and relationship functioning. In the subsequent portion of the dissertation, I review prior research of marital and parent-child interactions, which together suggest a pattern of emotion expression that is consistent across family subsystems.

Spillover of Emotion Expression from the Martial to Parent-Adolescent Conflict

The Spillover Hypothesis asserts that emotions may be transferred from one family subsystem to another (Engfer, 1988; Erel & Burman, 1995) such that prior research indicates parents' emotion expression within the marital relationship can influence the quality of

emotional communication in parent-child relationships (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Papp, 2002; Jouriles & Farris, 1992). For example, the extent to which parents engage in negative emotion expression during marital conflict is negatively associated with parental expressions of warmth and positivity during a parent-child interaction (Engfer, 1988; Madden-Derdich, 2002). Despite evidence of the connection between parents' expression of emotion across family subsystems, previous investigations have often studied emotion expression from a dimensional rather than a discrete perspective (Barry & Kochanska, 2010). In addition, much family systems research of emotion is centered on how parent emotion expression affects child adjustment outcomes rather than examining parents' communicative expression of emotion across family subsystems (e.g., Davies et al., 2006; Goeke-Morey, Papp, & Cummings, 2013). Therefore, the current project's focus on the communicative expression of emotion contributes to understanding discrete emotion expression across family subsystems, while also addressing the urgings of Boiger and Mesquita (2012) to study emotion expression in "real-time interactions" (p. 227) and Barry and Kochanska's (2010) call to examine discrete emotions in family interactions.

Though research assessing the expression of discrete emotions across marital and parent-child conflict interactions is limited, the pattern of results from a variety of family systems research provides evidence of the potential for a parents' emotion expression to be consistent across family subsystems. To begin, the influence of marital functioning on spouses' coparenting behavior was examined by Stroud et al. (2011) in a triadic family interaction between parents and a young child between the ages of three and seven years old. Stroud and colleagues (2011) found marital functioning to be positively associated with expression of positive affect toward one's marital partner in triadic family interactions. In addition, marital

distress was associated with expressing negative affect toward one's spouse in triadic interactions, but was only significant for families with daughters.

Scholars have also examined the influence of marital quality on parents' emotion expression within parent-child interactions such that individuals who are more satisfied with their marriage tend to express more positive emotion in interactions with their children (Barry & Kochanska, 2010; Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988). In a longitudinal analysis of parents raising an infant, Easterbrooks and Emde (1988) found parents from harmonious marriages expressed more positive and less negative emotions during interactions with their infant child over a period of 18 months. The detrimental effect of marital dissatisfaction on parent-child interactions is also evident in Belsky and colleagues' findings that as fathers' satisfaction with their marriage decreased, negative emotion expression toward their children increased (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991). The results from Feinberg, Kan, and Hetherington's (2007) longitudinal study of family conflict are also consistent with this pattern. Parents' self-reported rates of coparenting conflict at Time 1 were positively associated with their expression of anger and hostility during conflict with an adolescent child three years later at Time 2. These findings point to the potential for the emotional tone of one's marriage to be reflected in one's emotion expressions during interactions with one's adolescent child. However, this work tends to examine the affective quality of interactions as opposed to the expression of specific emotions despite the importance placed on the experience of discrete emotions within the family (Barry & Kochanska, 2010; Crockenberg & Langrock, 2001).

To more explicitly address discrete emotion expression, Barry and Kochanska (2010) observed parents' interactions with their child over the course of five years, from 6 to 67 months of age. Dyadic parental interactions with children were coded for expression of affection, joy,

and anger as well as the intensity of expression. The authors found parents' self-reported marital quality was consistently linked with emotion expression toward the child. More specifically, the benefits of a positive marital relationship were substantiated by the findings that mothers' reports of marital quality were positively associated with expressions of joy toward one's child, while fathers' satisfaction was positively associated with affection expression in parent-child interactions. However, these results are not specific to conflictual interactions within families nor do the results speak to the spillover of discrete emotions from a marital discussion to a parent-child interaction.

Kitzmann (2000), as noted previously in the manuscript, tested a closer approximation of the spillover of discrete emotion expression across family subsystems by observing parents' emotional expressivity in both a dyadic, marital and a triadic, parents-child interaction. Couples were randomly assigned to engage in either a conflictual or non-conflictual marital discussion. The results indicated couple-level expressed negativity in the marital interaction, regardless of interaction type, increased expressed negativity ($r = .27$, $p < .05$) and decreased expressed positivity ($r =- .27$, $p < .05$) in the triadic, parents-child interaction. Kitzmann's (2000) results are evidence of emotional spillover from the marital to parent-child interactions. Nevertheless, exploration of the spillover of discrete emotions across conflict interactions is needed as the triadic discussion in Kitzmann's (2000) study was focused on a neutral issue rather than a conflictual topic.

Taken as a whole, the results of prior research assessing emotion in the family present a pattern of consistency of expression across relationships and interactions. Positive marital functioning and emotion expression in a marriage was generally linked to an increased potential for positive interactions and emotion expression in the parent-child relationship. Although the

reviewed work is not exclusive to problematic or conflictual interactions, it stands to reason that parents who express positive emotion, such as affection, toward one's partner during a marital conflict are likely to also express positive emotion toward one's child in a subsequent parents-child conflict interaction. As such, I propose:

H9: A parent's expression of affection during marital conflict will be positively associated with his/her expression of affection toward the adolescent child in a triadic, family conflict.

A similar pattern of results is suggested for the association between expression of negative emotion in the marital and parents-child conflict interactions as previous efforts demonstrate expressed negativity in marital interactions tends to increase expressions of negativity in parent-child interactions. Prior work by Lindahl and Malik (1999) as well as Gottman (Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson 1992) also points to the need for more specific examinations of negative emotions. Thus, the distinction of the current project lies in the separate propositions for each negative emotion of interest, even though the proposed relationship across interactions is the same for the four emotions. Presenting separate hypotheses for each emotion moves beyond transference of general negative affect to a more nuanced understanding of emotional spillover by determining the degree of transference of each discrete negative emotion across family subsystems. I posit that expression of a negative emotion toward one's partner in the marital conflict interaction will be positively associated with expression of the same emotion toward one's adolescent child in the subsequent parent-child conflict discussion.

H10: A parent's expression of anger within marital conflict will be positively associated with anger expression toward his/her child in the parent-adolescent conflict.

H11: Expression of contempt by a parent during marital conflict will be positively associated with contempt expression toward with his/her adolescent child in the parent-adolescent conflict.

H12: A parent's expression of disgust during conflict with one's marital partner will be positively associated with expression of disgust toward his/her child during triadic, family conflict.

H13: Expression of sadness by a parent when in conflict with one's spouse will be positively associated with one's expression of sadness toward one's child during the parent-adolescent conflict.

Emotion Expression and Perceptions of Resolution

Expression of discrete emotion during a conflict episode may result in differential perceptions of conflict resolution. Fitness' (2013) statement that expression of emotions in close relationships may be linked to positive and negative outcomes points to the potential for the association between emotion expression and perceptions of resolution. Jones (2001) makes a similar argument asserting emotion expression has the ability to transform the course of conflict. Previous efforts have identified the ability for emotion expression to influence message production (Burleson & Planalp, 2000; Sanford, 2007), goals for supportive interactions (MacGeorge, 2001), and long-term relational outcomes (Gottman et al., 2001). Marital conflict research substantiates the relationship between emotion expression and episodic conflict outcomes noting the ability for expression of particular negative emotions to decrease perceptions of the conflict as resolvable (Sanford, 2007). Yet, empirical support of the association between emotion expression and conflict resolution in a family context is limited, particularly with regard to conversational behavior. Building upon prior work of the effects of

discrete emotion expression on family functioning and emotion in marital conflict, I consider how a parent's expression of specific emotions may be linked to one's perceptions of the conflict as resolved.

Affection. Expressing affection is beneficial to those in close relationships such that affection expression is "overwhelmingly associated with numerous positive outcomes" for both the individual expressing and the individual receiving affection (Floyd, 2002, p. 135). For example at the relationship level, expressing high degrees of affection can bolster satisfaction and intimacy of relational partners and the health of the overall relationship (Floyd, Hess, Miczo, Halone, Mikkelson, & Tusing, 2005; Mongrain & Vettese, 2003; Smith, Heaven, & Ciarrochi, 2008). In a family context, expression of affection within father-son interactions is positively associated with relationship satisfaction (Floyd & Pauley, 2011). Additionally, communicating affection to another can also alleviate detrimental outcomes associated with stressful events such as conflict (Graber et al., 2011) and can protect a relationship from the potential detrimental effects of expressed negativity (Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006).

In the context of conflict, displaying affection toward another has been positively correlated with constructive conflict behaviors, which can enhance the potential for resolving conflict (Gonzaga et al., 2001). Because of the relational benefits regularly associated with affection expression along with the connection to positive conflict approaches, I put forward a positive association between a parent's affection expression during conflict and his/her perception of conflict resolution.

H14: A parent's expression of affection will be positively associated with his/her perception of the conflict as resolved in both the marital and parent-child conflicts.

Anger. In contrast to displays of affection, the expression of anger is detrimental to close relationships (Gottman, 1994; Nabi, 2002). Guerrero and LaValley (2006) state that expressions of anger, particularly when aggressively displayed, are associated with relationship dissatisfaction and perceptions of incompetence. Though anger expression is damaging to relationships, much scholarship has focused on the experience of anger rather than the expression. Research documenting self-reports of anger experience demonstrate a recurring pattern relating anger experience to increases in destructive communication behavior and decreases in positive communication behavior (e.g., Creasey & Hesson-McInnis, 2001; Lemay et al., 2012; Sanford, 2007). The pattern is consistent with the action tendency associated with anger of attacking or taking action against another (Frijda, 1987).

Though the experience of anger has often been studied in connection with marital relationship conflict (e.g., Nabi, 2002; Sanford, 2005; 2007; 2012), parental expression of anger during a parent-child conflict interaction has been explored less frequently. Still, a parent's expression of anger within a parent-adolescent conflict could lead to negative episodic outcomes as prior evidence suggests children of all ages find parental anger to be stressful (Lemerise & Dodge, 2008). Davies and colleagues (2006), for instance, found parental displays of anger and hostility to be positively associated with distress responses in elementary aged children. The negative relational outcomes linked to anger expression in conjunction with the association between anger and destructive communication behaviors lead to the proposition that parent anger expression during conflict will decrease perceptions of conflict resolution for both the marital and parent-child interactions.

H15: A parent's anger expression will be negatively associated with his/her perception of conflict resolution in both the marital and parent-child conflicts.

Contempt. Expression of contempt is considered to be damaging to close relationships. The body of work by Gottman concerning marital relationships and conflict points to nonverbal expressions of contempt as resulting in significant deterioration of marriage (e.g., Gottman, 1994; Gottman & Levenson, 1992). For example, husbands' nonverbal displays of contempt predicted wives' physical illness four years later (Gottman et al., 2001), while couple's expression of contempt predicted increased rates of divorce (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). Contempt expression is also included as one of Gottman's (1994) "Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse," observable aspects of marriage that are considered precursors to divorce and separation (p. 111). Though these results of contempt expression are exclusive to marital interactions, expressing contempt toward one's adolescent child during conflict may also be detrimental to parent-child interactions and the future health of the parent-child relationship. When considering a singular conflict episode, it seems logical that if contempt were exceptionally destructive to close relationships and their trajectory, when nonverbally communicated during conflict interactions contempt should be associated with declining perceptions of conflict resolution. Therefore, I propose:

H16: Expression of contempt by a parent will be negatively associated with his/her perception of conflict resolution in both the marital and parent-child conflict interactions.

Disgust. Results of close relationship conflict research specific to the effects of disgust expression also come from the work of Gottman and colleagues (2001), which indicates wives' expression of disgust during marital conflict predicted both husbands' and wives' self-reported marital separation four years later. Additional empirical evidence for the potential association between disgust expression and conflict outcomes is scarce. This limitation may be due to individuals' low base rate of disgust expression during conflict or potential difficulties in

researchers' ability to identify nonverbal expressions of disgust. Despite a lack of previous evidence, it is still of import to study the effect of disgust expression on conflict outcomes as Gottman (1994) has noted that even subtle expressions of disgust can have a powerful influence on relationships. Therefore, this dissertation provides the opportunity to explore a gap in marital and family conflict research by explicitly investigating the expression of disgust in relation to parents' perceptions of conflict resolution. For this reason, I question the potential association between a parent's disgust expression and his/her perception of resolution for both the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts.

RQ1: What is the association (if at all) between a parent's expression of disgust and perception of the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts as resolved?

Sadness. Sadness differs from the previously reviewed negative emotions in its categorization as a soft negative emotion (Sanford, 2007; 2012). Soft negative emotion results from perceptions of hurt from or disappointment with another (Sanford, 2007) and often results in passive responses to conflict (Guerrero et al., 2008). As such, sadness is considered to be a more prosocial negative emotion (Sanford, 2007) that could produce positive outcomes such as relationship repair (Lemay et al., 2012; Van Kleef, 2010) and supportive behaviors from a partner (Bless, 2002). The evidence for sadness as a prosocial emotion would then suggest a positive association between sadness expression and perceived conflict resolution. Yet, the findings of additional close relationship research contradict this proposition.

Multiple authors state the detrimental relationship outcomes associated with expression of sadness during conflict. Caughlin (2002) notes sadness expression is associated with decreases in wives' marital satisfaction, while Gottman et al. (2001) indicate husbands' expression of sadness decreased both partners' fondness for one another and their identification

as a unit. Destructive communication outcomes of sadness have also been documented. For example, retrospective self-reports of sadness experience were associated with perceptions that conflict would be difficult to resolve (Sanford, 2007). Also, the action tendency associated with sadness is one of indifference, passivity, and withdrawal (Frijda, 1987; Guerrero et al., 2008). Withdrawal is a maladaptive response to conflict as it limits effective discussion and conflict resolution (Wright & Roloff, 2009). Hence, expression of sadness may also be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution. Considering the contradictory implications for the relationship between sadness expression and perceptions of conflict resolution, the following research question is put forth:

> *RQ2:* What is the association between a parent's sadness expression during conflict and his/her perception of the conflict as resolved?

Hypotheses and research questions pertaining to emotion expression can be found in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

Emotion Expression Hypotheses and Research Questions

H9: A parent's expression of affection during marital conflict will be positively associated with his/her expression of affection toward the adolescent child in a triadic, family conflict.
H10: A parent's expression of anger within marital conflict will be positively associated with anger expression toward his/her child in the parent-adolescent conflict.
H11: Expression of contempt by a parent during marital conflict will be positively associated with contempt expression toward with his/her adolescent child in the parent-adolescent conflict.
H12: A parent's expression of disgust during conflict with one's marital partner will be positively associated with expression of disgust toward his/her child during triadic, family conflict.
H13: Expression of sadness by a parent when in conflict with one's spouse will be positively associated with one's expression of sadness toward one's child during the parent-adolescent conflict.
H14: A parent's expression of affection will be positively associated with his/her perception of the conflict as resolved in both the marital and parent-child conflicts.
H15: A parent's anger expression will be negatively associated with his/her perception of conflict resolution in both the marital and parent-child conflicts.
H16: Expression of contempt by a parent will be negatively associated with his/her perception of conflict resolution in both the marital and parent-child conflict interactions.
RQ1: What is the association (if at all) between a parent's expression of disgust and perception of the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts as resolved?

RQ2: What is the association between a parent's sadness expression during conflict and his/her perception of the conflict as resolved?

CHAPTER 2: METHOD

Participants

The data for this dissertation are drawn from a larger project funded by a National Institute of Health/Eunice Kennedy Shiver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development grant. As such, the current sample is comprised of families randomly selected from the grant-based data (*N* = 100). Families included two parents and an adolescent child. One parent from each family was randomly selected as the target parent for this dissertation (mothers = 48, fathers = 52). The sample was stratified for an equal representation of parents talking to sons (n = 50) and daughters (n = 50).

Recruitment and Inclusion Criteria

Families were drawn from the community of Monroe County, New York. Participants were recruited in two ways: (1) posting of flyers in the Monroe County community and (2) direct mailings from local school districts (Henrietta, East Irondequoit, Brockport, Hilton). Families who demonstrated interest in participating were contacted via telephone to complete screening measures to ensure they met all inclusion criteria: (a) the child adolescent child and two coparents must have been living together for the past three or more years, (b) both parent figures as well as the adolescent child must be willing to participate in the project, (c) one of the coparents must be the biological or adoptive parent of the child participating in the study, (d) the child participant must be between the ages of 12 and 15 years old, and (e) all participants must be fluent in English. The age range for the target child was chosen because as a result of prior research examining parent-child relationships identifies identifying early adolescence as a period

of fluidity in parent-child relationship dynamics (Branje et al., 2013; Laursen, Coy, & Collins, 1998). Families were excluded from participation if any of the above criteria were not met. In addition, participants could not have any significant cognitive, physical, or health impairments or obvious physiological deficits that may could compromise the validity of various measures throughout the course of the larger grant-based data collection project. Finally, if more than one child in the family met the inclusion criteria, only one child per family was able to participate.

Demographics

Though the investigation was open to all families in the community, efforts were made to obtain a sample of families representative of the county where data collection took place (Monroe County, NY). Representativeness was based on 2010 United States Census data. Demographic data for the individuals included in the current project reflect a sample similar to that of individuals living in Monroe County. Mothers identified themselves as White (78%), Black (8%), Asian (1%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1%), and more than one race (3%). Fathers identified themselves as White (76%), Black (13%), American Indian or Alaska Native (1%), and more than one race (1%).

The majority of mothers reported being the birth parent of the child (85%), with the remainder identifying themselves as a step parent (4%), adoptive parent (1%), or live-in-partner of the child's parent (1%). Fathers primarily indicated they were the birth parent of the child (77%), with fathers also reporting themselves to be the step parent (9%), adoptive parent (1%), or live-in-partner of the child's parent (4%). Median family income was in the range of $55,000 to $74,999 with 12% of the sample reporting a household income below $23,000.

Couples had been living together on average for 15.73 years (*SD* = 6.40). Individuals who indicated they were the non-biological parent of the target child reported the number of

years the child had been in their care (mothers: M =6.83, SD = 4.26; fathers: M =6.00, SD = 3.66). According to the female in the relationship, the majority of couples were married (73%), while the remaining couples were either engaged to be married (6%), or in a domestic partnership (12%).

Procedures

Laboratory Procedure

Once families were pre-screened as fulfilling the inclusion criteria, families arrived at a laboratory space at the Mount Hope Family Center to complete all tasks and measures for the larger grant-based project. Upon arrival, families were provided with a tour of the facility and an overview of what would be taking place during the visit. Immediately following the tour and overview of protocol, parents completed an informed consent process and provided permission for the adolescent child to participate. After providing consent, parents individually completed a demographic interview, various survey measures on paper that are not included in the current study, and additional questionnaire measures via MediaLab including the Couples Satisfaction Index for the current investigation. Families then completed the observational portion of the laboratory session.

Observational Procedure

Marital conflict interaction. All parents first completed the dyadic, marital conflict followed by the triadic, family interaction. The dyadic, couple interaction was a 10-minute videotaped conflict discussion, where participants were instructed to discuss a difficult issue specific to their marital/romantic relationship. Couples were provided with a list of common relationship issues in the event of difficulty in generating a topic for discussion. Common discussion topics available to participants included but were not limited to child-rearing, career

decisions, household tasks, money, amount of time spent together, relationships with others, and personality differences. Couples were video and audio recorded during the 10-minute conflict discussion which included selection of the discussion topic. All dyadic, marital interactions were recorded for exactly 10 minutes regardless of whether the conversation had concluded at that time. Parents were then separated to complete a post-interaction questionnaire, which included the measure of perceived conflict resolution.

Parent-adolescent conflict interaction. Upon completion of the post-interaction questionnaire, parents were reunited with the adolescent child to complete a 7-minute triadic, family interaction task. Similar to the dyadic, parent conflict, the three participants were instructed that to discuss a problematic issue specific to their relationship as parents and adolescent child. Again, families were advised that they could choose a topic from a list of common issues parents and adolescents may disagree about if they had difficulty generating a topic to discuss. Common discussion topics were primarily child-focused and included but were not limited to: respecting rules, school, money, amount of time spent with family, siblings, chores/responsibilities, entertainment, and health habits. Families were also instructed that it was important that "you each get your point across to the other" to suggest the adolescent child have an opportunity to speak. The family conflict discussion was video and audio recorded for 7 minutes, which included topic selection. Recording was concluded at the end of that time regardless of whether the discussion was completed. At the conclusion of discussion, all family members were separated to complete measures of perceived conflict resolution along with several other post-interaction measures specific to the larger project. All procedures for the laboratory session took approximately three to four hours to complete.

Observational Measures

Verbal Conflict Tactics

Video recordings of the marital and parent-adolescent interactions were coded for verbal conflict tactics employed by the parent of interest using a modified version of the Verbal Tactics Coding Scheme (VTCS; Sillars, 1986). The VTCS has demonstrated heuristic value with its inclusion in an array of communication scholarship (Olson & Braithwaite, 2004; Sillars & Canary, 2013, Sillars et al., 2004) and has been used to code the verbal behaviors of individuals across a number of relationship types including newlyweds (McNulty, 2008; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998), established marital couples (Burggraf & Sillars, 1987), and college roommates (Sillars et al., 1982). Originally, the VTCS (Sillars, 1986) classified tactics into three superordinate approaches (i.e., integrative, distributive, avoidant). However, future work by Sillars and colleagues (2004; Sillars & Canary, 2013) has re-conceptualized the conflict tactics according to the cooperation/competition continuum, resulting in *four* superordinate approaches: (1) negotiation, (2) direct fighting, (3) nonconfrontation, and (4) indirect fighting. Therefore, I have elected to use the four-approach categorization to code the verbal conflict tactics employed during the interactions examined. With this taxonomy in mind, the coding scheme for conflict tactics includes 9 subordinate conflict strategies each corresponding to a particular approach. Strategies are then comprised of 26 specific conflict tactics that an individual may employ. The taxonomy of approaches, strategies, and tactics is located in Table 2.1. See Appendix A for full description of the individual tactics.

For the purpose of this project, verbal conflict tactics were coded at the strategy level (n = 9), which maintains the parsimony of the coding scheme while affording a more precise examination of verbal conflict behavior than has been typically conducted. For instance, Pasch

Table 2.1

Taxonomy of Verbal Conflict Tactics

Approach	Strategy	Tactics
Negotiation	Analytic remarks	Descriptive statements, disclosive statements, qualifying statements, soliciting disclosure, soliciting criticism
	Conciliatory remarks	Supportive remarks, concessions, acceptance of responsibility
Direct Fighting	Confrontative remarks	Hostile imperatives, hostile jokes, hostile questions, denial of responsibility, hostile remarks
	Personal attacks	Personal criticism, rejection, presumptive remarks
Nonconfrontation	Topic management	Topic shifts, topic avoidance
	Noncommittal remarks	Noncommittal statements, noncommittal questions, abstract remarks, procedural remarks
	Irreverent remarks	Friendly joking
Indirect Fighting	Denial	Direct denial, implicit denial
	Equivocation	Evasive remarks, ambiguous remarks

and Bradbury (1998) used the original conceptualization of the VTCS to analyze conflict interactions of newlyweds; however verbal behaviors were coded at the approach level (i.e., integrative, distributive, avoidant) rather than the strategy level. In addition, McNulty (2008) coded conflict behavior of newly married individuals at the highest level of abstraction by using a dimensional approach. Conflict behaviors were coded according to the dimensions of cooperation and competition where each speaking turn received a code classifying conflict behavior as either "constructive" or "negative" (McNulty, 2008, p. 173). In the current study, one of the nine strategy-level codes was applied to every utterance made by the parent of interest within a single interaction. Further explanation for using an utterance as the unit of analysis is provided in the following section.

Unit of analysis. Following the procedures outlined by Sillars (1986), each conflict interaction was unitized according to the utterances or "thought units" of the target parent. Several criteria were employed to unitize an utterance, which are adapted from Sillars' (1986) coding manual. First, an utterance is operationalized as "a main clause (subject-verb-predicate) plus dependent and coordinate clauses" (Sillars, 1986, p. 6). Clauses included in a single utterance consisted of subordinate and coordinating clauses. Subordinate clauses were indicated by words such as "although" and "because," while coordinating clauses included conjunctions such as "and," "but," and "or." However, an exception to the inclusion of subordinating and coordinating clauses was applied when a parent displayed a personal speaking pattern in which the beginning of a new phrase repeatedly included the term "but" or a similar word, despite the lack of connection between the consequent and preceding phrases. Second, if a new phrase repeated the content of the previous utterance, the two sections were considered a single utterance. Third, if a segment relied on a previous phrase for its subject, verb, or predicate; then

the two segments were regarded as a single utterance. Fourth, speech segments that were incomplete or indecipherable were considered part of the adjacent utterance. Fifth, if an individual was interrupted, his/her utterance was not terminated until he/she completed the utterance (Sillars, 1986). Finally, an additional criterion was placed on utterances made within the parents-adolescent conflict, such that utterances were coded only when directed toward the adolescent child. Utterances directed exclusively to one's romantic partner were not coded for the family interaction.

Coder training and intercoder reliability. Coders were undergraduate Communication Studies students who were aware of the aims of the larger grant-based project, but who were blind to the purpose of the current study. The pair of coders underwent extensive training in the Verbal Tactics Coding Scheme, approximately 8 hours, and was trained using a set of pilot interactions from both the dyadic and triadic conflicts. Training included regularly scheduled meetings involving discussion and clarification of the coding scheme along with identification and trouble-shooting of problem areas of coding. Agreement above 75% was required before coding began. The pair of coders rated a randomly selected 25% of the interactions, which were distributed throughout the duration of the coding process as intercoder reliability checks. Throughout the period of coding, several meetings were conducted to discuss difficult interactions (e.g., "taboo topic" discussions) and to resolve any inconsistencies in coding through discussion. These procedures for establishing intercoder reliability are consistent with those employed in prior research (see McNulty, 2008; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998; Stroud et al., 2010).

As each utterance received a categorical code for verbal conflict tactics, a kappa value was used to establish consistency across coders (Kitzmann, 2000). Using the Interact software program, a kappa value was computed for each of the four conflict approaches within a single

interaction (see Table 2.2). Kappa values indicate adequate intercoder reliability ranging from .67 to .79 for the marital conflict and from .61 to .73 for the parent-adolescent conflict. These kappas are consistent with prior research by Kitzmann (2000) that indicated K = .58 for categorical codes of parent-child conflict behavior.

Table 2.2

Kappa Values for Intercoder Reliability of Verbal Conflict Tactics

	Marital Conflict	Parent-Adolescent Conflict
Negotiation	.67	.61
Direct Fighting	.79	.72
Nonconfrontation	.71	.73
Indirect Fighting	.67	.73

Emotion Expression

An individual's nonverbal expression of emotion was coded for both the marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions using a modified version of the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF; Coan & Gottman, 2007). The SPAFF is a widely used coding system of emotion expression, which has been applied to the study of marital couples (Gottman, 1994), newlyweds (Graber et al., 2011), cohabiting couples (Ben-Naim, Hirschberger, Ein-Dor, & Mikulincer, 2013), and college-sample romantic relationships (Creasey, 2002). The SPAFF has demonstrated high levels of construct and criterion validity (Coan & Gottman, 2007; Heyman, 2001) as well as predictive validity for relationship decline (Gottman, 1996).

Interactions were assessed for individuals' expression of five emotions, which include the positive emotion of affection along with the negative emotions of anger, contempt, disgust, and sadness. The system takes a cultural informants approach to study emotion expression (Ben-Naim et al., 2013; Boiger & Mesquita, 2012) in which coders consider facial expression, gestures, body movements, and vocal tone as information for determining expression of a particular emotion (Ben-Naim et al., 2013; Creasey, 2002). Though verbal content is typically included as source of information for emotion expression, verbal content was not included as an indication of expression in the current study in order to distinguish nonverbal emotion expression from verbal conflict tactics. Specific indicators of each emotion are in Table 2.3, while the full description of each emotion according to Coan and Gottman (2007) is found in Appendix B.

Table 2.3

Emotion Expression Code Descriptions

Emotion	Indicators
Affection	Slow speech, quiet voice; smiling, mirrored expression to show understanding, nodding in agreement, good natured laughing
Anger	Lower voiced, constrained speech, yelling, sharp exhalations, thinning lips, clenched teeth, tight jaw
Contempt	Eye rolls, icy tone of voice, sarcastic tone, laughing at the expense of the other, speaking from a position of superiority, uni-lateral dimpler (pulling one's mouth to one side), raised upper lip
Disgust	Involuntary revulsion, protruding tongue, head tilted to one side, flared nostrils, raised upper lip
Sadness	Sighing, pouting, sulking, low energy, slouching, crying, drooping shoulders, hanging head, quavering voice, lip tremble, frowning

Unit of analysis. The unit of analysis for emotion expression is the same as that of the verbal conflict tactics: each utterance by the individual within a single interaction. Selecting each utterance as the unit of analysis deviates from the procedures in the SPAFF. The SPAFF considering a single interaction as a continuous "stream of behavior" (Ben-Naim et al., 2013, p. 510) and therefore suggests emotion expression can be coded at any time in an interaction. However, I chose to segment the interaction according to utterances for two reasons. First, using utterances as the unit of analysis allows for consistency across observational measures. Second, unitization of interactions aligns with close relationship research of emotion expression, as prior research has segmented interactions for coding purposes (Barry & Kochanska, 2010; Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

For the marital conflict, each utterance was coded for presence of expression of each the emotion of interest. For the parent-adolescent conflict an additional caveat was placed on the coding of each utterance, such that the presence of emotion expression was coded only when the nonverbal expression was directed at the adolescent child. Utterances directed exclusively to one's romantic partner were not coded for the parent-adolescent conflict interaction.

Coder training and intercoder reliability. Pairs of undergraduate Communication Studies students, blind to the purpose of the study, coded parents' nonverbal expression of emotion. Coder pairs were trained for 5 hours in the SPAFF for a specific set of emotions. Regular scheduled training sessions were comprised of discussions of the emotion code, identification of the presence of emotion expression in pilot interactions, clarification of the coding scheme, and review of previously coded interactions. Before coding began, coders must agree on 75% of the pilot observations. For each emotion, a pair of coders rated a randomly selected 30% of the interactions, which were evenly distributed throughout the duration of the

coding process as intercoder reliability checks. Meetings were held during the coding period to discuss difficulties as they arose. These procedures for establishing intercoder reliability are consistent with those employed in prior research (see Pasch & Bradbury, 1998).

Similar to the coding procedure of Barry and Kochanska (2010), each utterance received a categorical code for the presence of the expression of a single emotion. As such, kappa values were calculated to establish intercoder reliability (Barry & Kochanska, 2010). Kappas were calculated for the expression of each emotion across all time points for a single interaction using the Interact software program. Kappas indicate adequate intercoder reliability ranging from .89 to 1.00 (see Table 2.4), aligning with the values demonstrated in previous research of parental emotion expression ranging from .54 to 1.0 (Barry & Kochanska, 2010).

Table 2.4

Kappa Values for Intercoder Reliability of Emotion Expression

	Marital Conflict	Parent-Adolescent Conflict
Affection	.95	.92
Anger	.92	.95
Contempt	.92	.96
Disgust	1.00	1.00
Sadness	.89	.98

Self-Report Measure

Perceived Conflict Resolution

After completion of each discussion, individual members of the family were separated to answer survey items regarding the conflict interaction just completed. Perceived conflict resolution was assessed using a single item created by the principal investigators of the larger grant project. Use of a single item to measure conflict resolution is consistent with similar research of close relationship conflict (e.g., Bates & Samp, 2011).

The single-item, "How much did the discussion of the topic help you resolve this issue?" was completed by participants at the conclusion of each interaction. Perceived conflict resolution was rated on a 6-point, Likert-type scale (0 = not at all, 5 = a whole lot). For each interaction, a one-sample t-test was conducted to determine if the mean of the perceived conflict resolution scores significantly differed from the scale mid-point. The one-sample t-test for the *marital* conflict interaction indicated that the mean score for perceived conflict resolution (M = 2.11, SD = 1.22) was significantly below the mid-point (=2.5), $t(89) = -3.02$, $p = .003$. A similar pattern was demonstrated for the *parent-adolescent* conflict interaction such that the mean score for perceived conflict resolution (M = 2.23, SD = 1.08) was also significantly below the mid-point (=2.5), $t(89) = -2.34$, $p = .02$.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to testing hypotheses, the observational data were aggregated and descriptive statistics obtained. The observational measures were then screened for frequency of occurrence within each conflict interaction as well as for normal distribution, followed by modifications to tests of hypotheses when needed. All preliminary analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS 20.0.[1]

Verbal Conflict Tactics

Marital conflict data aggregation. For the dyadic, marital conflict discussion a total score was computed for each conflict approach according to the data aggregation strategy utilized in prior close relationship conflict research using the VTCS (see Pasch & Bradbury, 1998). First, for each strategy (e.g., analytic remarks, conciliatory remarks) a sum was created by totaling the number of utterances in which the parent utilized the strategy. Second, the sum for each strategy was divided by the total number of utterances for the interaction to allow for comparison across all individuals regardless of number of utterances. When examining the descriptive statistics for each strategy, the skewness and kurtosis scores indicated the data were not normally distributed at the strategy level, which was due to the low frequency with which participants employed particular strategies. As the strategies comprising each approach measured the same construct, strategies were then collapsed into superordinate conflict approaches.

A total score for each approach to conflict was computed by summing the proportion scores of the strategies comprising that approach. For example, an individual's total score for the negotiation approach was created by summing the proportion score for analytic remarks and conciliatory remarks. Participants used the negotiation strategy most frequently (M = .58, SD = .21), followed by the direct fighting (M = .23, SD = .19), nonconfrontation (M = .13, SD = .11), and indirect fighting (M = .05, SD = .07) strategies respectively. Normal distribution was analyzed using scores of skewness and kurtosis. Results indicated the low frequency with which the approach of indirect fighting occurred (skewness = 2.37, SE = .24; kurtosis = 7.93, SE = .48). Based on the insufficient frequency of use, the indirect fighting approach was not included in the tests of hypotheses.

Parent-adolescent conflict data aggregation. A total score for the verbal conflict tactics used in the parent-adolescent conflict was calculated by summing the number of utterances directed toward the adolescent child in which the parent utilized the conflict strategy. Then, the sum for each strategy was divided by the total number of utterances directed toward the adolescent child, controlling for number of utterances and allowing for comparison across all individuals. Similar to the results from the marital conflict interaction, the means and standard deviations for each strategy indicated infrequent use of particular strategies. Skewness and kurtosis scores were examined and indicated the data were not normally distributed due to the low frequency with which specific conflict strategies were employed. As the strategies within each approach measured the same construct, the data were then collapsed into the superordinate conflict approaches.

The total score for each conflict approach was computed by summing the proportion scores of the strategies comprising that approach. Parents employed the negotiation strategy

most often (*M* = .51, *SD* = .23), followed by the direct fighting (*M* = .34, *SD* = .33), nonconfrontation (*M* = .09, *SD* = .10), and indirect fighting (*M* = .03, *SD* = .07) strategies. All hypotheses analyzing verbal conflict tactics in the parent-adolescent conflict interaction utilized the total score for each approach.

The normality of the distribution of each approach was examined. Skewness and kurtosis scores indicated that the nonconfrontation approach (skewness = 1.97, *SE* = .24; kurtosis = 4.67, *SE* = .48) and indirect fighting approach did not meet the standards for normality (skewness = 4.57, *SE* = .24; kurtosis = 27.36, *SE* = .48). However, when examining the average frequency of use for each approach, it is clear that the nonconfrontation approach was used approximately three times more frequently than the indirect fighting approach. The nonconfrontation approach was retained for tests of hypotheses for several reasons. First, the variable was normally distributed in the marital conflict interaction. Second, scores for skewness and kurtosis in the parent-adolescent conflict approached the standards for normal distribution. Third, the variable occurred with sufficient frequency in the parent-adolescent conflict to allow for tests of the transference of nonconfrontation behaviors from the marital to the parent-adolescent conflict.

Conversely, the indirect fighting approach was not normally distributed in the marital conflict due to the low frequency with which the approach was used by parents in the interaction. Second, the skewness and kurtosis scores were far from meeting the standards for normal distribution because of the lack of use in the parent-adolescent conflict. Taken together, the preliminary results for the indirect fighting approach indicated the behaviors comprising this approach were not implemented with sufficient frequency in either conflict interaction to test the transference of these behaviors across subsystems. Therefore, the indirect fighting approach was not included in subsequent analyses.

Emotion Expression

Marital conflict data aggregation. To create a total score for the expression of each emotion, the first step in data aggregation was to sum the number of utterances in which the individual nonverbally expressed the emotion. Second, the sum for the expression of the emotion was divided by the total number of utterances to allow for comparison across all individuals (see Table 3.1 for *Ms* and *SDs*). This data aggregation strategy is consistent with that used by Barry and Kochanska (2010) analyzing the emotion expression of parents and children in conflict interactions.

When examining the descriptive statistics for emotion expression, it was apparent that disgust was not expressed during the marital conflicts observed. Therefore, disgust was not included in the tests of hypotheses. In addition, preliminary results suggested contempt and sadness were expressed infrequently. Due to the low frequency of expression and in turn a high frequency of the score of zero for both contempt and sadness expression, the expression scores for these emotions were not included in subsequent analyses. Finally, tests of normal distribution of affection and anger expression indicated the data were positively skewed (affection = 1.54, anger = 1.82), which is due to the moderate frequency of the score of zero. The resulting positive skew of affection and anger expression scores was accounted for by defining the variables as censored below when testing hypotheses.

Parent-adolescent conflict data aggregation. Scores for expression of each emotion within the parent-adolescent conflict were calculated by summing the number of utterances in which the parent nonverbally expressed the emotion toward the adolescent child. Utterances in which nonverbal emotion expression was aimed exclusively toward one's romantic partner were not coded and therefore were not included in the calculation. Next, the sum for the emotion

expression was divided by the total number of utterances directed at the adolescent child to allow for comparison across all individuals regardless of number of utterances (see Table 3.1 for *Ms* and *SDs*).

Table 3.1

Means and Standard Deviations of Emotion Expression

	Marital Conflict	Parent-Adolescent Conflict
Affection	.06 (.07)	.09 (.11)
Anger	.16 (.23)	.17 (.23)
Contempt	.01 (.04)	.02 (.05)
Disgust	.00 (.00)	.002 (.01)
Sadness	.03 (.07)	.01 (.06)

Note. Standard deviations presented in parentheses. N = 100

The descriptive statistics indicated contempt, disgust, and sadness were not expressed with sufficient frequency in the parent-adolescent conflict interaction. The normality of distribution of the data was then examined using scores of skewness and kurtosis. These scores indicated the data for contempt (skewness = 4.96, kurtosis = 26.85), disgust (skewness = 3.99, kurtosis = 15.14), and sadness (skewness = 7.50, kurtosis = 62.68) were not normally distributed. The severe non-normality of the data was due to the lack of expression of these emotions within the parent-adolescent conflict interaction. Therefore, the low frequency of expression led to the exclusion of the emotions of contempt, disgust, and sadness from tests of hypotheses.

Table 3.2

Zero-order Correlations Between Study Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
1. Negotiation M	1.00											
2. Direct Fighting M	-.76**	1.00										
3. Nonconfrontation M	-.33**	-.28**	1.00									
4. Negotiation PA	.34**	-.23*	-.17	1.00								
5. Direct Fighting PA	-.31**	.28**	.01	-.58**	1.00							
6. Nonconfrontation PA	-.21*	.06	.33**	-.15	-.29**	1.00						
7. Affection M	.27**	-.35**	.10	.12	-.10	.02	1.00					
8. Anger M	-.39**	.53**	-.22*	-.23*	.16	.14	-.17	1.00				
9. Affection PA	.29**	-.18	-.15	.21*	-.26*	.13	.14	.02	1.00			
10. Anger PA	-.28**	.36**	-.14	-.31**	.41**	-.19	-.13	.34**	-.21*	1.00		
11. Resolution M	.37**	-.41**	.05	.20	-.24*	-.04	.25*	-.33**	.12	-.07	1.00	
12. Resolution PA	.13	-.15	.03	.17	-.16	-.08	.10	-.14	.16	-.10	.43**	1.00

Note. Correlations are two-tailed, zero-order, Pearson correlations. N = 100. Asterisks denote partial correlations significant at the $p < .05$ level (*) and $p < .01$ level (**). M = marital conflict, PA = parent-adolescent conflict.

Normal distribution of the affection and anger expression scores were also analyzed. Skewness values for affection and anger expression indicated the data had a positive skew and positive kurtosis (affection: skewness = 2.74, kurtosis = 11.25; anger: skewness = 1.80, kurtosis = 3.43). The non-normal distribution was due to the moderate frequency with which these emotions were expressed in the parent-adolescent conflict interaction. However, as these emotions were expressed with sufficient frequency to be included in analyses, the moderate to high frequency of the score of zero for affection and anger expression was accounted for in the tests of hypotheses by defining the variables as censored below. Finally, Table 3.2 presents the zero-order correlations of all variables retained for the tests of hypotheses.

Tests of the Spillover of Verbal Conflict Tactics

H1 through *H3* were tested through multiple regression analyses using IBM SPSS 20.0. As the negotiation and direct fighting approaches within a single interaction were negatively correlated, tests of hypotheses were conducted separately for each approach. Although significantly correlated, the negotiation and direct fighting approaches are theoretically distinct constructs. To appropriately determine the degree of transference from the marital conflict to the parent-adolescent conflict interaction, separate analyses were conducted for hypotheses pertaining to each approach. This data analysis strategy addressed multicollinearity concerns which could have arisen had all approaches been entered into a single analysis. Finally, the resolution score for the marital conflict interaction was considered as a potential moderator of spillover of verbal conflict strategies from the marital to the parent-adolescent conflict interaction. An interaction term was created by multiplying the score for the use of each conflict approach in the marital conflict by the score for perceived resolution of the marital conflict. Hypotheses were then tested using separate multiple regression models for each hypothesis,

entering the proportion score for the conflict approach within the parent-adolescent conflict as the dependent variable. The proportion score for the use of the conflict approach in the marital conflict and the score for the perceived resolution of the marital conflict were entered together in Step 1. Only when the score for the perceived resolution of the marital conflict was significant in Step 1 was the interaction term then entered in Step 2. The score for the perceived resolution of the marital conflict was included to assess the potential for the use of a particular conflict strategy to be reinforced by the outcome of the marital conflict and thus employed during the subsequent parent-adolescent conflict interaction. Results for perceived resolution of the marital conflict and the interaction term are reported only when significant.

Negotiation

H1 predicted a positive association between the use of the negotiation approach in the marital conflict and the use of analytic and conciliatory remarks toward one's child in the family conflict interaction. The prediction was tested using multiple regression analyses where the proportion score for the overall use of the negotiation approach within the parent-adolescent conflict was entered as the dependent variable. The proportion score for the use of the negotiation approach in the marital conflict and the score for the perceived resolution of the marital conflict were entered together in Step 1. The model was significant ($R = .42$, $R^2\Delta = .17$, $F(2,85) = 8.97$, $p < .001$). When examining the individual parameters, as expected the use of negotiation in the marital conflict was a significant predictor of use of the negotiation approach toward one's child in the parent-adolescent conflict ($\beta = .39$, $p < .001$). Therefore, *H1* was supported.

Direct Fighting

H2 proposed a positive association between the use of the direct fighting approach in marital conflict and employment of confrontative remarks and personal attacks addressed toward one's child in the parent-adolescent conflict. *H2* was tested using multiple regression analyses in which the proportion score for use of the direct fighting approach within the parent-adolescent conflict was entered as the dependent variable. The score for the use of the direct fighting approach within the marital conflict and the score for the perceived resolution of the marital conflict were entered together in Step 1. The model was significant ($R = .34$, $R^2\Delta = .12$, $F(2,85) = 5.63$, $p = .005$). Consistent with prediction, the results for individual parameter of the use of direct fighting in the marital interaction indicated a positive association between the use of direct fighting in the marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions ($\beta = .25$, $p < .03$). Therefore, *H2* was supported.

Nonconfrontation

A positive association between the use of the nonconfrontation approach in the marital interaction and the use of topic management, noncommittal remarks, and irreverent remarks toward one's child in the parent-adolescent conflict interaction was put forth in *H3*. The prediction was tested using a moderated multiple regression analysis. The proportion score for the use of the nonconfrontation approach within the parent-adolescent conflict entered as the dependent variable. The score for the use of nonconfrontation within the marital conflict and the score for the perceived resolution of the marital conflict were entered together in Step 1. The interaction term was entered in Step 2. The full model was significant ($R = .42$, $R^2\Delta = .07$, $F(3,84) = 6.75$, $p = .01$). Counter to prediction, the result for the individual parameter of the nonconfrontation approach within the marital interaction was non-significant ($\beta = -.05$ $p = .79$,

ns). However, resolution of the marital conflict (β = -.33 p = .03) and the interaction term were significant (β = .55 p = .01).

As Figure 3.1 indicates, as the use of nonconfrontation in the marital conflict increases, the use of nonconfrontation in the parent-adolescent conflict also increases. The interaction indicates that the spillover of nonconfrontation is more pronounced for those with high levels of perceived resolution of the marital conflict as compared to those low in perceived resolution of the marital conflict. Therefore, *H3* was partially supported.

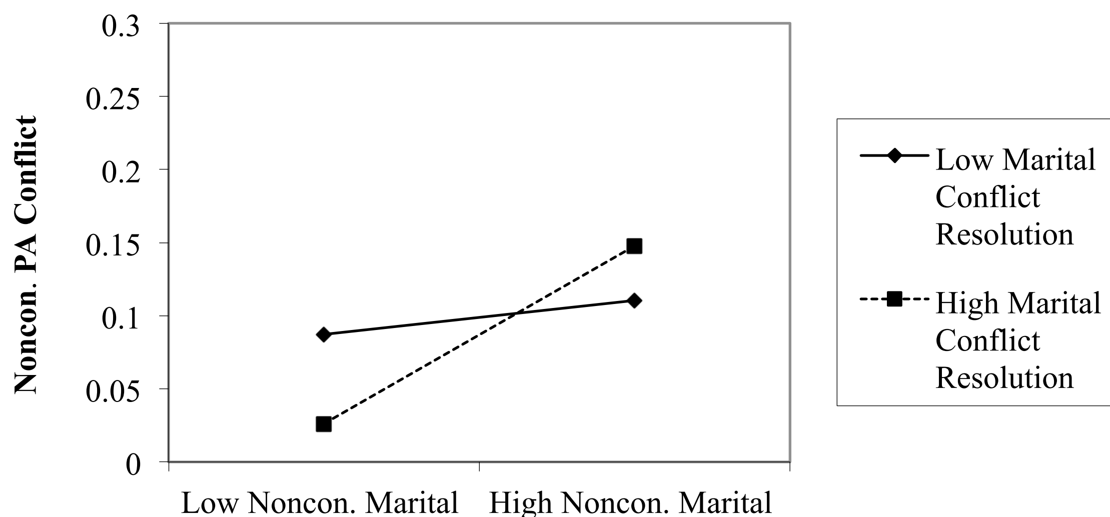

Figure 3.1. Moderating effect of perceived resolution of the marital conflict on the spillover of nonconfrontation from the marital to parent-adolescent conflict. Noncon. = nonconfrontation approach; Marital = marital conflict; PA = parent-adolescent

Tests of Verbal Conflict Tactics and Perceived Conflict Resolution

To test *H5* through *H7*, two linear regression analyses were conducted for each conflict approach, one per interaction. For all hypotheses tests, the score for perceived conflict resolution was regressed on the proportion score for the use of the conflict approach.

Negotiation

H5 proposed that the negotiation approach would be positively associated with perceived conflict resolution for both the marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions. For each interaction, the score for the perceived resolution of the conflict was regressed on the score for the use of negotiation in the interaction. For the marital conflict, the use of negotiation explained 13 percent of the variance in perceived conflict resolution ($R = .37$, $R^2\Delta = .13$, $F(1,86) = 13.18$, $p < .001$). These results indicate a positive association between the use of the negotiation approach and the likelihood of perceiving the conflict as resolved ($\beta = 2.11$, $p < .001$). Within the parent-adolescent conflict, the use of the negotiation approach did not emerge as a significant predictor of perceived conflict resolution ($R = .17$, $R^2\Delta = .03$, $F(1,88) = 2.72$, $p = .10$, *ns*). Therefore, *H5* was supported for the marital conflict.

Direct Fighting

H6 put forth that the direct fighting approach to conflict would be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution for both the marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions. For each interaction, the score for the perceived resolution of the conflict was regressed on the score for the use of the direct fighting approach in the interaction. In the dyadic, marital conflict, the use of the direct fighting approach was a significant predictor of a parent's perception of conflict resolution ($R = .41$, $R^2\Delta = .17$, $F(1,86) = 16.94$, $p < .001$). Consistent with prediction, these results indicate the use of the direct fighting approach was negatively associated with the perception of the conflict as resolved ($\beta = -2.63$, $p < .001$). However, the use of the direct fighting approach within the parent-adolescent conflict did not emerge as a significant predictor of perceived conflict resolution ($R = .16$, $R^2\Delta = .02$, $F(1,88) = 2.20$, $p = .14$, *ns*). As such, *H6* was supported for the marital conflict.

Nonconfrontation

H7 predicted the use of nonconfrontation to verbally manage conflict would be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution for both the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts. For each interaction, the score for the perceived resolution of the conflict was regressed on the proportion score for the utilization of nonconfrontation in the interaction. The use of the nonconfrontation approach did not emerge as a significant predictor of perceived conflict resolution for the marital ($R = .05$, $R^2\Delta = .002$, $F(1,86) = .17$, $p = .68$, *ns*) or parent-adolescent conflict ($R = .08$, $R^2\Delta < .01$, $F(1,88) = .51$, $p = .48$, *ns*). *H7* was not supported.

Tests of the Spillover of Emotion Expression

H9 and *H10* were tested through censored regression analyses using LISREL 8.80, as the program allows for the censoring of data prior to running regression analyses. Censored regression analyses allows for the estimation of regression models in which the data for the dependent variable are clustered around a single value at either the minimum or maximum value of the variable (Joreskog, 2002). When the dependent variable of the regression model is censored, ordinary least squares estimation is biased, as the analysis does not account for the positive skew of the data. In contrast, censored regression analyses allows for the estimation of regression models using a maximum likelihood estimation that accounts for the clustering of values of the dependent variable around a single value. For the current project, the variables of affection and anger expression in the parent-adolescent conflict were each clustered around the minimum value (i.e. 0). Designating the variables as censored below in LISREL treats the values below the censor threshold as distinct from the remaining values of the variable. Censoring below is consistent with prior research where the data is clustered around zero (Joreskog, 2002). Therefore, censored regression analyses were used to analyze *H9* and *H10.*[2]

Affection

H9 proposed a parent's expression of affection during the marital conflict would be positively associated with his/her expression of affection toward his/her adolescent child in the parent-adolescent conflict. The prediction was tested by regressing the censored affection expression score for the parent-adolescent conflict on the censored affection expression score for the marital conflict. Contrary to prediction, a significant association did not emerge for affection expression across the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts ($R^2\Delta = .001$, $\beta = .28$, Wald Z = .93, $p = .35$, *ns*). *H9* was not supported.

Anger

H10 predicted one's expression of anger during marital conflict would be positively associated with the expression of anger toward one's adolescent child in the parent-adolescent conflict. The prediction was tested by regressing the censored anger expression score for the parent-adolescent conflict on the marital conflict censored anger expression score. Expression of anger in the marital conflict predicted a significant increase in anger expression toward one's child in the parent-adolescent conflict ($R^2\Delta = .08$, $\beta = .50$, Wald Z = 2.70, $p = .007$). As such, *H10* was supported.

Tests of Emotion Expression and Perceived Conflict Resolution

To test *H14* and *H15*, a linear regression analysis was conducted using the censored emotion expression variables as the independent variable and the perceived conflict resolution score for each interaction as the dependent variable. Linear regression analyses were conducted as the dependent variables in the current hypotheses are normally distributed. Two analyses were conducted for each emotion, one per interaction type. Therefore a total of four regression models were estimated: two for affection expression (i.e., marital and parent-adolescent conflict)

and two for anger expression (i.e., marital and parent-adolescent conflict). For all hypotheses tests, the score for perceived conflict resolution was regressed on the proportion score for expression of the emotion within the specific interaction.

Affection

H14 predicted expression of affection by a parent during conflict would be positively associated with perceived conflict resolution for both the marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions. However, expression of affection during conflict did not emerge as a significant predictor of perceived conflict resolution for the marital conflict ($\beta = 2.66$, Wald Z = 1.55, $p = .12$, *ns*) or the parent-adolescent conflict interaction ($\beta = .54$, Wald Z = .76, $p = .45$, *ns*). *H14* was not supported.

Anger

H15 proposed that expression of anger by a parent during conflict would be negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution for both the marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions. Counter to the prediction for the marital conflict interaction, expression of anger toward one's romantic partner predicted a significant increase in perceived conflict resolution ($R^2\Delta = .34$, $\beta = 2.58$, Wald Z = 6.35, $p < .001$). However, expression of anger toward one's child in the parent-adolescent conflict was not a significant predictor of perceived resolution of the conflict ($\beta = -.01$, Wald Z = -.02, $p = .99$, *ns*). Together these results indicated *H15* was not supported.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

Parents experience conflict as a common part of their interpersonal relationships within a family, particularly during times of transition such as raising adolescent children (Belsky & Hsieh, 1998; Cui & Donnellan, 2009; Sillars & Canary, 2013). Though prior work has analyzed the transference of global marital quality to the quality of the parent-child relationship (Engfer, 1988; Stroud et al., 2011) as well as the potential for parents' conflict communication behaviors to influence child adjustment (Davies et al., 2006; Sturge-Apple et al., 2006), scarce research has focused on the analysis of a parent's implementation of communication behaviors to strategically manage conflict across family subsystems. This dissertation employed the Spillover Hypothesis as a means for understanding parents' micro-level communicative responses to conflict. Support for the proposition that individual conflict tactics and expressions of discrete emotions can be transferred across family subsystems demonstrate the utility of implementing the Spillover Hypothesis as a conceptual framework for studying communication within family conflict. These results also point to an innovative avenue for future theoretical development and inquiry specific to communication during close relationship conflict.

Additionally, results of this dissertation provide an optimistic perspective of family conflict by highlighting parents' abilities to engage in constructive conflict management behaviors (i.e., negotiation, nonconfrontation) across family subsystems, which are often overlooked in studies of conflict communication. Finally, the current project breaks new ground in communication research of close relationship conflict through the explicit examination of emotion expression during real-time conflict interactions. Though prior research indicates the

importance of emotion in conflict, observational research of emotion expression within close relationship conflict interactions is rare (for exception see Huggins & Samp, 2013b). Therefore, the observational analysis of expressions of affection and anger in the current study contributes to knowledge of the transference of both positive and negative emotion expressions during conflict across family subsystems.

Overall, the results of this dissertation indicate support for the spillover of verbal conflict approaches, both constructive and destructive, along with the spillover of anger expression from the marital to the parent-adolescent subsystem. Also, the verbal conflict approaches of negotiation and direct fighting along with the expression of anger were associated with variations in perceived resolution of the marital conflict. Therefore, this dissertation makes substantial contributions not only to the understanding of parents' communicative management of conflict within families, but also presents implications for understanding of more broad conflict communication processes. Below, I provide a detailed presentation of the results of this dissertation as well as implications of its findings.

Transference of Verbal Conflict Strategies across Family Subsystems

By specifically examining verbal communication behaviors enacted by parents during conflictual interactions, this dissertation breaks new ground in the study of communicative behavior during close relationship conflict. Though theoretically the Spillover Hypothesis asserts a parent's behavior can be transferred from one family subsystem to another (Erel & Burman, 1995; Repetti, 1987), prior research does not explicitly examine micro-level behavior during interactions. Instead, prior work has established the transference of global relationship quality across family subsystems. Therefore, identification of parents' use of particular verbal conflict strategies within the marital conflict to be positively associated with the use of the same

behaviors in the parent-adolescent conflict broadens understanding and application of the Spillover Hypothesis. Additionally, the current study's investigation of a non-clinical sample of families provides insight into the message content and conflict dynamics of "adequately functioning" families (Sillars et al., 2004, p. 433) raising adolescents. Discussion of the implications of the results for each conflict approach is provided.

Negotiation

Parents' use of the negotiation approach in the marital conflict interaction was positively associated with the use of negotiation strategies toward one's child in the parent-adolescent conflict. These results support the proposition of the Spillover Hypothesis and provide encouraging evidence that parents with the capacity to directly and constructively engage in conflict have the potential to do so consistently across family subsystems. In the current study, parents (on average) used the negotiation approach most frequently to strategically manage conflict, which is especially optimistic for families given prior research has typically focused on the presence and influence of negative communication behavior rather than identifying patterns of constructive conflict communication. Though research has noted the potential for individuals from well-adjusted relationships to produce more positive messages than those from maladjusted relationships (Fincham & Beach, 1999; Sillars & Canary, 2013), observational analysis of constructive communication strategies during conflict is limited. Therefore, the positive association between the use of negotiation in the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts demonstrated here provides detailed understanding of how parents constructively work through conflict within the family. This finding also bolsters the proposition that conflict within families and during times of transition (i.e., adolescence) can be a productive process for family

development and growth, particularly when conflicts are approached constructively and in the context of positive relationships (Branje et al., 2013).

The consistent use of negotiation across family subsystems suggests the potential for parent-child relationships to benefit from direct, cooperative conflict engagement in ways similar to that of marriages. For example, prior marital conflict research has outlined functional outcomes of engaging in positive conflict management behaviors including spouses' enhanced mental and physical health (Robles et al., 2006) and adaptive physiological responses to conflict (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). If these benefits are provided to individuals in marital relationships where conflict is managed using the negotiation approach, it stands to reason that similar benefits may be garnered by the parents and adolescents comprising the relationships in which these behaviors are enacted during parent-child conflicts. For example parent's use of negotiation during conflict with an adolescent child can reinforce individuals' shared family identity (Beck & Ledbetter, 2013), feelings of closeness between parent and child, and potentially a more smooth transition to horizontal forms of parent-child communication (Branje et al., 2013). Future explorations of the use of negotiation in parent-adolescent conflicts should therefore consider the beneficial outcomes that may be associated with the use of the negotiation approach.

The current project also addresses the criticism that marital and family conflict research tends to focus its efforts on distinguishing the communicative patterns of distressed and non-distressed families (Sillars et al., 2004). Indeed, previous research has often sought to outline the negative aspects of family communication, while little attention has been paid to "adequately functioning" families (Sillars et al., 2004, p. 433) and their potential for constructive conflict management. The dissertation addressed this criticism by including (1) a community sample of families and (2) analyzing the use of direct, cooperative behaviors during conflict. The

composition of the current sample together with the support for the spillover of negotiation behaviors across family subsystems indicates that families in the range of adequate functioning may engage in conflict in a constructive manner more often than is represented by the juxtaposition of distressed and non-distressed families in previous research. The current results call attention to the need for future research to highlight families' potential for constructive conflict engagement through the inclusion of direct, positive approaches in analyses of parents' conflict management behaviors across family subsystems. It should also be noted that typically, individuals in this study did not use direct, positive behaviors exclusively as indicated by the modest use of the direct fighting approach across the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts.

Direct Fighting

As indicated above, individuals raising an adolescent child have the capability to constructively engage in conflict management; however, the presence of constructive behaviors is not synonymous with the absence of destructive behaviors. Indeed, parents employed the direct, competitive approach in approximately one quarter of utterances in the marital conflict and a third of utterances directed at one's child during the triadic conflict interaction. The use of the direct fighting approach in both family subsystems is not surprising given the nature of the study as focused on discussion of a problematic topic in one's relationship. Even still, the findings provide interesting implications for the use of direct fighting in normally functioning families. Though most scholars consider the direct fighting approach to be destructive to relationships and indicative of maladjustment (Bevan, 2013; Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006; Sillars et al., 2004), direct fighting behaviors may also be enacted within normally functioning relationships. The current sample of families from the general community addressed the need to examine conflict communication behavior in normal families while also indicating that normally

functioning families deviate from a theoretical ideal of enacting constructive behaviors exclusively during conflict. Instead, individuals employ a range of conflict strategies to effectively manage family conflict.

The spillover of the direct fighting approach from the marital to the parent-adolescent conflict demonstrates that both constructive and destructive approaches to conflict are transferred across family subsystems. Considering the use of directly aggressive behaviors in marital relationships is predictive of future relationship decline (Gottman & Levenson, 2000), the next step in the research process is to uncover the long-term outcomes, both individual and familial, of the employment of direct fighting behaviors across family subsystems. Research indicates these behaviors are detrimental to marriages and distinguish distressed couples. But, what are the long-term consequences of the transference of these behaviors across family subsystems for those families who would be considered normally functioning?

Erbert and Duck (1997 as cited in Sillars et al., 2004) propose that beyond disturbed or dysfunctional relationships, interpersonal connections often experience cycles of using negative and positive behaviors as a means of adapting to transitions. This perspective is consistent with the morphogenesis assumption of Family Systems Theory, which states change is inevitable within families and requires adaptation for successful transition (Minuchin, 1985). Thus, the period of adolescence may require parents' use of direct conflict approaches, both positive and negative, in order to effectively traverse the transition as parents and adolescents navigate the dialectical tensions of autonomy and connection (Branje et al., 2013). Speculatively, if a parent has seen success in utilizing the direct fighting approach in the marital relationship, he/she may be inclined to employ direct fighting strategies when seeking behavioral changes with an adolescent child. For example, parents may employ direct fighting behaviors as a means of

dissuading an adolescent's attempts to obtain autonomy too swiftly or in a particular area deemed inappropriate by the parent. As these behaviors clearly present a parent's concerns and desires for change, direct fighting behaviors may allow an adolescent child the opportunity to meet the verbalized concerns of the parent in the future and in turn, move the conflict toward resolution. This perspective aligns with the view of Dainton and Gross (2008) that negative conflict behaviors may be beneficial to relationships when enacted as a means of relational maintenance. In addition, prior research suggests directly aggressive approaches can facilitate productive alterations to relationships (Caughlin, 2002; McNulty & Russell, 2010; Sillars & Canary, 2013). However, the enduring effects of employment of direct fighting behaviors is unclear from the current study. As well, the potential for difficulties within normally functioning families tapers off as the adolescent child matures (Branje et al., 2013). Thus, future work should consider the long-term efficacy of the use of the direct fighting approach in both the marital and parent-child subsystems.

Nonconfrontation

The current project deviated from the traditional conceptualization of conflict behaviors by distinguishing between positive and negative indirect approaches to conflict management. Though previous efforts have often examined avoidance generally by considering indirect verbal conflict tactics to be conceptually similar, the results of this dissertation provide empirical evidence for the assertion made by communication scholars (Sillars & Canary, 2013; Sillars et al., 2004) that indirect conflict approaches differ according to the cooperation-competition continuum. For example, prior conceptualizations of avoidance as physical or conversational withdrawal from the interaction limits understanding of indirect conflict approaches, as avoidance may be verbalized in a cooperative manner during conflict as a means of strategically

managing an interaction. Therefore, without distinguishing between indirect conflict behaviors, previous findings of the outcomes associated with conflict avoidance may not be indicative of the effects of nonconfrontation.

The current project addresses this shortcoming of prior research by demonstrating the use of the constructive, indirect approach of nonconfrontation in the marital conflict was positively associated with the use of nonconfrontation behaviors toward one's adolescent child in the triadic family conflict according to the degree of resolution of the marital conflict interaction. These results indicate that when a parent's use of nonconfrontation contributes to the perception of the conflict as resolved, the parent will continue to use nonconfrontation behaviors when interacting with one's adolescent child. Overall, these results point to the potential for the use of cooperative conflict avoidance, which has been largely overlooked in prior research, to be used consistently across family subsystems. Future work should therefore explore the relational outcomes associated with the repeated use of nonconfrontation specifically, to determine if cooperative avoidance is detrimental to family relationships as previous efforts often describe avoidance as a maladaptive response to conflict (Wright & Roloff, 2009).

Considering nonconfrontation may be enacted in an effort to maintain a lack of or passive engagement in conflict interactions (Overall et al., 2010; Sillars, 1986), this approach could be detrimental to the coparenting relationship when used in both the marital and parent-adolescent conflict interactions. The coparenting relationship is conceptually distinct from the spousal, romantic relationship and is defined according to the degree of shared responsibility and support between parents for childrearing (Margolin et al., 2001). When the current findings for nonconfrontation are placed in the context of the coparenting relationship, the transference of nonconfrontation across family subsystems has the potential to be consequential to both the

marital and coparenting relationships. For instance, a parent's engagement in nonconfrontation by changing the subject, making abstract statements, and joking around during conflicts in several family subsystems suggests the individual may not be fully contributing to the resolution of conflict within the family. Though speculative, the use of nonconfrontation by one parent could become frustrating for the other, as the responsibility for directly addressing conflict in both the marital and parent-child relationships may often fall to the second parent. Crockenberg and Langrock (2001) suggested a similar relationship when noting a dysfunctional pattern of mother aggressive conflict engagement and father disengagement in parent-child conflicts. The authors indicated that a father's consistent disengagement from conflict places more of the parenting demands on the mother and may increase the mother's use of destructive marital and parental conflict behaviors (Crockenberg & Langrock, 2001). However, the disengagement analyzed by Crockenberg and Langrock (2001) may be more consistent with the conceptualization of the indirect fighting approach. Therefore, future work should investigate if an individual's use of nonconfrontation is indicative of the distribution of coparenting responsibilities, including working through conflict with an adolescent child, as well as exploring the effects of the use of indirect, constructive behaviors. Conversational analysis of the behaviors of the second parent across conflict interactions could also provide insight into the influence of one parent's use of nonconfrontation on communicative dynamics of the coparenting relationship.

In addition, future efforts could analyze factors, both individual and contextual, that may explain the degree of spillover from the marital to the parent-adolescent conflict. Some factors of interest would include personality type (e.g., introversion/extroversion) and the seriousness of the conflict topic. For example, the spillover of nonconfrontation could be the result of an

individual's perception that the topic of discussion is trivial and therefore does not warrant conflict engagement. If the conflict is indeed trivial, the use of nonconfrontation may be appropriate and beneficial to the health of the relationship. In all, the current work provides insight into the ways in which individuals strategically manage close relationship conflict interactions by demonstrating that parents' engagement in cooperative avoidance in the marital interaction can be transferred to the parent-child subsystem.

Verbal Conflict Strategies and Perceived Conflict Resolution

Negotiation

Though the use of negotiation was transferred from the marital to the parent-adolescent conflict, the episodic outcomes of the negotiation approach were inconsistent across family subsystems. The use of negotiation in the marital conflict was positively associated with perceived conflict resolution, while the association was non-significant for the parent-adolescent conflict. As predicted, in the marital relationship the direct and cooperative approach to conflict was associated with increases in the perception that the discussion was effective for moving the issue toward resolution. This result is consistent with prior work of marital conflict, which outlines positive episodic outcomes of constructive conflict engagement (Heavey et al., 1993; Lindahl & Malik, 1999). As such, the current project bolsters support for the benefits of addressing conflict in a positive manner within marriage and suggests counselors continue to advocate the use of the negotiation approach within marital conflict interactions. For instance, though individuals may believe providing information is a neutral approach to conflict, creating an awareness of the difference between positive and negative information provision could help couples to use negotiation on a more regular basis. To gain the skills needed to successfully incorporate the negotiation appropriate when presented with a problematic discussion,

individuals could follow Markman, Stanley, and Blumberg's (2010) recommendation to use the speaker-listener technique by paraphrasing information provided by one's partner and soliciting information from the partner during conflict.

Surprisingly, a parent's use of negotiation strategies toward one's adolescent child did not emerge as a significant predictor of perceived conflict resolution for the triadic, family conflict. Though prior research has investigated communicative behavior in parent-adolescent conflicts, often this work has not addressed the potential for conflict resolution as an outcome of positive engagement. In the current project, the dissimilar outcomes associated with the use of negotiation strategies in each family subsystem is particularly curious given the transference of negotiation behavior from the marital to the parent-adolescent conflict. The inclusion of the adolescent child in the family interaction may alter conflict dynamics so dramatically as to render the use of the negotiation approach ineffective for resolving the conflict. The more complex nature of the parent-adolescent conflict as a part of a triadic interaction may also have limited the effectiveness of an individual parent's verbal conflict behavior.

Additionally, these results point to the potential for variation in the content of the negotiation approach across family subsystems. For instance, the negotiation approach is comprised of both analytic and conciliatory remarks; however, the small sample size of the current study required collapsing these strategies into the superordinate negotiation approach for data analysis purposes. Future work with a larger sample of families could examine potential differences in the specific negotiation strategies used within the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts to determine if parents are more willing to use conciliatory remarks (i.e., support, concessions, accept responsibility) in the marital interaction than the parent-adolescent conflict, which could account for differences in the association between the use of the negotiation

approach and perceived resolution across family subsystems. Conversational analysis of the pattern of communication between the individuals within the marital and parent-adolescent dyads may also provide insight into the contextual dynamics surrounding a parent's use of the negotiation approach. For example, couples may be more likely to engage in reciprocal negotiation because of the potentially equal distribution of power between marital partners. Conversely, within the parent-adolescent conflict the parent may be engaging in negotiation behaviors that are met by an adolescent's use of indirect approaches to conflict due to the asymmetrical power distribution inherent in parent-child relationships; thus, limiting resolution of the parent-adolescent conflict.

Finally, the non-significant relationship between the negotiation approach and perceived conflict resolution may also be explained in part by the method of coding verbal conflict behavior in the triadic family conflict. Negotiation was assessed as a linear process from one parent to a child. Though analyzing communication directed from one parent to the adolescent child was advantageous for the investigation of the Spillover Hypothesis, this method may have limited understanding of the broader dynamics taking place in the triadic, family conflict interaction. Specifically, though a parent may be enacting the direct, cooperative approach of negotiation, his/her adolescent child and/or romantic partner may not be similarly addressing the conflict in such a way as to promote conflict resolution. As such, perceptions of resolution likely depend on the behaviors of all parties involved rather than simply one's own behavior. To fully ascertain the influence of a single individual's behavior, future endeavors should examine the conflict behaviors and perceptions of resolution for all parties within the interaction. Even so, the current results provide an initial step toward uncovering the effects of strategically managing parent-adolescent conflict by employing the negotiation approach.

Direct Fighting

Consistent with the understanding that the strategies comprising the direct fighting approach are detrimental to close relationships (Canary, 2003; Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006; Overall et al., 2009), the use of the direct fighting approach in the marital conflict was negatively associated with perceived conflict resolution. Thus, the results for the marital conflict align closely with prior work indicating marital relationships can experience destructive, episodic outcomes to conflict when directly aggressive verbal behaviors characterize these interactions (Bevan et al., 2008; Heavey et al., 1993; Overall et al., 2009). Therefore, marital and close romantic partners should work to minimize the use of direct, competitive communication during conflict as these behaviors may undermine relational concerns and inhibit conflict resolution.

Similar to the results for negotiation and in contrast to the prediction, the use of direct fighting strategies in the parent-adolescent conflict did not emerge as a significant predictor of perceived resolution. The different associations within each interaction may reflect structural differences in the marital and parent-adolescent relationships according to the distribution of power. For example, marital relationships are typically characterized by a relatively symmetrical balance of power in comparison to the asymmetrical distribution of power within parent-child relationships. As such the use of overtly hostile behaviors within a marital relationship may be particularly detrimental to the relationship and the conflict episode because of the potential threat to the balance of power in the marriage. Alternatively, use of direct fighting by a parent in conflict with one's adolescent child may be more consistent with the status quo as the individual enacting directly aggressive behavior (i.e., the parent) is operating from a position of power. Therefore, the use of direct fighting in the parent-adolescent conflict may maintain each individual's position on the issue, rather than deterring or facilitating perceptions of resolution.

Together with the results of the spillover of the direct fighting approach from the marital to the parent-adolescent conflict, the findings for the relationship (or lack thereof) between direct fighting and perceptions of resolution point to the potential for parents to approach conflict destructively across family subsystems. In addition, the results of this dissertation suggest heightening parental awareness that the use of overtly, negative conflict strategies may be hurting their marital relationship more so than their relationship with their children. Though time intensive, future work should consider examining the conflict behaviors of both parents and children to determine how a parent's behavior may alter an adolescent's perception of conflict resolution, and in turn, how an adolescent's behavior may influence a parent's perception of resolution. For example, though a parent's use of direct fighting toward a child is consistent with the structure of the parent-child relationship, an adolescent's use of these same strategies could potentially threaten the nature of the relationship and the episodic outcomes of the conflict. Finally, future efforts could also explore the motivations for the use of direct fighting in both marital and parent-adolescent relationships as prior work proposes direct fighting strategies may be fueled by relational goals such as commitment to the relationship and desires for relational improvement (Fincham & Beach, 1999; Solomon et al., 2004).

Nonconfrontation

The use of nonconfrontation did not emerge as a significant predictor of perceived resolution of either the marital or parent-adolescent conflict. Though counter to prediction, these results are consistent with the viewpoint that passive approaches to conflict, even when positively valenced, may not contribute to the resolution of conflict (Overall et al., 2009). Nonconfrontation is characterized by talking around the problematic issue rather than directly confronting the topic, which suggests the content of nonconfrontation messages may not

facilitate conflict resolution. Yet, nonconfrontation strategies are presented in a positive manner and therefore may not deter conflict resolution either. Therefore, the use of nonconfrontation may simply maintain the status quo rather than helping or hurting progress toward a solution.

Though speculative, the non-significant relationship between nonconfrontation and perceived resolution in the current study suggests that use of nonconfrontation may be appropriate when an individual is not invested in the outcome of the conflict or is content with the current position of the issue. The lack of findings for nonconfrontation may also contribute to understanding the relational implications of using indirect conflict approaches. Prior research suggests avoidance has a negative effect on marital relationships (Canary, 2003; Caughlin & Vangelisti, 2006). However, the results of this dissertation imply avoidance may not always be hurtful to conflict interactions. Additional investigation is needed to determine the effects of the use of nonconfrontation on relationship outcomes for marriages and parent-child relations.

The Spillover of Emotion Expression across Family Subsystems

Emotion is theoretically considered as a foundational component of close relationship conflict (Bodtker & Jameson, 2001; Jones, 2001); yet, functionally communication research often overlooks emotion expression within conflict interactions between close others. By examining the potential transference of nonverbal emotion expression across conflicts in the marital and parent-adolescent relationships, the current project contributes to scholarship of close relationship conflict in a number of ways. First, previous efforts to study emotion expression during conflict typically take a dimensional approach by examining general affectivity (i.e., positivity, negativity) rather than expression of discrete emotion (e.g., Kitzmann, 2000). Here, I observed discrete positive (i.e., affection) and negative emotions (i.e., anger, contempt, disgust, sadness), which delineated the presence and influence of expressing individual emotions during

conflict. Second, prior investigations of communication in marital and parent-child conflicts tend to confound nonverbal expression of emotion and verbal conflict behaviors (Sillars et al., 2004). To address this limitation, the current project distinguished nonverbal expression of emotion as separate from verbal conflict tactics, outlining the distinctive contribution of communicating emotion nonverbally during conflict. Finally, this dissertation extended the application of the conceptual framework of the Spillover Hypothesis to the nonverbal communication of discrete emotion across family subsystems, which has not been conducted in the past. The current project therefore refines understanding of emotion expression during conflict and highlights the ability for anger expression specifically to be transferred from a marital to a parent-adolescent conflict interaction.

Affection

This dissertation considered the potential for spillover of positive emotion expression, which has been understudied in prior research. Yet, the association between a parent's expression of affection within the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts was non-significant in the current study. Expression of positivity within family conflict has been examined in past research as an outcome of marital satisfaction (Barry & Kochanska, 2010; Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988; Stroud et al., 2011) rather than an outcome of emotion expression in a preceding marital interaction. Further, observational analysis of nonverbal expression of emotion has measured positivity for the purpose of creating a composite measure of negativity by reverse coding the score for positive emotion expression (e.g., Kitzmann, 2000). In doing so, researchers limit analyses to the effects of expressed negativity on the emotional content of parent-child conflicts. Therefore, though the results for the spillover of affection expression were non-significant, the efforts of this dissertation contribute to the exploration of positive emotion expression within

conflict and point to the need for continued investigation of the potential for positive emotion expression to be transferred across marital and parent-child conflicts.

A lack of significant results for the expression of positive emotion may also be due in part to the chosen emotion of focus. For instance, affection was selected due to its expression being fundamental to the maintenance of close relational bonds (Floyd, 2002; Floyd & Pauley, 2011; Mongrain & Vettese, 2003) as well as its inclusion in the Specific Affect Coding System (Coan & Gottman, 2007). However, if marital satisfaction predicts expression of positive emotion in parent-child relationships, perhaps other emotions that may be more reflective of satisfaction (i.e., joy; happiness) should have been examined. Even so, the nature of conflictual interactions may simply impede affection expression. Prior close relationship conflict research comparing individuals' self-reports of affection experience to observers' ratings of affection expression has noted potential for individuals to engage in expressive suppression of affection (Huggins & Samp, 2013b). In the college student sample, individuals reported experiencing affection at moderate rates during romantic conflict but expressed minimal levels of affection (Huggins & Samp, 2013b). Though relationships within the family may qualitatively differ from college student romantic relationships, parents in the current study may also be utilizing strategic expression of affection to inhibit expression of emotions experienced (Hayes & Metts, 2008). Further research is needed to determine the extent to which parents' experience and expression of emotion may diverge. Nonetheless, the potential for expressive suppression of affection may explain the non-significant results of the current study.

In conclusion, the lack of findings for the spillover of affection expression may indicate *expression* of affection is not characteristic of conflictual interactions within families even though affection can be *experienced* in both conflictual and non-conflictual interactions (Graber

et al., 2011). Emotion regulation research also indicates suppressing expression of positive emotion decreases the experience of the emotion (Gross, 2002). Therefore, if parents are suppressing expression of affection, they may be limiting the beneficial outcomes that may be garnered by conveying affection during conflict (Floyd, 2002; Floyd & Pauley, 2011; Papp et al., 2010). As such, initiatives to improve family conflict interactions may focus on encouraging parents to express affection when it is experienced during conflict.

Anger

As anticipated, a parent's anger expression in the marital conflict was positively associated with anger expression toward one's child in the parent-adolescent conflict. Though these results may appear intuitive, the findings of this dissertation break new ground in the understanding of emotion expression across problematic family interactions. Prior research of parental emotion expression and conflict has centered around the influence of marital quality on the emotions demonstrated toward a child during parent-child interactions (Belsky et al., 1991; Feinberg et al., 2007). Furthermore, previous research specific to emotion expression across the marital and parent-child subsystems takes a dimensional approach to the study of negative emotion (Kitzmann, 2000). Thus, the demonstrated transference of anger expression by a parent from the marital to parent-adolescent conflict refines knowledge of the communicative expression of negative emotion across family conflicts.

Considering the spillover of negative emotion has now been demonstrated for parents raising elementary-aged children (Kitzmann, 2000) as well as adolescents, the current findings suggest this phenomenon can occur during a wide range of the childrearing years. As such, the spillover of anger may occur over extended periods of an individual's childhood and, in turn, could potentially yield enduring negative effects on both parents and children. Examining the

association between the degree to which anger is transferred from marital to parent-child conflicts over time, in association with individual and relational functioning would provide a more broad understanding of the implications of the current findings. Study of the potential for both parents' expression of anger to be transferred from the marital to a triadic family conflict may also be a fruitful avenue of inquiry. For instance, differences in family functioning may arise according to whether one or both parents' anger expression in a martial conflict spills over to parent-adolescent conflicts. Finally, these results are informative for future study of child development as consistent hostility via expression of anger across family subsystems may threaten children's emotional security (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Davies et al., 2006). Overall, the positive association between expression of anger in the marital and parent-adolescent conflicts refines understanding of the transference of negative emotion across family subsystems.

Emotion Expression and Perceived Conflict Resolution

Affection

Affection expression did not emerge as a significant predictor of resolution for either conflict interaction, which may be due to the methodological choice to distinguish nonverbal emotion expression from verbal conflict tactics in the current project. As this dissertation is focused on communication within family conflict, the verbal and emotional content of messages were differentiated to address the criticism that past work has often confounded nonverbal expression of emotion with the verbal strategies employed during conflict (Sillars et al., 2004). When prior research has analyzed verbal and nonverbal content of messages separately, positive emotion expression has been found to be positively associated with the use of constructive conflict management behaviors (Gonzaga et al., 2001). As seen here in the association between the negotiation approach and perceived resolution of the marital conflict, constructive conflict

engagement may facilitate conflict resolution. However, nonverbal affection expression alone may not be sufficient to enhance individuals' perceptions of conflict resolution. This may be particularly relevant in the current study given the low levels of affection expression across interactions.

Though affection expression did not predict the episodic outcome of conflict resolution, perhaps expressing affection within conflict may be more consequential to long-term relational functioning. Floyd and colleagues (2002; Floyd et al., 2005; Floyd & Pauley, 2011) have established that affection expression and experience are associated with a variety of benefits to marital and parent-child relationships; however, these benefits have not been assessed within the conflict context. Therefore, future research should consider the influence of affection expression on long-term family outcomes. Lastly, further investigation of the motivations for expressing affection may allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how affection functions in relation to conflict resolution.

Anger

Counter to prediction, expression of anger toward one's romantic partner in the marital conflict predicted a significant increase in perceived conflict resolution. Unlike anger *experience* (Sanford, 2005), the outcomes of anger *expression* during conflict have received limited attention in prior research of marital conflict (see Gottman, 1994; Guerrero & LaValley, 2006). Thus, though surprising, the current results provide valuable insight into the progression of marital conflict interactions. The emotion regulation perspective suggests that when anger is experienced, the intensity of experience will increase if anger is not externalized through expression (Gross, 2002). Thus, anger expression during conflict may serve as a cathartic

experience for the parent. The release of tension may in turn enhance the perception that the conflict discussion was helpful in moving the issue toward resolution.

Additional speculation concerning the positive association between anger expression and perceptions of resolution within the marital conflict, relates to the underlying meanings of family conflict interactions. According to Emery (2014), family conflicts can be categorized as either power or love struggles based on the deeper meaning of the conflict. Power struggles are centered on displays of dominance and are defined by fighting for control of the conflict outcome. Love struggles are focused more on eliciting emotion expression from a partner and less on the outcome of conflict (Emery, 2014). Contextualizing the current marital interactions as love struggles may explain, in part, the positive association between anger expression and perceived resolution. If a parent expresses anger in a marital conflict with the desire to evoke an emotional response from one's partner and is successful, the individual may then perceive the conflict has resolved as a product of anger expression. To support this reasoning, additional analysis of the motivations for conflict engagement are needed in connection with nonverbal expression of anger. Future research should also consider conversational analysis of marital conflict interactions to determine how the interplay between an individual's nonverbal display of anger and a partner's response may inform perceptions of the outcome of the conflict episode.

Regarding the parent-adolescent conflict, parental anger expression did not emerge as a significant predictor of perceived conflict resolution. Perhaps anger expression by one parent may not be sufficient to contribute to variation in resolution of the multi-faceted triadic conflict interaction. The inherent interdependence of individuals within the family suggests all three members comprising the triad of the parents-adolescent conflict contribute to the episodic outcome of the interaction (Minuchin, 1985). However, a parent's anger expression examined

here was specific to expressions directed at the adolescent child and therefore may not be representative of how a parent's overall anger expression may influence the conflict outcome. In addition, given the complexity of the triadic interaction, a parent's perception of the resolution of conflict may also be heavily dependent on the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of others. Analysis of the communicative behaviors of both parents and the adolescent child in future research could provide a more comprehensive depiction of the factors that may influence a parent's perception of resolution within the triadic family conflict interaction.

Limitations

This dissertation contributes to understanding of parents' communicative management of conflict across family subsystems and the episodic outcomes that may result; however, there are limitations to the study. The primary shortcoming of the current project surrounds participants' insufficient use of the indirect fighting approach as well as the restricted expression of the negative emotions of contempt, disgust, and sadness; which prevented the inclusion of these variables in the tests of hypotheses. Additional methodological limitations to the current study are also addressed. Each shortcoming is discussed below along with suggestions of next steps in the investigation of marital and parent-child conflict communication dynamics.

Infrequent Use of the Indirect Fighting Approach

The current project addressed the urgings of communication scholars to distinguish indirect verbal conflict strategies according to the cooperation-competition continuum (Koerner, 2013; Sillars & Canary, 2013; Sillars et al., 2004). Despite the efforts to expand understanding of the use of conflict strategies by employing the four-part taxonomy, the indirect fighting approach was rarely employed in the current study. Though indirect fighting did not emerge as a frequent approach to conflict management, which inhibited the inclusion of these conflict

behaviors in the tests of hypotheses; the low frequency of implementation may simply be representative of normally functioning families' conflict communication behaviors. This dissertation therefore provides insight into how individuals may be engaging or disengaging from conflict interactions. Parents from families within the normal range of functioning may seek to avoid conflict through the use of the positively-valenced approach of nonconfrontation rather than indirect fighting. The nonconfrontation approach may address concerns for the relationship that may be threatened by the use of the indirect fighting approach to manage family conflict.

The nature of the conflict paradigm may also have limited the use of indirect fighting as conflict interactions observed here took place in a laboratory setting where individuals were instructed to discuss a difficult topic for an extended period of time. Based on the context of the interactions, individuals seeking to avoid the conflict may be more likely to do so through nonconfrontation. The indirect approach of nonconfrontation allows for continued discussion that can be recorded for the purpose of the study, even if the talk is irrelevant to the issue at hand. Conversely, the indirect fighting approach may be enacted through complete withdrawal from the interaction and a lack of discussion, which may be perceived as noncompliant with the instruction to discuss the issue. Therefore, individuals may have strategically elected to refrain from using the indirect fighting approach due to the constraints of the interaction. Adjustment to the paradigm may be needed for analysis of the use of the indirect approach to conflict. For example, directions provided to participants could be altered to allow for physical withdrawal from the interaction. Additionally, though time and cost prohibitive, the ability to record conflict interactions as they naturally occur, such as within the home, may provide a more accurate representation of individuals' use of the indirect fighting approach. Overall, though indirect

fighting behaviors were implemented infrequently, these results are encouraging as they suggest parents may elect to utilize constructive approaches to conflict management (i.e., nonconfrontation) rather than destructive conflict behaviors (i.e., indirect fighting).

Low Frequency of Expression of Negative Emotions

Though the negative emotions of contempt, disgust, and sadness have been examined in prior research, these emotions were not coded as occurring with regularity in the conflict interactions observed here. The minimal amount of expression could have resulted from shortcomings in the coding process. For example, though the nonverbal indicators of contempt and disgust expression are clear (e.g., eye rolls, pulling one's mouth to one side); these facial actions are often fleeting. Because of their brief duration, recognition of these emotions may be particularly difficult for undergraduate coders, which may have limited identification of the frequency of expression of contempt and disgust. Additionally, sadness is a passive emotion that may be difficult for individuals to identify when compared to the active emotion of anger, as individuals may process sadness experience internally or express sadness indirectly (Papp et al., 2010). Future efforts will be made to lengthen training in the identification of these emotions so as to ensure all instances of expression are coded, considering these emotions may be rarely expressed during conflict interactions.

It should also be noted that the unit of analysis for coding emotion expression was each utterance within a specific interaction. The selected unit of analysis for emotion expression was appropriate for the current investigation as it provided consistency of analysis across observational measures. However, utilizing each utterance as the unit of analysis may have provided a limited picture of the full expression of each emotion, as emotions are often expressed separately from verbal messages. Within conflict interactions, an individual is most likely

nonverbally expressing emotion when he/she is acting as the listener rather than the speaker in the interaction, which was not accounted for in the current analysis. Additionally, altering the unit of analysis for emotion expression may be particularly important for identification of the nonverbal expression of contempt and disgust which include distinct behaviors that may be difficult for participants to enact while speaking (e.g., rolling one's eyes, pulling one's mouth to one side). Therefore, effort should be made in the future to examine nonverbal emotion expression outside of the utterance time points to uncover individuals' full range of expression of emotion during the interaction.

Finally, the sample of adequately functioning families may simply not express these emotions with regularity, particularly contempt and disgust as these behaviors are indicative of maladjustment and are predictive of future relationship decline (Gottman, 1994). The potential methodological limitations of the current coding scheme notwithstanding, if participants are indeed rarely expressing contempt, disgust, and sadness, these results present an optimistic picture of marital and family functioning. Future research should consider exploration of the experience of these emotions during family conflict as a means of understanding if the lack of expression indeed corresponds to an absence of experience of these emotions during conflict for normally functioning families.

Data Aggregation

Steps were taken to precisely examine the use of verbal conflict strategies across conflict interactions with the intention of examining conflict management behaviors at the strategy-level (i.e., analytic remarks, conciliatory remarks). Yet, it appeared that individuals used some strategies more frequently than others, which limited the analysis of conflict behaviors at the strategy level. Aggregating the data at the approach level (i.e., negotiation) allowed for the

examination of three out of four conflict approaches, which is consistent with the traditional categorization of conflict behavior (Sillars, 1986). Though this data analysis strategy was appropriate for the current project, aggregating the data did reduce the precision of understanding of the spillover of verbal conflict strategies. The challenge to analyze verbal conflict behavior at the strategy level encountered here sheds light on the reasoning as to why these behaviors have not been analyzed at the strategy level in past research. Future efforts may seek to diversify topics of discussion by instructing participants to generate an issue to discuss without the aid of a list of common topics. Extending the range of topics discussed may allow for the conflict behaviors enacted to be more evenly distributed across the nine strategies of interest here.

Sample Size

The current sample was comprised of 100 individuals randomly selected from a larger data collection project of two-parent families raising an adolescent child. The parent of interest within each family was randomly selected for analysis of a relatively equal distribution of mothers and fathers. Given the time-intensive nature of participation, the difficulty in obtaining a community-based sample, and the extensive coding process; inclusion of 100 individuals is notable, especially within communication research which is primarily comprised of retrospective, self-reports of behavior during family conflict (e.g., Beck & Ledbetter, 2013; for exception see Caughlin & Malis, 2004; Caughlin & Ramey, 2005). Even still, the sample size may have limited the potential for estimation of higher order moderation effects, while a larger sample size would afford the benefit of greater statistical power.

Future Directions

Insights and proposals of the next steps for research of behavioral and emotional responses to conflict have been provided throughout the chapter. Yet, additional suggestions

both theoretical and methodological are warranted. The primary contribution of this dissertation surrounds the potential for future theoretical development stemming from the application of the conceptual framework of the Spillover Hypothesis as well as the results of this project. The current study deviated from and expanded the application of the Spillover Hypothesis by examining the transference of specific verbal communication behaviors and nonverbal expression of emotions from a marital to a parent-adolescent conflict. The demonstrated transference of verbal conflict behaviors and emotion expression supports the utility of applying the Spillover Hypothesis to communication within close relationship conflict. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the current project presents the potential for development of a communication-specific theory of conflict behavior.

For the most part, conflict communication behavior has been studied in prior work through the analysis of individuals' conflict styles, or general orientations to conflict (e.g., Beck & Ledbetter, 2013). Though the findings concerning conflict styles were informative for the current project, an individual's conflict style is distinct from his/her consistent use of micro-level verbal conflict tactics that can be observed across conflict interactions. Instead, conflict styles are a global description of the behaviors an individual may potentially enact during conflict as determined by the individual's self-reports (Sillars & Canary, 2013). Therefore, conflict style is not representative of the behaviors an individual strategically employs to manage a conflict discussion with a close other as the interaction unfolds. As such, the use of and findings from application of the Spillover Hypothesis in the current study suggest a program of future research aimed at the development of theory specific to conflict communication behaviors enacted during interactions, moving away from the traditional conceptualization and operationalization of conflict styles and patterns of behavior.

As this dissertation examined transference of communicative responses from a marital to a parent-adolescent conflict coupled with the understanding that relationships among family subsystems are reciprocal, development of theory would be aided by the analysis of spillover from the parent-child subsystem to the marital subsystem of the family. For example, Emery (2014) urges future family systems research to analyze the reciprocal relationship between subsystems of the family, which is currently under-explored. Examining spillover from a parent-adolescent conflict to a conflict interaction between marital partners would provide the opportunity for additional support of the current findings while increasing the depth of understanding of the degree to which verbal conflict behaviors and nonverbal expressions of emotions may be employed consistently across conflict contexts.

Finally, future research could also explore individual difference variables such as birth order of the child to determine if the position of the family in the phase of raising adolescents may distinguish families' balance of constructive and destructive approaches to conflict. For instance, various theoretical perspectives of maturation indicate that as children progress toward later adolescence and young adulthood, conflict with parents becomes less frequent and intense. This decline may also be more pronounced for later-born children as parents have experience managing the adolescent years and may have successfully transitioned into the role of managing the dialectical tensions of autonomy and connection that become problematic during adolescence. Future efforts examining these additional components of family conflict dynamics could build upon the current study to refine the results of this investigation.

Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to examine the potential for the transference of verbal conflict strategies and nonverbal emotion expression during conflict across family subsystems.

By applying the Spillover Hypothesis as a conceptual framework for the current project, this dissertation took a unique focus on the strategic communicative behavior of parents engaged in conflict and determined that parents' use of specific verbal conflict strategies and nonverbal expressions of emotion can be transferred from a marital to a parent-adolescent conflict. Verbal conflict behaviors (i.e., negotiation, direct fighting) and expressions of emotion (i.e., anger) were also linked to perceptions of resolution for the marital conflict. This dissertation advances understanding of the communicative management of conflict through observational analysis of two conflict interactions using a community sample of parents raising an adolescent child. The results of this dissertation highlight the potential for normally functioning families to use a wide range of communication behaviors to strategically manage conflict interactions across family subsystems, which have implications for the outcomes of problematic discussions.

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FOOTNOTES

[1]Parent gender, child gender, and marital relationship satisfaction were included as potential moderators of spillover in the tests of hypotheses for the transference of verbal conflict strategies across family subsystems and for tests of hypotheses of the spillover of emotion expression. Tests of moderation were achieved by first creating an interaction term between the predictor of interest and the potential moderating variable. Then hierarchical moderated regression models were tested entering the predictor and moderator variables in Step 1 of the regression model, followed by the interaction term in Step 2. However parent gender, child gender, and relationship satisfaction did not emerge as significant moderators of the spillover of verbal conflict strategies or nonverbal emotion expression in the current project.

[2]Though the resolution score for the marital conflict interaction was considered as a potential moderator of spillover of emotion expression from the marital to the parent-adolescent conflict, the main effect for the perception of resolution did not emerge as a significant predictor of the expression of affection or anger in the parent-adolescent conflict interaction when included in the tests of hypotheses. Therefore, the resolution score was not included in the presentation of results of *H9* and *H10*.

APPENDIX A: VERBAL TACTICS CODING SCHEME

(Adapted from Sillars, 1986)

I. Negotiation

<u>Analytic Remarks</u>

1. Descriptive statements.

Nonevaluative statements about observable events related to conflict.

Example:

*A. "I criticized you yesterday for getting angry with the kids."

2. Disclosive statements.

Nonevaluative statements about events related to conflict which the partner cannot observe, such as thoughts, feelings, intentions, motivations, and past history.

Example 1:

*A. "I swear I never had such a bad week as that week."

Example 2:

*A. "I'm not used to your neatness because my parents didn't worry so much about how the house looked."

3. Qualifying statements.

Statements that explicitly qualify the nature and extent of conflict.

Example 1:

*A. "Well, there was just that one instance . . . ."

Example 2:

*A. "Communication is mainly a problem when we're tired."

4. Soliciting disclosure.

Nonhostile questions about events related to conflict that cannot be observed (thoughts, feelings, intentions, motives, or past history).

Example 1:

A. "Well, I feel there might be a problem there."

*B. "Do you feel that it is a problem with you, me or both of us?"

Example 2:

*A. "What were you thinking about when you said . . ."

Do not use this code for leading questions, declarative questions (e.g., "Don't you think…."), instances where the other person is not given time to answer the question or the question is answered by the person who asked it, or for "backchannel-type" questions (e.g., "Huh?" "What?"). Further, do not use this code when the speakers have not acknowledged the presence of a conflict.

5. Soliciting criticism.

Nonhostile questions soliciting criticism of oneself.

Example:

*A. "Does it bother you when I stay up late?”

Conciliatory Remarks

1. Supportive remarks.

Statements that refer to understanding, support, acceptance, positive regard for the partner, shared interests and goals, compatibilities with the partner, or strengths of the relationship.

Example 1:

*A. "I can see why you would be upset."

Example 2:

*A. "It wasn't anything you could help."

Do not use this code for statements that also explicitly or implicitly deny the presence of conflict. For example:

A. "I don't think this is a problem with us at all. We don't have any trouble getting along."

2. Concessions.

Statements that express a willingness to change, show flexibility, make concessions, or consider mutually acceptable solutions to conflicts.

Example:

*A. "I think I could work on that more."

3. Acceptance of responsibility.

Statements that attribute responsibility for conflict to self or to both parties.

Example 1:

*A. "That's my fault."

Example 2:

*A. "I think we've both contributed to the problem."

Do not use this code for statements that have a "Yeah, but . . ." tone (e.g., “Well, maybe I’m not so neat but neither are you.").

II. Direct Fighting

Confrontative Remarks

1. Hostile imperatives.

Requests, demands, arguments, threats, or other prescriptive statements that implicitly blame the partner and seek change in the partner's behavior.

Example 1:

*A. "If you would just pay the phone bill, everything would be okay."

Example 2:

*A. "You shouldn't let little things bother you so much."

2. Hostile jokes.

Joking, teasing, or sarcasm at the expense of the partner.

Example:

*A. "Should we tell everyone about what rags you use to clean?" (laughter)

B. "No."

*A. "Or when a roll of toilet paper falls in the toilet? That you dry it out?" (also hostile question)

3. Hostile questions.

Directive or leading questions that fault the partner.

Example 1:

*A. "Who does most of the cleaning around here?"

B. "You do."

A. "That' s right."

4. Denial of responsibility.

Statements that minimize or deny personal responsibility for conflict.

Example 1:

*A. "That's not my fault."

Example 2:

*A. “I always do my share."

5. Hostile remarks.

Statements that affirm the presence of the conflict in a way that demonstrates discontent with the partner.

Example 1:

*A. “That’s no way to build a relationship.”

Personal Attacks

1. Personal criticism.

Remarks that directly criticize the personal characteristics or behaviors of the partner.

Example 1:

*A. "Sometimes you leave and you don't say goodbye or nothing. You just walk right out."

Example 2:

*A. "You can get kind of bitchy when you've had a bad day."

2. Rejection.

Statements in response to the partner's previous statements that imply personal antagonism toward the partner as well as disagreement.

Example 1:

*A. "Bullshit."

Example 2:

*A. "Oh come on!"

3. Presumptive remarks.

Statements that attribute thoughts, feelings, motivations, or behaviors to the partner that the partner does not acknowledge. This code is the opposite of "soliciting disclosure."

Example 1:

*A. "I think you' re purposefully making yourself miserable."

Example 2:

*A. "You *always* tell me that. You just won't admit it."

Example 3:

*A. "That's not why we get mad. We get mad because we like to buy the best.”

III. Nonconfrontation

Topic Management

1. Topic Shifts

Statements that terminate discussion of a conflict issue before each person has fully expressed an opinion or before the discussion has reached a sense of completion. Watch for:

a. Abrupt discontinuities of discussion

Example:

A. "At first I think we were just afraid of what to say and do because we were afraid of how the other person would react."

*B. "Yeah, well, like Tammy and Steve .... " (Person goes on to discuss two friends.)

b. Interruptions

Example:

A. "Yeah, but I think .... "

B. "We're working it out." (B terminates discussion of the issue.)

c. Termination of the topic without responding to the issues raised by the other speaker

Example:

A. "I don't particularly like spending most of our vacation time visiting your relatives."

*B. "Yeah, I know. Okay, next question."

d. Termination of the discussion before both parties have expressed and explained their opinions

Example:

A. "Is there a lack of communication between the two of us?"

B. "No "

C. "Okay, what's the next question?"

Do not use this code if both parties have expressed and explained their opinions, the speakers have both responded to the main issues raised by the other person, and there is no abrupt shift in the discussion (i.e., not all changes in topic are coded as avoidance).

2. Topic avoidance.

Statements that explicitly terminate discussion of a conflict issue before it has been fully discussed.

Example:

*A. "I don't want to talk about that."

Noncommittal Remarks

1. Noncommittal statements.

Statements that neither affirm nor deny the presence of conflict and which are not evasive replies or topic shifts.

Example 1:

*A. "We don't watch much television. You like to watch football but that's about it." (In response to a question about disagreements concerning television and leisure.)

Example 2:

*A. "The kids are growing up so fast I can't believe it."

Do not use this code if a statement provides support, elaboration or clarification of an earlier evasive, confrontative, or analytic remark.

2. Noncommittal questions.

Includes:

a. Unfocused questions;

Example:

*A. "What do you think?"

b. Rephrasing the question given by the researcher;

Example:

*A. "Is 'lack of affection' a problem for us?"

c. Questions that seek conflict-irrelevant information;

Example:

*A. "How many vacation days do you have left from work this year?"

3. Abstract remarks.

Abstract principles, generalizations, or hypothetical statements

a. Abstract generalizations;

Example:

*A. "All people are irritable sometimes."

b. Abstract principles;

Example:

*A. "It's important for people to compromise."

c. Speaking hypothetically;

Example:

*A. "If you were smoking and it was making it hard for me to breathe, then I would probably say something."

4. Procedural remarks.

Procedural statements that supplant discussion of conflict.

Example 1:

A. "I think this one may be a problem."

*B. "Are we talking loud enough?"

Example 2:

A. (reads card) "Pressure from Work that has affected your relationship."

*B. "Now, by that do they mean your long-term relationship or what? That could mean ...." (The issue itself is not discussed.)

Irreverent Remarks

1. Friendly joking or downing around.

This code is used whenever there is friendly joking or laughter that is not at the expense of the other person.

IV. Indirect Fighting

Denial

1. Direct Denial

Statements that deny that a conflict is present.

Example 1:

A. "Do you think that's a problem?"

*B. "No."

Example 2:

*A. "That's not a problem"

Example 3:

A. "Do you think work pressures have affected our relationship?"

*B."I don't think they have. I try to make a point of not bringing them home."

2. Implicit Denial.

Statements that imply denial by providing a rationale for a denial statement although the denial is not explicit.

Example 1:

*A. "We've never had enough money to disagree over." (In response to a question about disagreements over money.)

Example 2:

*A. "Our beliefs are the same." (In response to a question about criticism of either spouse's beliefs.)

Equivocation

1. Evasive Remarks.

Failure to acknowledge or deny the presence of a conflict following a statement or inquiry about the conflict by the partner.

Example:

A. "Do you think that's a problem?"

*B "I don' t know."

Example 2:

A. "That's not really a conflict with us."

*B. "I suppose."

2. Ambiguous Remarks.

Includes:

a. Ambiguous sender or content;

Example:

* A. "That could be something that a person might resent but I don't know."

b. Ambiguous answers to questions;

Example 1:

A. "What do you think?"

*B. "I think that this is something that could occur on some level."

Example 2:

*B. "Sometimes."

APPENDIX B: SPECIFIC AFFECT CODING SYSTEM

(Adapted from Coan & Gottman, 2007)

Emotion Code: Affection

Function

Affection expresses genuine caring and concern and offers comfort. Often the voice slows and becomes quieter or lower. Its function is to facilitate closeness and bonding.

Indicators

1. *Reminiscing.* — The speaker shares warm memories of something he/she and the receiver enjoyed together.
2. *Caring statements.* — Direct statements of affection or concern, such as "I love you," "I care about you," "I worry about you," and so forth.
3. *Compliments.* — Statements that communicate pride in or admiration of another (e.g., "you are so smart!" or "you did such a great job with. . .").
4. *Empathy.* — Empathizing individuals mirror the affect of the communicative partner. Such mirroring need not be verbal, but however it is expressed, it should be obvious that the intent of the mirroring is to express an understanding of the partner's feelings. Importantly, empathy does more than simply validate the partner's thoughts and feelings—by mirroring the affect of the partner at the same time, it conveys a level of care that surpasses validation per se.
5. *The common cause.* — An important indicator of Affection, similar to empathy, is the common cause, whereby individuals engage in virtually any affective behavior *together*

as a form of building trust, closeness, consensus, or bonding. This indicator can sometimes be confusing. Insults, such as remarking that "Bob is a jerk," can be coded Affection if intended to express obvious agreement. A shared anger, a shared fear, a shared and vocalized political opinion—all of these things could be coded Affection.

Facial Action Units

There are no particular action units that indicate affection, but smiles will commonly be seen.

- o *Cheek compressor and lid raiser*
- o *Lip corner puller*

Counterindicators

- *Defensive affection.* — Occasionally, a speaker will insist that he/she loves the receiver as a defensive maneuver. Indicators of defensiveness will usually give this away. Watch for defensive voice tone, a defensive context, and a lack of warm or positive feeling underlying the affectionate message.

Emotion Code: Anger

<u>*Function*</u>

In the SPAFF, anger functions to respond to perceived violations of the speaker's rights to autonomy and respect. It serves as a kind of "affective underlining" of displeasure and complaint, indicating that an interpersonal boundary has been transgressed.

<u>*Indicators*</u>

1. *Frustration.* — A relatively low intensity form of Anger, here facial expressions of anger become apparent at low levels and the voice may lower in pitch and tempo. The anger will appear constrained or out of the obvious awareness of the speaker. Otherwise, the person may not express anger verbally at all.
2. *Angry "I-statements"*— These are verbal statements that express personal feelings, as in "I am so angry!" or "I am so frustrated right now!"
3. *Angry questions.* — Questions asked with angry affect and usually with sharp exhalations, as in "Why?!"
4. *Commands.* — Commands are not attempts to dominate but rather are strong, affectively intense attempts to stop a recent or ongoing violation of the speaker's autonomy or dignity. Sharp exhalations and strong angry affect frequently accompany commands. Examples include "Stop!" or "Don't speak to me like I'm a child!"

<u>*Physical Cues*</u>

The lips will frequently thin, with the red of the upper lip disappearing or the lips pressed together; the teeth will clench; and the muscles of the jaw and neck will tighten. The voice may suddenly increase in pitch, amplitude, and tempo and may include a kind of "growl" as when yelling

Facial Action Units

- *The brow lowerer*
- *The upper lid raiser*
- *The lid tightener*

Counterindicators

- *Blends with other codes.* — Angry affect is frequently observed during moments in which indicators of other negative codes are present. In these instances, Anger is never coded.
- *Firm without negative feeling* — Do not code anger if someone is make a point (being firm) without any kind of negative feeling behind it

Emotion Code: Contempt

<u>*Function*</u>

The function of contemptuous behavior is to belittle, hurt, or humiliate. Contempt can be any statement made from a superior position to the partner, such as correcting an angry person's grammar. Such behavior deliberately and forthrightly communicates an icy lack of respect, often cruelty. On theoretical and empirical grounds, we regard this behavior as extremely detrimental to interpersonal relationships (Coan et al., 1997; Gottman, 1993a; Gottman et al., 1998; Gottman & Levenson, 1992), and so the SPAFF gives it precedence over most other behaviors.

<u>*Indicators*</u>

1. *Sarcasm.* — Sarcasm in conversation frequently precedes derisive laughter at the receiver's expense or manifests as a ridiculing comment regarding something the receiver has said. Frequent examples include the ironic use of such statements as "sure!" or "I'll bet you did!"

2. *Mockery.* — When speakers mock, they repeat something the receiver has said while exaggeratedly imitating the receiver's manner of speech or emotional state for the purpose of making the receiver look ridiculous or stupid.

3. *Insults.* — Insults are active and straightforward forms of contempt—they are shows of disrespect for the receiver through obvious verbal cruelty.

4. *Hostile humor.* — Often, the contemptuous speaker uses a form of unshared humor that, though an apparent joke, utilizes sarcasm, mocking, or insults to achieve the aim of contempt. By delivering such messages as a "joke," the speaker may be attempting to leave him- or herself an "out" (as in, "hey, I was only joking"). Hostile humor can be momentarily confusing for coders and receivers alike. The contemptuous speaker may

laugh heartily, and sometimes the receiver will briefly and reflexively laugh along. Such moments are not coded as Humor.

Physical Cues

Eye rolls are nearly always coded as contempt.

Facial Action Units

- *The dimpler – uni- or bi-lateral*

Counterindicators

- *Good-natured teasing.* Good-natured "jabs" at the receiver's foibles are not coded as contempt. A good indication that contempt is not occurring is that the context of the conversation appears to contradict contemptuous intentions or that the speaker and receiver appear to both experience laughter and joy as a result of the teasing.

Emotion Code: Disgust

Function

Disgust is a relatively involuntary verbal or nonverbal reaction to a stimulus that is perceived to be noxious. Harmful substances (e.g., feces, rotted food) reliably elicit disgust, but disgust can also occur for moral or symbolic reasons (Rozin, Lowery, & Ebert, 1994).

Indicators

1. *Involuntary revulsion.* Here the object of disgust is some obvious image of, or reference to, an aversive, noxious stimulus, as in momentary descriptions of a gruesome physical injury.
2. *Moral objection.* Here the object of disgust is an action or idea that the speaker finds repulsive for moral or other symbolic reasons, as in responses to undesirable sexual practices or even political positions.

Physical Cues

The physical cues of Disgust are robust and specific. The tongue will sometimes protrude, and the head will sometimes turn to one side as if avoiding the noxious stimulus.

Facial Action Units

- *The nose wrinkler*
- *The upper lip raiser*
- *The brow lowerer*
- *The lip corner depressor*
- *The chin raiser*

Counterindicators

- *Mockery, insults, or belittlement.* If the function of a disgust response, whether verbal or

nonverbal, appears to be to communicate obvious disrespect of the receiver, it is more properly coded as Contempt. This includes instances in which the speaker appears to be disgusted by the behavior of the receiver.

- *Disapproval without Disgust affect.* Disapproval, absent other obvious signs of disgust, can be coded Neutral (when lacking in obvious affective tone), Domineering (when spoken in a patronizing tone), or Anger (with angry affect).

Emotion Code: Sadness

Function

In the SPAFF, the Sadness code refers to behaviors that communicate loss, resignation, helplessness, pessimism, hopelessness, or a plaintive or poignant quiescence.

Indicators

1. *Sighing.* — Sighs, especially deep sighs, very frequently occur in the context of Sadness. Thus sighing is nearly always considered an indication of sad feelings.
2. *Pouting/Sulking.* — Sadness physical cues in the context of being rebuffed, ignored, or not getting one's way. Pouting may cause the sad person to appear to withdraw from the conversation.
3. *Resignation.* — Sad individuals will frequently behave as if resigned or hopeless. This behavior is communicated through a pattern of very low energy, slouching, long pauses between words, and so forth. In the resigned person, nearly all movement appears to require extra effort.
4. *Crying.* — Nearly all instances of crying indicate sadness. Sometimes individuals can be observed "choking back tears," or trying not to cry. Physical cues and tears welling up in the eyes will give them away.
5. *Hurt feelings.* — In response to moments of high negativity, such as belligerence, contempt, or anger, individuals will sometimes report or appear to have hurt feelings. Such moments are coded as Sadness.

Physical Cues

Shoulders may droop, and individuals may hang their heads or look down. The lips and the chin may tremble. The voice may quaver in terms of pitch and amplitude and may occasionally break.

Facial Action Units

- *The inner brow raiser*
- *The lip corner depressor*
- *The chin raiser*

Counterindicators

- *No back channels.* — A lack of responding that is attributable to the deliberate attempt to communicate lack of interest is not a form of pouting and is more properly coded Stonewalling.
- *Relief.* — Individuals who display a sudden decrease in energy as a result of the diffusion of tension or an escape from responsibility may be showing evidence of relief, which may be coded as Neutral.
- *Happy tears.* — Happy tears are here intended to mean one of two things. First, tears can sometimes result from intense laughter. Second, tears can sometimes result from sudden moments of shared intimacy, compliments, accomplishments, and so forth. These instances of tears are more properly coded as Humor, Enthusiasm, or Affection.