PROMOTING RESILIENCE AMONG VULNERABLE FAMILIES: AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN COPARENTING, FATHER INVOLVEMENT, AND MATERNAL FUNCTIONING

by

JACQUELYN KENANN MALLETTE

(Under the Direction of Ted Futris)

ABSTRACT

The study of resilience from a family science perspective necessitates identifying family-level components that can promote individual and family resilience, as well as specifying contextual influences (Walsh, 2003). This dissertation introduces a conceptual model to explain how individual-, family-, and community-level contextual factors may influence coparental and paternal behaviors among vulnerable families who have experienced adversity. Major stressors, such as adolescent parenthood and non-marital childbearing, can derail the functioning of a family system and affect all members and their relationships. However, positive and supportive family relational processes, such as cooperative coparenting behaviors and positive father caretaking and involvement, can reduce the risk of dysfunction and support adaptation over time. In the current document, two studies investigated relationships between contextual factors, the interactive nature of the coparenting relationship and father involvement, and maternal functioning in two samples of distinct vulnerable family environments. The first study examined coparental relationship patterns among 125 adolescent mothers, as well as maternal and paternal covariates utilizing a 3-step latent profile analysis. Results indicated three unique patterns of

coparenting based on adolescent mothers' reports, which were associated with indicators of social, financial and human capital and between-group differences in parenting outcomes. The second study examined a sample of 1693 unmarried mothers from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study using bidirectional latent growth curve analysis. Results indicated a bidirectional influence of coparenting and father involvement, in that baseline coparenting support influenced the trajectory of father involvement, while initial father involvement also influenced rates of change in coparenting support over time. Results also indicated that declines in father involvement and coparenting support influenced maternal functioning when her child was nine. Collectively, findings offer insight into how context and the coparental relationship are related to fathers' engagement in caregiving and maternal well-being. Results aid in better understanding co-caregiving dynamics and also contribute information towards efforts to grow and support family stability across differing populations.

INDEX WORDS: Coparenting, At-risk Populations, Families, Adolescent Headed, Fragile Families, Family Resilience, Human Capital, Social Capital, Financial Capital, Longitudinal, Life Course Perspective, Spillover Hypothesis, Maternal Functioning, Latent Profile Analysis, Bidirectional Latent Growth Curve Analysis

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JACQUELYN KENANN MALLETTE

BA, The University of Akron, 2003

MS, East Carolina University, 2008

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JACQUELYN KENANN MALLETTE

Major Professor:	Ted Futris
Committee:	Geoffrey Brown
	Assaf Oshri

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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DEDICATION

To Quintin

You are indeed the most intricate and perfect melody weaved into my song,

creating a beautiful counterpoint that could only have been written

by the pen of God.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Page

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Need

Parenting has been a prominent task undertaken by adults throughout history. In most families, two or more caregivers participate in childrearing (McHale & Kuersten-Hogan, 2004). Historically, mothers have been considered to be the natural parent while fathers served as the financial provider and supporting parent. However, the model of fathers as sole breadwinners has shifted to one of an egalitarian view of parental roles (Mirandé, 1988), and interest in fatherhood research has grown and topics of study have broadened (Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). The current literature base has clearly demonstrated the importance and distinct influence of fathers (Lamb, 2004), and they have been recognized as key factors in the family (Parke, 2004) who are actively involved with their children, both in terms of amount of time spent and engagement behavior (Lamb, 2000). As trends in father involvement have changed, so has the structure of coparenting, with fathers and mothers beginning to share more of the responsibility. Fathers invest in the care and upbringing of their children, which is an important and central part of their lives (Doucet & Lee, 2014).

Young children with involved fathers demonstrate better cognitive and language development and better emotion regulation (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007). They are more likely to have higher social competence, better problem solving and adaptive skills, overall life satisfaction, and to experience fewer emotional and conduct problems (Jia, Kotila, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2012). Adolescents with highly involved fathers have better peer experiences

and experience less conflict in their social relationships (Ducharme, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2002). They are also more likely to grow up to be more successful adults with more supportive relationships of their own and to be more likely to have long-term, successful marriages that are less likely to end in divorce (Risch, Jodi, & Eccles, 2004). There is also substantial literature to support the idea that the relationship between mothers and fathers affects the functioning of their children, whether or not they are currently in a romantic relationship (Cummings, Merrilees, & George, 2010). Supportive coparenting is associated with positive developmental outcomes for children (Lamb, 1997), such as fewer externalizing behaviors (Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001) and more self-regulatory behaviors (Brody et al., 1994), regardless of parent age (Fagan, 2008). Alternatively, a non-supportive, conflictual coparental environment is associated with a lack of child well-being, as evidenced by lower academic achievement, low social competence, and more behavioral problems (Amato, 1998; Aldous & Mulligan, 2002; Harper & Fine, 2006).

Scholars have primarily considered the influence of a father's involvement on his children, but some have also considered the impact of fathering behavior on other members of the family. For instance, involvement is beneficial for maternal outcomes, with mothers of any age demonstrating more emotional well-being (Cutrona, Hessling, Bacon, & Russell, 1998; Mallette, Futris, Brown, & Oshri, 2015) and displaying improved maternal functioning (Turner, Grindstaff, and Phillips, 1990). Involvement impacts father's overall well-being as well (Pleck, 1997). Involved fathers feel more self-confidence and life satisfaction, exhibit more maturity and less emotional distress, are less likely to be involved in crime, less likely to abuse substances (Pleck, 1997), and are more likely to be involved in their community (Allen & Daly, 2007; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). However, the benefits of father involvement for parents seem to be dependent on the quality of the coparenting relationship. When fathers are in a more

conflictual, non-supportive relationship, they tend to show lower mental and emotional functioning overall (Cummings et al., 2010). For mothers, coparental conflict is associated with difficulties in maternal adaptation and adjustment to adverse situations (Conger et al., 2002; Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, Foster, & Brody, 2005).

As understanding of fathering and coparenting has changed over time, the conceptualization and study of fathers and their impact on the family has also evolved, with scholars attempting to identify and explore the full range of the ways a father can be involved with his child and the child's mother. For example, fathering models have evolved to incorporate the most current understanding of parenting processes (Baumrind, 1991). Frameworks that include three primary components (positive engagement activities, warmth and responsiveness, and control) continue to be the most widely used operationalizations of most fathering research (Pleck, 2010). Similarly, a three-part model for coparenting, including conflict, cooperation, and triangulation (inclusion of the child in coparenting conflict), has been proposed to explain how parents work together to parent their child (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001).

Contextual factors are vitally important to the study of father-child relationships (Marsiglio et al., 2000). Relationships in the family are individually, collectively, and reciprocally influential to the family system as a whole and need to be taken into account in order to fully understand the complexity of the nature of the father's relationship with his child(ren). Although early fathering and coparenting research was dominated by studies of White, two-parent families (McHale & Irace, 2011; Varga, Gee, Rivera, & Reyes, 2014), recently, the diversity of families has been considered and literature on coparenting and fathering has begun to examine vulnerable family structures and types. For example, fathering and

coparenting research now often includes family situations in which there is a residential mother and a non-residential father (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). This is a typical scenario in cases of never-married or divorced parents. In 2007, the rate of divorce for first marriages was 50% (U.S Census Bureau (2007), and in 2011, over 6 million US children lived with a divorced parent (U.S Census Bureau (2012), leading to many more children being parented by parents living apart. Another staggering change in the context of fathering and coparenting is one of cohabitation and nonmarital childbearing. In 2009, 41% of all births were to unmarried women, which is the highest reported in U.S history (Kamp Dush, Kotila, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2011). Today, divorced or unmarried parents frequently remarry or cohabit with new partners, changing the landscape of father involvement and coparenting for these families in major ways. Literature on these parents has historically taken a deficit perspective, in that it has tended to focus primarily on an assumed lack of involvement on the part of the non-residential fathers along with a plethora of negative child outcomes associated with their lack of involvement. Low-income, minority, and adolescent-headed families have been considered to be at the greatest risk for a lack of father involvement in coparenting and parenting behaviors.

Judging from the knowledge base on the state of father involvement, it can be assumed that, in general, fathers want to be involved with their children and that their positive and quality involvement has beneficial effects for all members of the family. In spite of the growing desire to spend more time involved in parenting decisions and direct engagement in their children's lives, fathers' level of involvement remains lower compared to that of mothers. This is especially true when considering populations of fathers who are more at risk for low levels of involvement, such as low income, adolescent, and non-residential fathers. However, positive coparenting may function as a protective factor within vulnerable families that can enhance

family outcomes, even in the presence of risk factors, such as uninvolved or negative fathering behaviors (Feinberg, 2003). Alternately, it may be possible that poor or disengaged fathering may be detrimental only in the presence of a dysfunctional coparenting relationship (Feinberg, 2003). Thus, coparenting may be an important protective factor within the family that enhances family outcomes (Feinberg, 2003) even in the presence of risk or adversity. Emotionally supportive coparenting relationships have been found to help compensate for adverse circumstances (DuMont, Ehrhard-Dietzel, & Kirkland, 2011) that could impact family adaptation. Conversely, high levels of conflict within the coparental relationship may actually offset the beneficial effects that are usually observed with increased paternal involvement (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998). Thus, in vulnerable populations of families, such as never-married, separated, or divorced families, or in families that experience high levels of instability, a healthy and functional coparenting relationship may be of particular importance to father involvement and may serve as a protective factor (Varga et al., 2014), in that fathering behavior may only be beneficial for family outcomes if the coparents are able to maintain collaboration and agreement on parenting practices, engage in harmonious conversations about their children, avoid bringing their children into their arguments, and work together to avoid conflictual interactions (Jia, Kotila, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2012).

Current Study Overview

Based on the extant literature described above on coparenting and father involvement in vulnerable family situations, I have proposed a conceptual model (see Figure 1.1) that encompasses and pictorially describes the relationships and pathways between these complex constructs, and which is explained in detail in my Area of Specialization paper. In order to study specific pathways of the model, this dissertation presents two manuscripts which examine

coparenting relationships, father involvement, and family adaptation among two distinct vulnerable populations: adolescent parents and fragile families. Increased understanding of influences on and impacts of family resilience will better inform family strengthening programs designed for vulnerable populations of families.

The first study, *Cooperative, Conflictual, and Uninvolved Coparenting Among Teenaged Parents*, examines the coparental relationship style among 125 adolescent mothers aged 14-19, as well as maternal and paternal covariates. Young parents often maintain a shared parenting relationship that is characterized by undermining behavior, frequent conflict, and unhealthy communication (Fagan & Lee, 2010). However, in relationships with less conflict and more cooperation, adolescent mothers display more well-being and self-acceptance (Letourneau. Stewart, & Barnfather, 2004) and young fathers are more likely to be involved with their child (Mallette et al., 2015). Using a conceptual framework that reinforces the individual and collective influence of parents' investments (i.e., human, financial, and social capital) on family processes and individual well-being (Amato, 1998; Coleman, 1988), this manuscript examines indicators of each resource as precursors to differing coparenting styles. Utilizing a 3-step latent profile analysis, we (1) identify patterns of coparenting based on adolescent mothers' reports, (2) examine the influence of social, financial and human capital resources, and (3) evaluate between-group differences in parenting outcomes.

The second study, *Paternal Support and Involvement in Unmarried Fragile Families: Impacts on Long-Term Maternal Functioning*, longitudinally examines a sample of 1,693 unmarried mothers from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study using bidirectional latent growth curve analysis. Fragile families are defined as those families who include unmarried or romantically unstable parents, have children, and are socioeconomically

disadvantaged (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010). Typically, these families consist of a residential mother and a non-residential father. The nature of the father's relationship with the mother has emerged as a contextual factor that is a vital component to understanding variability in father involvement (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007). When fathers have a positive coparental relationship with the mother, they are significantly more likely to demonstrate high levels of engagement with their child, regardless of residential status (Cabrera et al., 2004). However, men who have an unstable coparenting relationship with their child's mother are much less likely to maintain ongoing involvement. Using the Life Course Perspective and spillover hypothesis as a conceptual framework, this manuscript analyzes the following hypotheses: (1) The initial level of coparenting support positively influences the level of change of father involvement; (2) The initial level of father involvement positively influences the level of change of coparenting support; (3) Both the initial level and the rate of change of coparenting support influence maternal functioning when the child is age nine; (4) Both the initial level and the rate of change of father involvement influence maternal functioning when the child is age nine.

For the remainder of this introductory chapter, additional theoretical and empirical context is presented to further explain the pathways in the conceptual model, followed by sections explaining how this theory encapsulates the contextual paths in my model that specifically relate to the studies outlined above.

Family Resilience Theory

Family resilience theory (Walsh, 2003), with roots in family stress theory and family systems theory (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996), takes into account risk and protective factors internal and external to the family that influence the family as a whole, as well as its subsystems and individual members. Each individual member experiences risk and protective factors that are

influential for personal functioning, which, in turn, serves as a risk or protective factor for the various subsystems and the entire family (Rutter, 1989). Risk factors are generally considered to be negative factors that make a family more vulnerable to negative outcomes, while protective factors are generally considered to be family resources and strengths that act as buffering factors that families draw on in order to balance the negative impact of risk factors. Consequentially, positive and/or negative family characteristics as a whole affect family functioning. Family resilience theory extended family stress theory, which focused more on outcomes related to adversity without taking individual and family strengths into account.

A review of the family resilience literature demonstrates that family-level resilience processes, such as positive and effective communication patterns, strong emotional connections, and shared family beliefs, are important ways in which families cope with adversity (Walsh, 2012). A positive parent-child relationship, one that includes support, nurturance and a reliance on authoritative parenting practices, is a crucial influence on child development, especially in families with low financial resources (Fernandez, Schwartz, Chun, & Dickson, 2013). The presence of a strong familial support system is also associated with an increased ability of family members to cope with stressors and demonstrate resilience (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996).

It is necessary to think of family resilience as more than just family members acting as resources for individual resilience among other family members (Walsh, 2013). Instead, the family as an entire unit should be considered as a risk or protective factor for family adaptation. In addition to the family functioning processes that are aspects of resilience, there are specific ways that parents can promote family resilience through a healthy and collaborative parent-child relationship. Parents can foster a supportive and protective environment through family routines, skill development, and establishment of a strong social network. According to Hawley and

DeHaan (1996), the family can actually serve as both a protective and risk factor for family members. The family can promote resilience by providing support and protection, but can also increase vulnerability by exposing family members to risky situations. For example, financial strain can be a significant risk factor for children in father-absent homes (Anderson, 2012).

The interactive and dynamic family-level nature of this theory, combined with its emphasis on individual-, community-, and family-level protective factors, makes it an ideal framework for examinations of fathering, coparenting, and family adaptation. While risk factors are considered within the theory, Walsh (2003) has emphasized more of a strengths-based approach to the study of families by considering resources, relational factors, and the family itself as protective factors. Specifically, parents can provide a protective environment that fosters the ability of the whole family to adapt successfully in stressful circumstances by utilizing effective parenting behaviors, creating a supportive environment, and working together as an involved, harmonious coparenting team. Potential familial risk and protective factors, both internal and external to the family, as well as their linkages with fathering, coparenting, and family adaptation over time, are discussed below.

Risk and Protective Factors

It has been suggested that the study of resilience must begin with a quantifiable examination of risk and protective factors that will allow for the heterogeneity of resilience and adaptation between families to be illuminated (Rutter, 2012). Protective factors in individuals and their environments may facilitate the capacity for adaptation while risk factors may prohibit adaptation. Prior studies have considered community, parent, and child factors to be important risk and protective factors either directly or indirectly influencing family- and individual-level processes, as well as adaptation outcomes. For example, parent factors such as educational

attainment and employment status have been identified as factors leading to increased individual and family resilience (Rutter, 2012). Parental social support serves as a protective factor, in that adults and children who perceive more social support exhibit more adaptive functioning following an adverse experience (Norris et al., 2002; Sprague et al., 2015).

Many contextual factors have been considered in the fathering literature as impactful for variability in father involvement. For instance, some have considered socioeconomic status, father and child age, education, employment status, ethnicity, family of origin experiences, social support, child gender and psychological functioning as factors responsible for variable levels of involvement (Coates & Phares, 2014). As mentioned earlier, the majority of fathering research has taken a deficit approach and examined how risk factors influence father absence; however, the converse of these may also be considered, in that protective factors may be associated with greater father involvement. For example, social support has emerged as an essential protective factor influencing the variability of father involvement, especially among vulnerable populations of fathers (Coates & Phares, 2014).

Examinations of non-residential fathering tend to demonstrate that unwed, noncohabiting fathers are at an increased risk for lower father-child involvement (Cabrera et al., 2004; Marsiglio et al., 2000). The majority of non-residential fathers are involved with their infants (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010), but their involvement often decreases dramatically as the child ages (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007), making child age a noteworthy risk or protective factor to consider. The majority of findings indicate that, among other demographic characteristics, younger age, lower socioeconomic status, low-income neighborhood, unemployment, and lower levels of educational attainment are predictive of less involvement (Rhein et al., 1997; Coley, 2001; King, Harris, & Heard, 2004).

Demographic parental characteristics such as age, gender, and educational attainment may also be related to a more conflictual or harmonious coparenting environment (Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jessee, 2011). For example, both maternal and paternal educational attainment may have an influence on supportive coparenting behavior (Stright & Bales, 2003; Van Egeren, 2003). The effect of parental age on coparenting quality is one that needs further attention. It has been suggested that coparenting relationships between adolescent parents are unstable and likely to deteriorate (Fagan, 2008) and end within the first few years of a child's life (Fagan, Farrie, Cabrera, & Roy, 2007); however, little is known about how this dynamic differs from the coparenting experiences of older unmarried parents. It is possible that the quality of coparenting relationships may be sensitive to mother and father developmental and maturity levels (Mangelsdorf et al., 2011).

Likewise, cohabitation status may be influential on the coparenting quality of vulnerable families. Most unmarried couples will dissolve their relationship early in their child's life (McLanahan, 2009). For those who cohabit, there may be more of an opportunity to participate in coparenting behaviors, but for parents who do not reside together, it may be less likely that they will engage in coparenting, and when they do, the quality of their coparenting interactions is less likely to be supportive and collaborative (Carlson & Högnäs, 2011). Thus, the coparenting relationship may be more fragile in these situations, making relationship and cohabitation status important factors of consideration.

Conclusion

The nature of the father's relationship with the mother has emerged as a contextual factor that is a vital component to understanding variability in father involvement (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007), especially for non-residential fathers. Specifically, the coparenting relationship has been

suggested as a support system for fathers in their parenting role (Roy & Smith, 2013). The combination of a supportive coparenting relationship and encouragement from the mother has been found to be associated with paternal involvement (Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008). When mothers and fathers are more harmonious in their interactions with their children, fathers are more likely to be highly engaged with their children (Brown, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, & Neff, 2010). The father-child relationship is considered to be more sensitive to outside influences, and as such, the quality of the coparenting relationship can affect fathering behavior to a large degree, for both residential and non-residential fathers (Coates & Phares, 2014; Fagan & Cabrera, 2012). Even when coparents are not in a romantic relationship, a strong coparenting alliance positively impacts the mother's perceptions of the father's caregiving (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007). On the other hand, coparental conflict and undermining have been associated with poorer quality parent-child interactions and stressful parent-child relations (Dorsey, Forehand, & Brody, 2007; Solmeyer & Feinberg, 2011). For example, when a mother is feeling tense or anxious about her relationship with her coparent, she is more likely to use less effective parenting strategies and demonstrate poorer parent-child interactions (Amato, 1998). In summary, the literature on the coparental relationship and fathering implies an interconnected relationship that may have simultaneous or distinct influence on individual and family resilience.

The remainder of the document comprises the following sections. The two chapters following the introduction illustrate the manuscripts of the aforementioned studies. Each manuscript details a review of the literature, methods, results, and discussion, followed by tables and figures to provide more detail. The final conclusion chapter will provide a summary that begins with a description of the linkages between these two manuscripts, and how they are

supported by family resilience theory. Finally, I will revisit the conceptual model described above by detailing how the model is supported based on findings in the studies, and discuss implications and directions for future research related to vulnerable family systems. Formatting, numbering of tables and figures, and style considerations are in accordance with guidelines established by APA (6th edition) and the Graduate School at the University of Georgia.

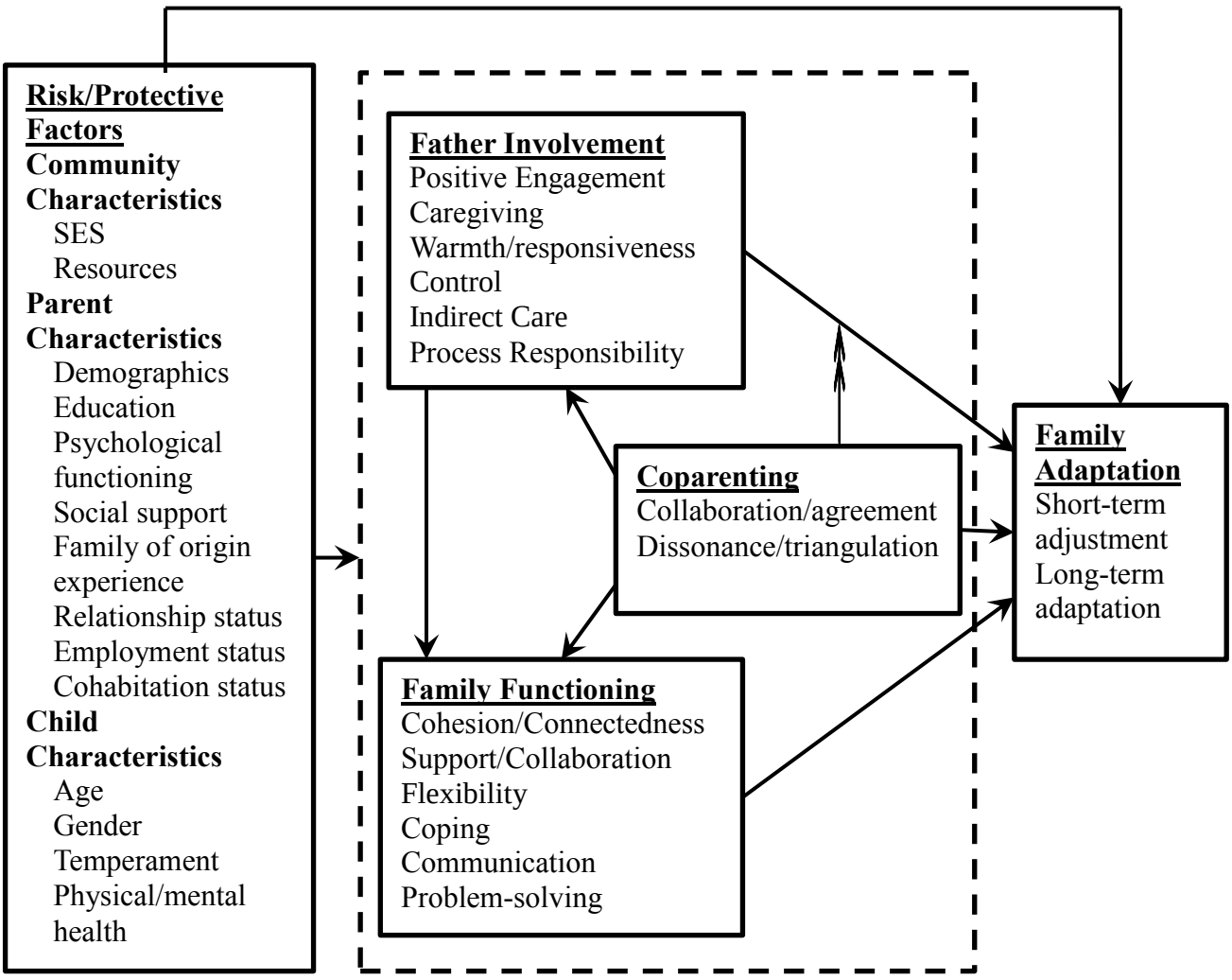

Figure 1.1. Conceptual model of the associations between internal and external individual and family vulnerabilities, protective factors, relational characteristics, and family adaptation over time.

CHAPTER 2

COOPERATIVE, CONFLICTUAL, AND UNINVOLVED COPARENTING AMONG TEENAGED PARENTS

Abstract

Adolescent parents often maintain a shared parenting relationship that is characterized by undermining behavior, frequent conflict, and unhealthy communication (Fagan & Lee, 2010). However, in relationships with less conflict and more cooperation, adolescent mothers display more positive well-being and greater self-acceptance (Letourneau, Stewart, & Barnfather, 2004) and young fathers are more likely to be involved with their child (Mallette, Futris, Brown, & Oshri, 2015). Using a conceptual framework that reinforces the individual and collective influence of parents' investments on family processes and individual well-being (Amato, 1998; Coleman, 1988), the current study examines indicators of human, financial, and social capital as precursors to differing coparenting styles among 125 adolescent mothers, as well as maternal and paternal outcomes. Using a 3-step latent profile analysis, we (1) identify patterns of coparenting based on adolescent mothers' reports, (2) examine influence of social, financial and human capital resources, and (3) evaluate between-group differences in parenting outcomes. Results indicated three unique patterns of coparenting based on adolescent mothers' reports, which were associated with indicators of social, financial and human capital and between-group differences in parental functioning. Implications for practice are presented.

Introduction

In the US, nearly a quarter of a million adolescents give birth each year (Martin, Hamilton, Osterman, Curtin & Mathews, 2015). Although the majority (88.7%) of these births are to unmarried teenagers, it has been estimated that more than half of adolescent mothers are in a romantic relationship with the father of their child at the time of birth (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009). Despite the short duration of their romantic relationship, adolescent parents often maintain a shared parenting relationship, albeit typically characterized by undermining behavior, frequent conflict, and unhealthy communication (Fagan & Lee, 2010). These unstable relationships decline early in their child's life and often end in a termination of the coparenting relationship (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007). When the parental relationship is conflictual, mothers experience parenting stress (Larson, 2004) and less parental competence (Birkeland, Thompson, & Phares, 2005). However, adolescent mothers who receive support from their children's fathers display psychological well-being and self-acceptance (Letourneau et al. 2004). It may be more difficult for young fathers to participate in positive coparenting behaviors when they are not in a committed or cohabiting relationship; however, even in non-residential situations, maintenance of a healthy coparenting relationship may increase a father's engagement with his children (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009). In fact, in relationships with less conflict and more cooperation, young fathers are more likely to be involved from pregnancy to after the birth of their child (Mallette et al., 2015).

Using a conceptual framework that reinforces the individual and collective influence of parents' investments on family processes and individual well-being (Amato, 1998; Coleman, 1988), the current study examines indicators of human, financial, and social capital as precursors to differing coparenting styles among adolescent parents, as well as maternal and paternal

outcomes (Figure 2.1). Although recent research has demonstrated distinct clusters of coparenting styles among divorced parents (Amato, Kane, & James, 2011; Lamela, Figueiredo, Bastos, & Feinberg, 2015; Beckmeyer, Coleman, & Ganong, 2014), or older unmarried parents (Waller, 2012), there is still little known about the variations in and correlates of coparenting styles among younger, unmarried parents. Furthermore, studies of coparenting typically consider the impacts of coparenting on child adjustment, but parental functioning may be a vital primary step for understanding child well-being, as vast amounts of literature demonstrate that parent well-being is correlated with child outcomes (Belsky, Putnam, & Crnic, 1996). Given the vulnerable situation of adolescent coparenting, along with the unique attributes of the coparenting relationship for parental well-being, this examination of human, financial, and social capital as resources for coparenting is of particular help to practitioners concerned with the functioning of members of at-risk family populations.

Review of the Literature

Younger parents tend to have more vulnerable characteristics, such as lower income, lower educational attainment, poorer community upbringing, and fewer resources with which to support their child (Bunting & McAuley, 2004). Younger mothers tend to feel less competence with parenting and consequently feel less certain about how to respond appropriately to their child's needs (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009). Although not all adolescent mothers are unprepared for parental responsibilities, many experience stress, anxiety, and depression, along with low self-esteem, anger, and hopelessness (Birkeland et al., 2005), resulting in less confidence in their parenting skills and poorer parenting practices (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009). Teenaged mothers and fathers have higher rates of medical, educational, behavioral, relational, and psychological issues, but are less likely than adults to seek or access potential resources (Logsdon et al., 2014;

Quinlivan & Condon, 2005). Although young fathers are often much more involved with their children than previously assumed, adolescent fathers have often been considered to be more likely than adult fathers to have inadequate parenting skills, disinterest in parenthood, to be troublemakers or delinquents (Cutrona, Hessling, Bacon, & Russell, 1998), and to have contentious relationships with the mother's family (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009). These combined risk factors make it more likely that young parents will lack the resources necessary to establish and maintain healthy and cooperative coparenting relationships (Fagan, 2008).

The Association between Coparenting and Parental Functioning

Coparenting, or how parents work together when raising a child, has been considered as a distinctly separate concept from relationship or parenting quality, and may be considered as a protective factor for families, especially in times of stress or disruption (Feinberg, 2003). Strong evidence can be found in the literature to support the idea that a functional and supportive coparental relationship is related to father involvement, mother and child outcomes, and the child-parent relationship. The quality of the marital or couple relationship has been found to have direct and indirect influences on fathering behavior; however, the coparenting relationship likely has a unique and differential influence in particular on fathering behavior (Varga, Gee, Rivera, & Reyes, 2014). For example, the coparenting relationship is a crucial factor of the father's relationship with the mother and may impact his level of involvement (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007) and also how his involvement impacts family well-being (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, Pruett, & Wong, 2009; Elliston, McHale, Talbot, Parmley, & Kuersten-Hogan, 2008). Coparenting has been considered as having both a direct and indirect effect on father involvement, due in part to the greater sensitivity of fathers to their relationship with the mother (Coates & Phares, 2014). A cooperative coparenting relationship that involves shared values and

beliefs ensures that access to the father-child relationship can be maintained (Futris, Nielsen, & Olmstead, 2010) and thus encourages further involvement.

Similarly, coparental conflict has been associated with poorer quality parent-child interactions, stressful parent-child relations (Dorsey, Forehand, & Brody, 2007; Solmeyer & Feinberg, 2011), and maternal maladjustment in adverse situations (Conger et al., 2002; Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, Foster, & Brody, 2005). For example, when a mother is feeling tense or anxious about her relationship with her coparent, she is more likely to use less effective parenting strategies and demonstrate poorer parent-child interactions (Amato, 1998). Fathers in highly conflictual coparenting relationships are less likely to report a positively engaged parent-child relationship (Elliston et al., 2008). In contrast, when parents have more cooperation and less conflict in their coparental relationship, this spills over into their parenting behaviors, so that both mothers and fathers are more likely to exhibit functional parent-child relationships (Allen & Daly, 2007; Bunting & McAuley, 2004). Supportive coparenting is associated with less parenting stress (Solmeyer & Feinberg, 2011) and positive well-being for adolescent mothers (Gavin et al., 2002).

However, as evidenced in Waller's (2012) study of father involvement in fragile families, the absence of conflict in the coparenting relationship may not indicate the presence of cooperation. In fact, in these families, four separate coparenting styles emerged: cooperative (high cooperation, low conflict); conflictual (high conflict, low cooperation); disengaged (low conflict, low cooperation); and a small group of mixed (high conflict, high cooperation) parents. Fathers in the cooperative group were more involved with their children than in other style groups; however, paternal involvement was diminished more by the presence of a conflictual rather than a disengaged coparenting relationship. Although Waller's (2012) study examined

older unmarried parents, their findings may help inform expectations of variations in coparenting among adolescents.

Theory

As adolescent parents navigate and develop all of the parenting skills necessary for their new parental role, including their new coparenting relationships, they call on existing resources in their current environment. Adolescent parents may have more of a challenge in maintaining cooperative coparenting relationships, but their ability to function may be related to the availability of certain resources. Using the conceptual framework presented by Coleman (1988) and Amato (1998), we examine human capital, financial capital, and social capital as potential parental resources that could be associated with variability in the coparenting style of young parents.

Human Capital

Nonmaterial resources provided by parents, such as education, skills, knowledge, and traits, are considered human capital (Amato, 1998). Parents with more human capital are better equipped to provide stimulating, nurturing, and supportive home environments that have the potential to develop skills and abilities in children that will benefit their own educational achievement and future earning potential (Amato, 1998; Bornstein & Bradley, 2012). Both maternal and paternal educational attainment has been found to be predictive of supportive coparenting behavior (Stright & Bales, 2003; Van Egeren, 2003), whereas low educational achievement, as well as differences in education level, are associated with less supportive coparenting behaviors (Belsky et al., 1996). Adolescent mothers and fathers are also at risk of attaining lower levels of education (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009), which may impact their ability to attain a cooperative coparenting relationship.

Similarly, demographic parental traits such as age may be related to a more conflictual or harmonious coparenting environment (Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jessee, 2011). For example, it has been suggested that coparenting relationships between young parents are unstable and likely to deteriorate (Fagan, 2008) and end within the first few years of a child's life (Fagan, Farrie, Cabrera, & Roy, 2007), but less is known about differences in coparenting as a function of age in these younger parents. Strong evidence can be found to support the idea that parenting quality declines along with younger parental age (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009), so although maternal age may not be associated with coparenting style for more diverse age groups of mothers (Kamp Dush, Kotila, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2011), it is possible that the quality of coparenting relationships may be sensitive to the developmental and maturity levels of both mother and father when considering adolescent parents (Mangelsdorf et al., 2011).

Parental responsibilities and stressors may change as children move through differing developmental stages. As such, child age may be associated with the coparenting relationship. Among adult parents, conflictual coparenting has been found to decline as the child ages (Gable, Belsky, & Crnic, 1995). Although not widely studied among adolescent parents, it is possible that parents of infants may experience a more conflictual coparenting relationship due to increased demands on parental time. It is also conceivable that as children grow, young parents may grow more comfortable with parenting and, thus, feel more harmony in their relationship. On the other hand, studies of at-risk parents who are not romantically involved show a decline in supportive coparenting over time (Kamp Dush et al., 2011). Because adolescent parents are more likely to have romantic relationships that deteriorate over time within the early years of their child's life, it may be that adolescent parents of older children report greater conflict within their coparenting relationship. It is also possible that fathers do not parent infants as frequently

as they do toddlers, so coparenting behaviors may necessarily become more frequent over time, which could lead to increased conflict or cooperation with child age (Belsky, Rovine, & Fish, 1989).

Financial Capital

Financial capital is typically considered to be the economic and fiscal resources available to parents and children (Bornstein & Bradley, 2012). A lower socioeconomic status and a lack of community resources may put a family at risk for experiencing strained family relationships following a crisis event (Norris et al., 2002), whereas the availability and accessibility of financial resources may strengthen families and promote family relationship quality (Ungar, 2012). For example, parent employment status has been identified as a factor leading to increased family functioning (Rutter, 2012).

Maternal and paternal *employment status* has been found to associate with variations in coparenting among adult parents, with dual-earner couples displaying more supportive behaviors (Lindsey, Caldera, & Colwell, 2005). It is less known how employment status affects the coparenting behaviors of non-romantically involved or adolescent parents. This may be of particular importance, as the lack of financial capital of teenaged mothers and fathers is considered to be a risk factor for these parents (Rhein et al., 1997). Specifically, unemployed fathers with less income are also less likely to be actively involved in parenting with the mother (Coley, 2001). It may also be possible that parents who work outside of the home have less time to participate in coparenting discussions, or that the stress of outside employment may spill over into their discussions and create more conflict (Cooklin et al., 2015).

Social Capital

Social capital encompasses the resources stemming from healthy family and community relationships that influence individual development in a positive way (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). This type of parental resource includes the social relationships internal and external to the family (Bornstein & Bradley, 2012) and may be particularly important in the study of variability in the coparenting styles of adolescent parents, because of the higher level of social support necessary for positive functioning. Specifically, teenaged mothers rely on their own parents for assistance, particularly their mothers (Borcherding, SmithBattle & Schneider, 2005) and their emotional support may be particularly influential in fostering or inhibiting coparental cooperation among the young parents. For example, adolescents who perceive more support from the maternal grandparents are more likely to report cooperative coparenting discussions (Herzog, Umaña-Taylor, Madden-Derdich, & Leonard, 2007). It may be that adolescent mothers whose own mothers are more accepting of the child's father may feel encouragement to maintain a cooperative coparenting relationship with him (Herzog et al., 2007). The association between paternal grandmother support and variations among coparenting style has not been researched among adolescent mothers. However, adolescent mothers perceive paternal grandmother rejection to be a barrier to fathers' involvement in child rearing (Rhein et al., 1997), which may extend to discussions of parenting. Additionally, extended family has been found to enhance adult parents' ability to engage in cooperative coparenting behaviors (Lindsey, Calder, & Colwell, 2005). Thus, adolescent mothers who feel supported by the father's family, specifically his mother, may be more likely to maintain a supportive connection with the father. Alternatively, when there is a lack of support from the paternal grandmother, tension between the adolescent parents may be more likely.

Within an adolescent-headed family, negative interparental relationship quality, such as relationship anxiety, less closeness and intimacy, observed distress and hostility, low self-reported relationship quality, defensiveness, and low engagement in couple discussions, is linked with lower levels of supportive coparenting and more undermining coparenting (Mangelsdorf et al., 2011). Less is known about how *relationship status* (i.e., in a romantic relationship or not) may affect the coparenting relationship for adolescent parents, although in at-risk samples of more diverse age groups, higher relationship commitment has been found to correlate with cooperative coparenting (Kamp Dush et al., 2011). Likewise, is it possible that the *length of the relationship before pregnancy* may serve as a proxy for level of commitment, and likewise, be differentially related to coparenting style.

Cohabitation with a partner has become increasingly common over the past decades. However, research has consistently shown that unmarried couples who cohabit have less stable relationships and are more likely to dissolve their relationship early in their child's life (McLanahan, 2009). Adolescent parents who do not reside together may have less opportunity to engage in coparenting, and when they do, the quality of their coparenting interactions is less likely to be supportive and collaborative (Carlson & Högnäs, 2011). Thus, the coparenting relationship may be more fragile in these situations, making relationship and cohabitation status important factors to consider. Likewise, the *fathers' nearness to mother and child* may be a likely influence on variability in coparenting behaviors. Fathers who have more proximity to the child may have more availability and flexibility to take part in coparenting discussions, which may be cooperative or conflictual.

Current Study

Guided by a conceptual framework that highlights potential parental resources as well as existing research, the current study seeks to further understand the variability in coparenting relationship styles between adolescent mothers and fathers, as well as the parental resources that may be associated with the way that these young parents negotiate coparenting discussions with each other. The current study extends previous examinations of coparenting styles through utilization of a 3-step latent profile analysis to identify variations in coparenting among teen parents, and to further examine associations between parental resources, adolescent coparenting styles, and parental functioning. We expect there will be three distinct coparenting patterns among adolescents, with a latent profile analysis indicating clusters of adolescent parents who differ in their approach to handling coparenting discussions (i.e., high conflict, low cooperation; high cooperation, low conflict). Similar to findings among older unmarried parents (Waller, 2012), and due to the prevalence of uninvolved adolescent fathers, we also expect that there may be a cluster of adolescent parents who are less likely to be involved in coparenting discussions together (i.e., low cooperation, low conflict). Additionally, based on literature focused on parental capital and its relationship to aspects of parenting, we expect to identify specific parental capital resources that are related to the coparenting patterns. Last, because of established links between coparenting, father involvement, and maternal functioning, we expect to identify group differences in maternal stress, maternal competence, and paternal engagement based on the coparenting patterns.

Methods

Mothers in the current study were recruited during the 2001-2002 school year through a statewide school-based program for adolescent parents from 32 schools in midwestern Ohio. From an initial pool of 296 adolescent parents, 168 mothers met the study criteria (i.e., mother

was 19 years old or younger at the time the focal child was born; focal child was under 25 months old; the focal child's biological father was 24 years old or younger) and were mailed a survey. The current study is based on complete data returned from 125 adolescent mothers.

The mothers ranged from 14 to 19 years (M = 17.00; SD = 1.1), and 67.2% were White, 19.2% were African American, and 14.6% were other. The focal child ranged in age from one to 24 months (M = 9.2; SD = 6.4). Based on maternal reports, fathers ranged from 15 to 24 years of age (M = 19.1; SD = 1.9), and 64.8% were White, 23.2% were African American, and 12.0% were other. Most of the fathers (81.0%) did not reside in the same household with the mother and focal child, and 47.0% were romantically involved with the mother at the time of the survey.

Measures

Endogenous variables. Three unique domains (human, financial, social capital) were selected as potential determinants of adolescent coparenting class membership.

Human capital. Mothers reported their own and the fathers' *age* in years and their child's age in months. Mothers also reported their own and the fathers' *education* (1=<High School; 2=High School Diploma or GED; 3 = College).

Financial capital. Mothers reported their own and the fathers' *employment status* (0 = no; 1 = yes). A selection of "yes" was indicative of either part-time or full-time employment.

Social capital. Mothers indicated whether or not they were currently in a *romantic relationship* with the father of their child (0 = no; 1 = yes), whether or not they were currently *cohabiting* with the father (0 = no; 1 = yes), *father's nearness to mother and child* (1 = <2 miles; 2=3-10 miles; 3 = ≥11 miles), and the *length of the relationship before pregnancy* (in months). The amount of *maternal grandmother support* and *paternal grandmother support* was measured with a single item each indicating how much (1= No Support; 5 = A Great Deal) emotional

support (e.g., advice, counseling) the mother had received in the last month from the child's grandmothers (e.g., own mother/stepmother, child's father's mother/stepmother) (Koeske & Koeske, 1990).

Coparenting. Mothers indicated how often (1 = *never*; 5 = *very often*) the fathers had participated in cooperative and or conflictual behaviors during conversations dealing with their child during the past month. *Coparenting cooperation* was measured with four items (e.g., "Did he provide emotional support in dealing with your child?"; "Was he a resource to you in raising your child?"). *Coparenting conflict* was measured with five items (e.g., "Did you have basic differences in opinion about issues related to childrearing?"; "Was the conversation between you stressful or tense?")

Parental Functioning. Two maternal correlates and one paternal correlate were investigated to determine how reports of parental functioning varied across adolescent mothers in each coparenting class.

Maternal parenting stress. Mothers' feelings of stress were examined using an adapted version of the Parenting Stress Index (Abidin, 1992; Abidin & Brunner, 1995). Mothers rated their level of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*) with 22 items reflecting possible parenting stressors (e.g., "Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be"; "I have had more problems raising my child than I expected"; "When I think about the kind of parent I am, I often feel guilty or bad about myself"). Mean scores were computed such that higher scores reflected lower role strain (α =.85).

Maternal parenting competence. Whereas self-efficacy is considered to be reflective of one's belief in one's own ability to perform parenting tasks, perceived parental competence refers to perceptions that others hold about the parent's ability to care for a child (Bryanton,

Gagnon, Hatem, & Johnston, 2008). Thus, to examine how mothers feel about their parenting competency, they were asked to rate their level of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 6 = *strongly agree*) with 10 items (e.g., "He is satisfied with my child-rearing skills," "He feels good about the amount of involvement I have with our child") that reflected how they believed the father would assess their parenting performance (Guidubaldi & Cleminshaw, 1985). Mean scores were computed, with higher scores indicating higher feelings of competence (α =.86).

Paternal engagement. Mothers indicated the extent (1 = *never* to 5 = *very often*) to which fathers participated in 12 child-centered tasks (e.g., play with the child, take the child to the park, read to the child), six caregiving activities (e.g., feed the child, change the child's diapers), and five financial tasks (e.g., shop for groceries for the child, provide money to support the child) during the past month (Roopnarine et al., 1995). Mean scores were computed, with higher scores representing more frequent involvement (α =.98).

Analysis Plan

All analyses were performed using M*plus* Version 7.31 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2015). Missing data was analyzed with the M*plus* missing data default, estimating the model under missing data theory using all available data (Full Information Maximum Likelihood; FIML).

A 3-step latent profile analysis (LPA) (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2013) was employed following recommendations in the latent class analysis (LCA) literature (Lanza, Tan, & Bray, 2013; Vermunt, 2010). This 3-step approach utilizes a structural equation modeling (SEM) based classification technique to identify unobserved data patterns. The three steps include: (1) identify typologies or patterns (i.e., configurations or "profiles" of adolescents based on their coparenting style); (2) examine potential preceding risk factors (i.e., parental resource covariates); and (3)

evaluate between-group differences in indicators of parental well-being (i.e., maternal functioning and paternal engagement).

Following the 3-step approach and existing family research utilizing this approach (e.g., Oshri et al., 2015), first, an optimal latent profile solution was selected after taking conceptual, empirical, and practical issues into consideration (McCutcheon, 2002; Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthén, 2007). The process of identifying typologies requires balancing conceptual or statistical considerations in order to make an informed decision in determining the optimal profile solution. For the second step, the derived profiles were compared on potential parental resources (human, financial, and social capital) using the most likely occurring group as a reference. The Wald test, which evaluates the statistical significance of profile mean differences, was utilized in the third step to examine equalities of means for the mothers across the latent profiles (Asparouhov & Muthén, 2007).

Results

Descriptive statistics for all studied variables are reported in Table 2.1. Per maternal report, 93.6% of mothers and 57.3% of fathers had not yet graduated high school at the time of survey, while 6.4% of mothers and 42.7% of fathers had a high school diploma or GED. According to the mothers, 59% of the fathers were employed at least part-time, and 49% of the mothers were employed at least part-time. On average, the fathers lived less than 10 miles away from the mother and child, with 19% cohabiting with the mother and child. Nearly half (47%) of the parents were romantically involved at the time of survey. The mothers generally felt quite a bit to a great deal of support from their own mother, but little support from the father's mother. On average, the parents had dated for about 14 months prior to getting pregnant. In terms of coparenting support, the adolescent mothers felt somewhat supported and rarely conflictual during coparenting discussions with the father. On average, the mothers in our sample felt high/positive feelings of

maternal competence and slightly disagreed that they felt parenting stress. Mothers also described that the fathers, on average, were sometimes engaged with their child.

Step 1: Maternally Reported Coparenting Patterns

Table 2.2 summarizes multiple model fit indices used to evaluate the competing LPA solutions. Models with lower Akaike Information Criteria (AIC) and Sample Size Adjusted Bayesian Information Criterion (Adj.-BIC) values and entropy close to 1.00 are considered to display the best fit to the data. The Lo-Mendell-Rubin adjusted likelihood ratio test (LMR) was not statistically significant for the 4-profile and 5-profile models, so they were rejected. In comparing the 2-profile and 3-profile models, the entropy value was most ideal for the 3-profile model (.96), indicating the best separation of the identified profiles. The AIC and Adj.-BIC statistics for the 3-profile model were an improvement over the 2-profile model. In the 3-profile model, each class size was adequate for analysis (approximately 19% for the smallest class). Based on these fit indices, the 3-profile latent profile solution was selected as the optimal fit to the data.

Figure 2.2 presents a visual depiction of the resultant 3-profile model. Profiles one, two, and three were named cooperative (n = 53 mothers; 42.4%), conflictual (n = 48 mothers; 38.4%), and uninvolved (n = 24 mothers; 19.2%), respectively. More specifically, in relation to the other profiles, the cooperative profile included mothers who indicated more frequent cooperation and less frequent conflict during coparenting discussions, whereas the conflictual profile included mothers reporting more frequent conflict and less frequent cooperation. The uninvolved profile comprised mothers who reported low scores across the items, indicating that she and the father do not often engage in coparenting discussions.

Step 2: Human, Financial, and Social Capital Covariates

The derived coparenting profiles were compared on covariates reflecting indicators of human, financial, and social capital, using the cooperative group as the reference group. These results are summarized in Table 2.3. Compared with adolescent mothers in the cooperative profile, those in the conflictual profile tended to be employed, to not be living with or in a romantic relationship with their child's father, to have older children, to have less support from the paternal grandmother, and to report that the father lived farther away from their child. Mothers in the uninvolved profile were more likely than those in the cooperative profile to be younger, to have older children, to be employed, to be romantically uninvolved and not living with their child's father, to have less support from the paternal grandmother, and to report that the fathers were unemployed and lived farther away.

Step 3: Group Differences in Indicators of Parental Functioning

Group differences in means were examined across the latent profiles. Statistically significant group differences were found, and results are presented in Table 2.4. On average, mothers within the cooperative profile group reported more frequent father-child engagement, greater parenting competence, and lower parenting stress when compared to the other two groups of mothers. When comparing mothers in the conflictual and the uninvolved groups, statistically significant differences were not found on maternal outcomes; however, mothers in the conflictual group, on average, described their child's father as more engaged than did mothers in the uninvolved coparenting group.

Discussion

The current study focused on identifying variations in the patterns of coparenting among adolescent parents and how these variations are linked to various antecedents that may be associated with coparenting styles, as well as associations between coparenting profiles and

indicators of parental functioning. The use of a person-centered analysis was a strength of this study as it allowed us to focus on relationships between individuals by classifying them into groups of other similar individuals (Jung & Wickrama, 2008). The selection of corollaries was guided by a conceptual framework of human, social, and financial capital (Amato, 1998; Coleman, 1988). This perspective emphasizes that certain resources available to young parents may be related to how they parent together, as well as their individual parental functioning. Due to their developmental age, adolescent parents may face more of a challenge building various types of capital, as they are simultaneously attempting to maintain a family, attain an education, seek employment, and attend to their own developmental need for connection with peers, romantic partners, and other family members (Gee & Rhodes, 2003; Mollborn & Jacobs, 2015). When attempting to understand the functioning of these vulnerable parents, the coparenting relationship is often overlooked as a fundamental element (Lewin et al., 2015). However, research has demonstrated the importance of the coparenting relationship, both for maternal well-being and paternal engagement (Lewin et al., 2015). Thus, the current study examined certain indicators of human, financial, and social capital as relevant to understanding the nature of the coparental relationship as reported by teenaged mothers. Overall, the associations we found are consonant with what we would expect from this perspective. At least one identified indicator of each type of capital (human, social, and financial) was implicated in the coparenting patterns reported by adolescent mothers, and the mothers' reports of individual parental functioning varied based on coparenting pattern membership.

Teenaged Coparenting

In the past, many studies of coparenting, especially amongst adolescent parents, have considered the effects of dichotomous indicators of coparenting interactions (i.e., cooperative or

conflictual; Lewin et al., 2015). Our results show that these young coparental relationships may be more nuanced than previously believed. The characteristics of the profiles (i.e., high conflict, low cooperation; high cooperation, low conflict; low conflict, low cooperation) were consistent with other studies of vulnerable family types (Amato et al., 2011; Beckmeyer et al., 2014; Lamela et al., 2015; Waller, 2012), but provide novel information about how unmarried adolescent parents may negotiate coparenting discussions. Although it is often assumed that coparenting relationships among teenaged parents are either non-existent or highly conflictual in nature (Bunting & McAuley, 2004), the most commonly occurring profile among our sample was cooperative coparenting, followed by conflictual, and, last, uninvolved. Consistent with our conceptual framework, these results support the idea that adolescent parents have the potential to participate in cooperative coparenting behaviors, but this potential may be related to the human, financial, and social resources available to them (Amato, 1998; Coleman, 1988).

Human Capital and Coparenting Style

Although fathers' age was not related to group membership, our results indicated that the mothers' age was related to group membership, with younger mothers more likely to be members of the uninvolved coparenting pattern. Existing literature on gatekeeping behaviors has demonstrated that the parents of young mothers may be likely to prohibit the involvement of the father in coparenting discussions (Rhein et al., 1997). It is likely that the youngest mothers in our sample were living with family members and that the majority of coparenting discussions may happen between the teenaged mother and her own parents, rather than with the father of the child.

Mothers' and fathers' education level were also not related to group membership. Existing literature on education typically describes a link between educational attainment and supportive coparenting behavior for adult parents (Stright & Bales, 2003; Van Egeren, 2003). Our results

may be due to the lack of variability of education in our young sample. Although discussions of healthy relationships have become more prevalent in high schools in recent years (e.g., McElwan et al., 2016), it is unlikely that the mothers and fathers in our sample would have received this information during high school. Future research in samples with variability in education level may be able to further delineate how education is related to coparenting. Future research in samples with variability in education level may be able to further delineate how education is related to coparenting.

Another factor in group membership was child's age, with parents of older children more likely to be placed in either the uninvolved or conflictual coparenting profiles than the cooperative profile. Child age has not factored much in discussions of teenaged parenting; however, our results indicate that parents of toddler age children were less engaged in coparenting, or more likely to have conflictual coparenting discussions. Although impossible to determine from our cross-sectional sample, it has been well researched that adolescent parents' engagement in coparenting wanes over time (Fagan, 2013), thus child age in our study may be representative of this typical decline. Similarly, adolescent parenting may function similarly to other types of at-risk populations in which supportive coparenting declines as the child ages (Kamp Dush et al., 2011).

Financial Capital and Coparenting Style

Adolescent parents often lack financial capital due to less educational attainment and fewer employment opportunities (Futris et al., 2010), which may influence how they engage in coparenting. For example, adolescent fathers may have more difficulty with providing monetary support to the mother and child, a factor that has been linked with a paternal lack of disinterest and uninvolvement in parenting (Rhein et al., 1997). It has been suggested that fathers who lack financial capital may avoid parenting because of feelings of inadequacy in their paternal role

(Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007), or that mothers may be more likely to encourage the involvement of employed as opposed to unemployed fathers (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007). In the current study, unemployed fathers were most likely to be members of the uninvolved coparenting profile. These findings are consistent with Coley (2001), who found that fathers with less income may also be less likely to be involved with the mother and child.

Although employment may be less likely among adolescent mothers due to the need to balance education and raising a child, almost half of our sample of mothers were employed at least on a part-time basis. These employed mothers were most likely to be members of the conflictual profile or the uninvolved profile. An explanation for these findings may be found in literature on maternal work-family conflict, which has been linked with negative well-being outcomes for adult mothers (Cooklin et al., 2015). The concept is based on the idea that competing roles (e.g., mother, employee) that limit a mother's time and energy may produce tension and conflict in her family life. Thus, mothers who experience greater work-family conflict are more likely to experience poorer couple relationships with the father (Cooklin et al., 2015). Although our data did not allow for examination of work-family conflict among our sample, this is an area for future research among adolescent parents and coparenting relationships.

Social Capital and Coparenting Style

Most teenaged pregnancies happen within the context of a romantic relationship (Mollborn & Jacobs, 2015), which is an indicator of social capital that has been linked with the coparenting relationship (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007; Schoppe-Sullivan, McBride, & Ringo Ho, 2004). However, it has been found that the absence of a romantic relationship may present a barrier for fathers' involvement, both with the mother and with his child (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2007). Our results echo these findings, in that the non-romantically involved parents were more likely to be

members of the conflictual or uninvolved profile than the cooperative profile. It has been suggested that lack of a romantic relationship may be a risk factor for coparenting, in that parents may be less invested in each other and less likely to effectively negotiate and share parenting responsibilities (Kamp Dush et al., 2011; Nock, 1995).

Similarly, cohabitation between mother and father may provide social capital in that parents can generate a coparenting relationship through coordination of their shared parenting responsibilities (McHale et al., 2002), especially when the coparenting relationship is a cooperative one. In our sample, the parents who were not cohabiting were more likely to be members of the uninvolved or conflictual profiles than the cooperative profile. Young parents who are not living together may not have as much opportunity to engage in coparenting discussions, or when they do engage in coparenting discussions, may be more likely to argue. Similarly, the farther away the father lived from the mother and child, the more likely the parents were to be in the uninvolved profile. On the other hand, the nearer the father lived, the more likely they were to be members of the conflictual profile. Overall these results indicate that the accessibility of fathers to the mother and child may play an important role in understanding their coparenting relationships. While living apart may hinder coparental relationships, those fathers who live closer may have more contact with the mother, and thus, more opportunity for conflict. Understanding the living arrangements of adolescent parents may be beneficial for practitioners, and could provide a unique opportunity to influence positive communications among those adolescent parents who live apart, but are geographically accessible for joint communications regarding their child.

An interesting facet of adolescent parenting is the connected nature of the adolescent mother with her own mother. Often young mothers remain living in their own parents' homes, and thus, support from the young mother's family is important for understanding her parental

functioning (Borcherding et al., 2005). There is less information on how support from her family is related to the cooperative nature of the coparenting relationship; however, examinations of gatekeeping behaviors among teenaged mothers indicate that the maternal grandparents may have substantial influence in the involvement of the young father (Herzog et al., 2007; Rhein et al., 1997). Our findings were somewhat contradictory to past research, in that the amount of support received from the young mother's own mother was not related to coparenting group membership (Herzog et al., 2007). However, mothers that reported a lack of support from the paternal grandmother were more likely to be members of the conflictual or the uninvolved coparenting profiles. It has been suggested that mothers perceive paternal grandmother resistance to be a barrier to fathers' involvement in child rearing (Rhein et al., 1997). Our results extend these findings to explicate how a mother's perception of paternal grandmother support is related to her reports of his positive engagement in coparenting discussions. The cross-sectional nature of our data did not allow us to examine whether a lack of support from the paternal grandmother leads to less involvement and more conflict between the mother and father, or if the presence of conflict leads to less support. Future research would benefit from further explication of the connections between paternal grandmother support and the negotiation of coparenting among teenaged parents.

Coparenting and Parental Functioning

In terms of parental functioning, the mothers who reported the highest levels of coparenting cooperation were also the most likely to report higher levels of father-child engagement. This finding is typical in studies of married coparents (Schoppe-Sullivan, Brown, Cannon, Mangelsdorf, & Sokolowski, 2008), divorced parents (Sobolewski & King, 2005), fragile families (Fagan & Lee, 2010), and young parents (Futris & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2007). Our results provide further support for the idea that fathers are more engaged with their children when the coparenting relationship is

supportive and cooperative, regardless of age or relationship status. The mothers who reported the lowest levels of father-child engagement were those in the uninvolved coparenting profile. This suggests that fathers who do not frequently engage in discussions about their child with the mother may also be unlikely to be involved in actively parenting that child. While the conflictual profile did not have the lowest mean score for father-child engagement, it was significantly lower than the cooperative profile. Similar to other studies of vulnerable family situations (Waller, 2012), our findings suggest that the connection between conflict, cooperation, and father engagement may not be a linear relationship in which less conflict is related to more father-child engagement and vice versa. Instead, mothers who reported more conflictual coparenting discussions *or* very few coparenting discussions with the father were likely to report decreased father engagement as compared with the cooperative profile.

Mothers who reported higher levels of coparenting cooperation were also more likely to report experiencing the lowest parenting stress and the highest feelings of competence as a parent. It has been established in the literature that adolescent mothers who perceive more support and cooperation from the father of their child tend to experience greater well-being and more positive adaptation to becoming a parent (Kalil, Ziol-Guest, & Coley, 2005; Mallette et al., 2015). Conversely, as expected, the mothers in the conflictual and uninvolved profiles reported significantly higher levels of stress and lower levels of competence. These two profiles did not significantly differ from each other in terms of these two indicators of parental well-being. This finding is unique for adolescent parents especially, who may have less coparental involvement with the father of their child due to their living arrangements and complex romantic relationships. It may be assumed that being in a conflictual coparenting relationship is worse for adolescent maternal well-being than being disengaged from the father; however, these findings highlight that

each scenario may be related to negative maternal functioning.

Implications

The current findings, which may be of interest to practitioners working with young parents, reinforce the variability within the functioning of young coparenting relationships. The majority of teenaged mothers in our sample described cooperative coparenting discussions with their child's fathers. This finding is encouraging and reinforces the idea that adolescent parents have the ability to function as well as adult parents. Our findings also indicate that certain human, financial, and social resources, which may be more difficult for adolescents to attain, may be related to their coparenting negotiations. Practitioners would benefit from understanding the individual nature of the coparental relationship, as well as the resources available to the adolescent parents with whom they work. Early recognition of a potential lack of resources would allow for identification of and intervention for the most vulnerable of these young parents. For clinicians aiming to promote healthy family functioning, examination of familial resources that are linked with parenting factors could be instrumental for developing and tailoring program plans. Additionally, although maternal grandmothers are often considered as additional coparents for teenaged mothers (Herzog et al., 2007), our results indicated that support from paternal grandparents may also play a significant role, and should also be included as integral family members in parenting plans and interventions.

As well, our discovery of group differences in parental functioning highlights the importance of encouraging positivity between parents in child-focused communications. Practitioners who engage with teenaged mothers and fathers may benefit from expanding traditional interventions to include programming that targets initiation and strengthening of positive coparental communication. Specifically, relationship education programs that are intended to help adolescent parents learn how to manage their differences and conflict may

promote greater father engagement and positive maternal functioning (Fagan & Lee, 2010).

Parents who learn and develop these skills gain confidence and competence with maintaining a healthy parenting relationship, which in turn may help them to provide a stable family for their child, whether or not they choose to remain in a romantic relationship. Unfortunately, although the importance of youth-focused relationship education has gained interest (McElwan et al., 2016), programs for adolescent parents typically target mothers only, and do not often focus on the couple as a parenting team, with certain exceptions (e.g., Lewin et al., 2015). Additionally, in situations where cooperative coparenting is not present, programs may encourage disengaged or parallel coparenting among parents (Waller, 2012), as a method for maximizing child contact for both parents. However, as compared to the conflictual cluster of parents, our results indicate little difference in maternal functioning for those mothers who reported the father was not involved. Thus, focusing on improving cooperation between young parents may be an advantageous approach for practitioners concerned with improving maternal well-being. The current study did not investigate intimate partner violence or child endangerment, so while conflictual and uninvolved coparenting may be related to adverse maternal functioning, further study would be needed to clarify how these processes function in families with greater abuse potential.

Limitations and Future Directions

Though the current study may shed light on important characteristics among teenaged parents, our findings must be considered within the confines of their limitations and how these can be addressed in future research. While likely human, social, and financial capital antecedents were chosen based on research and theory, there may be additional indicators of each type of capital that are related to coparenting style. Additionally, the cross-sectional nature of the study limited our

ability to distinguish between causal and co-occurring effects of our variables. Due to the complex and capricious nature of adolescent coparenting relationships, as well as the possibility of bidirectional effects, the use of longitudinal designs in future studies could allow for the examination of fluctuations over time. Similarly, the current study relied solely on mothers' reports. Although common in studies of adolescent parents because of the challenges posed in collecting data from fathers (Savio Beers & Hollo, 2009), this presents an issue of bias in the accuracy and objectiveness of maternal reports. It is conceivable that mothers' reports of the coparenting relationship and fathers' parenting engagement may be falsely inflated. Lastly, we focused our examination of support on grandmothers, due to the importance of perceived maternal and paternal grandmother support for adolescent mothers (Herzog et al., 2007; Rhein et al., 1997). Future research on adolescent coparenting relationships would benefit from consideration of other potential sources of support, such as extended family members, peers, new partners, or teachers.

Conclusion

Despite its limitations, this study contributes to the literature in several ways. Firstly, our identification of three distinct coparenting styles indicated that adolescent coparenting relationships may not be best represented by dichotomous indicators (i.e., conflict or cooperation). Instead, it is important to consider that the absence of conflict may not mean the presence of cooperation, and vice versa. Thus, consideration of multiple coparenting styles may allow for more nuanced examinations of family functioning. Moreover, our examination of a human, financial, and social capital framework reinforced the connected nature of parental resources, coparenting style, and parental functioning. Attainment of resources may be challenging for adolescent parents, and those adolescent who lack capital may be more likely to display conflictual or uninvolved coparenting. Understanding of resources and their relationship to coparenting could

help practitioners to identify the most vulnerable parents and mitigate these risk factors. Lastly, we discovered that variability in coparenting was related to maternal reports of competence and stress as well as paternal engagement. Encouragement of the skills necessary for cooperation between adolescent coparents may reduce the risk of conflict, thereby enhancing father-child engagement and promoting maternal well-being.

Table 2.1

Descriptive Statistics for all Study Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Range	Skewness
Human Capital				
Father				
Age	19.05	1.91	15-24	.41
Education	1.46	.56	1-3	.72
Mother				
Age	17.00	1.063	14-19	-.12
Education	1.07	.29	1-3	4.32
Child				
Age	9.16	6.36	1-29	.95
Financial Capital				
Father Employment Status	.59	.49	0-1	-.37
Mother Employment Status	.49	.50	0-1	.05
Social Capital				
Relationship Status	.47	.50	0-1	.11
Cohabitation Status	.19	.40	0-1	1.58
Fathers' Nearness to Mother and Child	1.89	.83	1-3	.21
Maternal Grandmother Support	4.19	1.13	1-5	-1.34
Paternal Grandmother Support	2.44	1.55	1-5	.54
Length dated before Pregnancy	14.02	13.10	0-52	1.11
Coparenting				
1.Did he provide emotional support in dealing with your child	2.93	1.65	1-5	.06
2.Did you see yourself as a resource to him in raising your child	2.93	1.53	1-5	-.03
3.Did you provide him emotional support for dealing with your child	3.15	1.63	1-5	-.22
4.Was he a resource to you in raising your child	2.58	1.54	1-5	.38
5.Did an argument result	2.41	1.41	1-5	.53
6.Did you and he call each other names	2.00	1.28	1-5	1.07
7.The conversation between you was stressful or tense	2.65	1.48	1-5	.27
8.Did you have basic differences of opinion about issues related to childrearing	2.51	1.35	1-5	.34
9.Was the atmosphere between you hostile or angry	2.02	1.12	1-5	.82
Parental Functioning				
Maternal Stress	2.70	.65	1.41-5	.69
Maternal Competence	5.19	.79	2.25-6	-1.56
Paternal Engagement	2.64	1.33	1-5	.08

Table 2.2

Model Fit Statistics for the Latent Profile Solutions

Solution	LMR	PBLRT	AIC	Adj.-BIC	Entropy	SmallestProfile[1] (%)
Two Profiles	366.80***	-1980.98***	3643.57	3722.76	.95	54(43.2%)
Three Profiles	**242.38***	**-1793.78*****	**3416.17**	**3403.49**	**.96**	**24(19.2%)**
Four Profiles	116.27	-1670.09***	3317.50	3301.47	.95	24(19.2%)
Five Profiles	77.29	-1610.75***	3258.61	3239.25	.95	21(16.8%)

Note. LMR = Lo-Mendell-Rubin Adjusted Likelihood Ratio Test; PBLRT = Parametric Bootstrapped Likelihood Ratio Test; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion; Adj.-BIC = Sample Size Adjusted Bayesian Information Criterion. [1]Number of mothers in the smallest profile solution.

Table 2.3

Between-class Comparisons on Predictors (Multinomial Logistic Regression)

	Conflictual	**Cooperative**	**Uninvolved**
	Logit (OR)	Logit (OR)	Logit (OR)
Human Capital			
Father			
Age	-.16 (.85)	-.21 (.81)	.28(1.34)
Education	-.54 (.58)	-.92 (.40)	.37(1.45)
Mother			
Age	-.13 (.88)	.43 (1.53)	-.55(.58)*
Education	-.19 (.83)	.88 (2.41)	-1.07(.34)
Child			
Age	.12 (1.18)**	.00 (1.00)	.11(1.12)*
Financial Capital			
Father Employment Status	-.647 (.52)	.73 (2.08)	-1.38(.25)*
Mother Employment Status	1.60 (4.96)**	.53 (1.70)	1.07(2.92)*
Social Capital			
Relationship Status	-2.7 (.07)***	1.84 (6.32)	-4.33(.01)***
Cohabitation Status	-2.42 (.09)**	17.53 (.00)***	-20.13(.00)***
Fathers' Nearness to Mother and Child	.10 (2.72)**	-.469 (.63)	-1.172(.31)**
Maternal Grandmother Support	.19 (1.20)	-.267 (.76)	.452(1.57)
Paternal Grandmother Support	-.56 (.57)***	.64 (1.89)	-1.19(.30)**
Length dated before Pregnancy	.00 (1.00)	.06 (1.06)	-.06(.94)

Note. Comparisons are made for demographic covariates using the concerned profile group as a reference. OR = Odds Ratio.

*p>.05; ** p>.01; ***p>.001;

Table 2.4

Mean Group Differences in Parental Functioning Based on Coparenting Style

	Cooperative (*n* =53)		**Conflictual (*n* =48)**		**Uninvolved (*n* =24)**	
	M	*SE*	*M*	*SE*	*M*	*SE*
Parental Functioning						
Maternal Parenting Stress	2.502 [a b]	.078	2.884 [a]	.105	2.800 [a b]	.132
Maternal Parenting Competence	5.560 [a b]	.097	4.885 [a]	.127	4.932 [a b]	.195
Father-Child Engagement	3.738 [a b c]	.110	2.085 [a b c]	.173	1.007 [a b c]	.005

Note. Comparisons are made across the three latent profile groups. Similar subscripts indicate group differences at the $p>.05$ level.

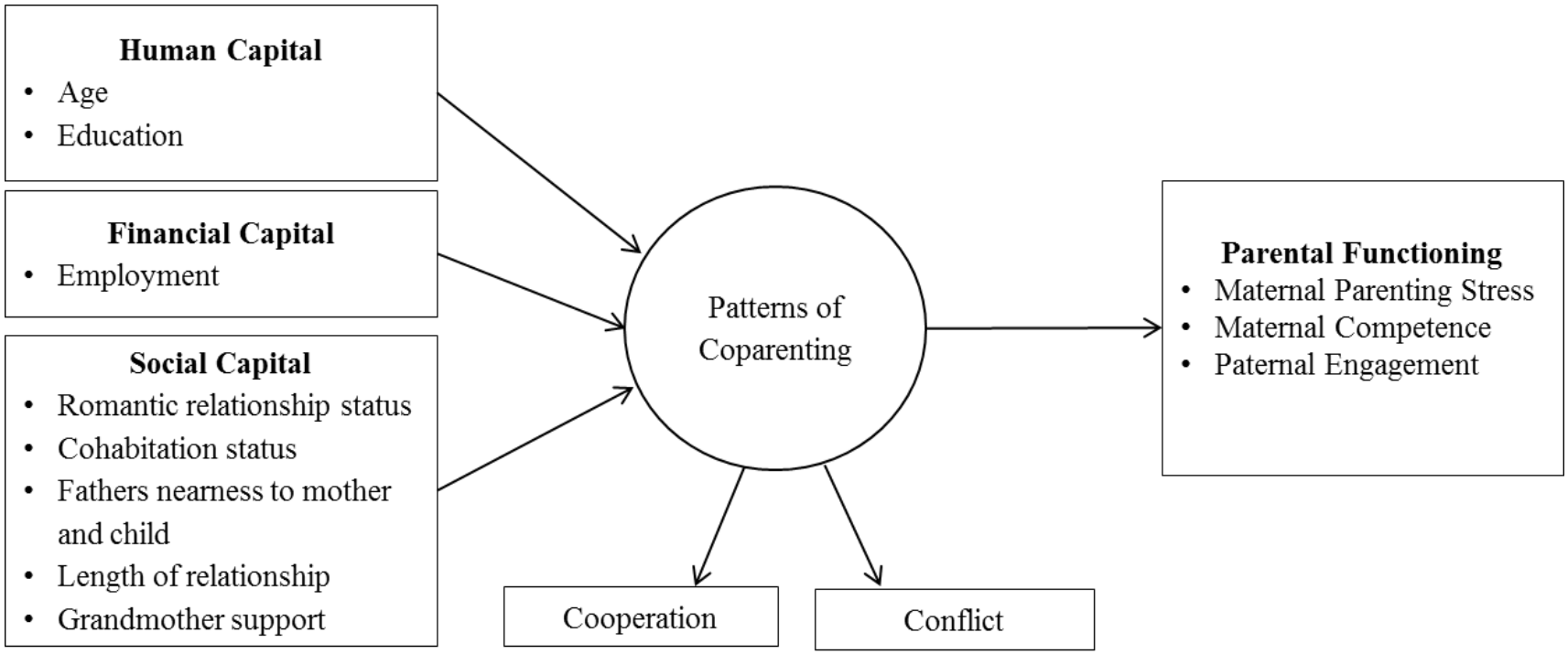

Figure 2.1. Conceptual model of expected covariates and outcomes of adolescent coparenting styles.

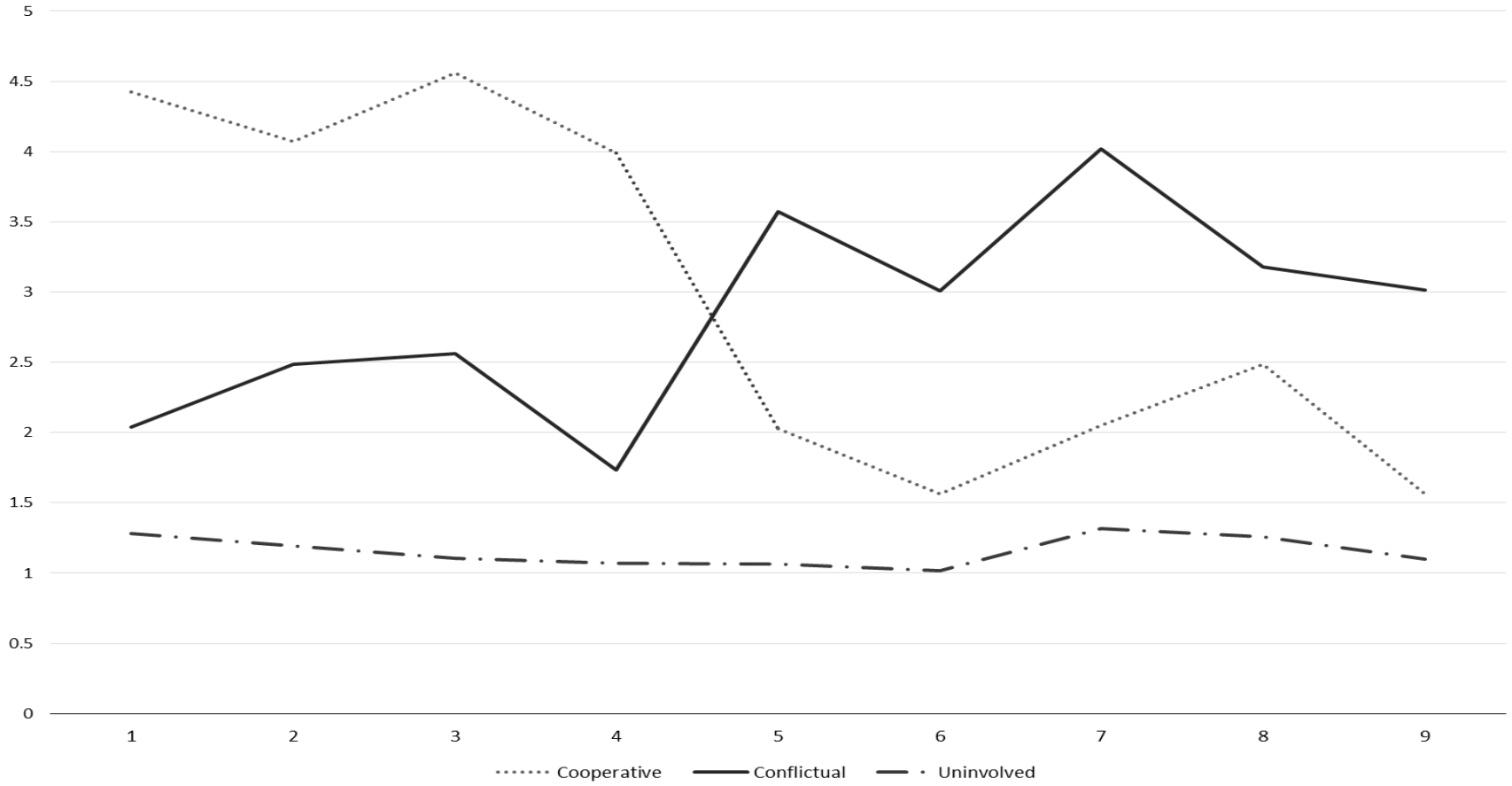

Figure 2.2. Three latent classes based on patterns of coparenting cooperation and conflict. Numbers 1 through 4 on the x-axis reflect cooperative items while numbers 5 through 9 are reflective of conflictual items.

CHAPTER 3

PATERNAL SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT IN UNMARRIED FRAGILE FAMILIES: IMPACTS ON LONG-TERM MATERNAL FUNCTIONING

Abstract

Fragile families are defined as those families who include unmarried or romantically unstable parents, who have children, and are socioeconomically disadvantaged (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010). Mothers in fragile families may experience risk factors that lead to increased depressive symptoms that inhibit their ability to bounce back after stressful events (Kalil & Ryan, 2010). Risk factors for poorer maternal functioning may include fathers' involvement with their common child, as well as the quality of the coparenting relationship. For example, declines in father involvement, as well as a lack of coparenting support have been found to be associated poorer maternal adjustment. We used a life course perspective and tenants from the spillover hypothesis to examine the connected nature of coparenting and father involvement over time amongst continuously unmarried mothers from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study. A bidirectional latent growth curve analysis demonstrated that father involvement and coparenting support declined over time within this fragile population. However, early father involvement was associated with more gradual declines in coparenting support over the child's first five years, while early coparenting support also predicted a slower decline in father involvement over time. Lastly, steeper declines in both were associated with more negative maternal outcomes when their child was 9 years old.

Introduction

Fragile families are defined as those families who include unmarried or romantically unstable parents, have children, and are socioeconomically disadvantaged (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010). Typically, these families are formed after a nonmarital birth and consist of a residential mother and a non-residential father. Many parents in fragile families cohabit, while others live apart but remain in a romantic relationship. Both of these family structures are vulnerable to greater disruption of the coparenting relationship, and often experience family instability (Waldfogel, Craigie, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). These are risk factors that may negatively impact the mental health and well-being of these parents and children. Mothers in fragile families tend to experience more economic hardship and have fewer sources of external support, which may open them up to increased depressive symptoms that inhibit their ability to bounce back after stressful events (Kalil & Ryan, 2010). Father absence has also been identified as a risk factor in fragile families. Because fathers are likely to live separately from the mother and child, they have less availability and access to their children. Due to the lack of parental resources, strained parental relationships, poorer parental emotional well-being, and the higher potential for father absence, children who live in fragile families have worse educational and behavioral outcomes, and are more likely to display risky behavioral choices into adolescence (Waldfogel et al., 2010).

The outcomes of family members in fragile families is of particular importance to researchers and practitioners concerned with issues of racial and class equality in family functioning. Minority children, especially African-Americans and Hispanics, are more likely than White children to have unmarried parents (Hamilton, Martin, & Ventura, 2009). Similarly, those with lower socio-economic status and lower educational attainment are more likely to

experience nonmarital childbearing (Carlson & McLanahan, 2010). Better understanding of factors that influence fathering and coparenting behavior, as well as changes in these behaviors over time, would elucidate contextual as well as risk and protective factors in families that are more likely to result in positive mental health outcomes for mothers.

Fathering Behavior in Fragile Families

The role of the father in unmarried fragile families is complex and multidimensional. There are multiple ways that fathers can be involved in the lives of their children, and in cases where the father is not living with the mother and child, it may be especially difficult to determine the actual amount of time that the father spends actively involved in responsible fathering behavior. It has been suggested that the affective nature of fathering (e.g., connection, active involvement) may be representative of an emotional climate in which there is a positive father-child relationship and the child understands that the father is available as a support (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013). In order to nurture this positive relationship, fathers can be available for their children through positive engagement activities, which include time spent actively engaged with their children, and encompasses the aspect of play that is typically characteristic of father-child interactions (Fletcher, St. George, & Freeman, 2013). When their children are young, fathers may also be involved in caregiving, which includes but is not limited to feeding, bathing and routine care. These types of involvement have been shown to have positive impacts for children, including social, academic, behavioral, and psychological well-being (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013).

Unfortunately, in vulnerable family situations, fathers tend to demonstrate involvement patterns that diminish as their child gets older (Slade, 2013). This lack of involvement over time has been attributed to many different factors, including lack of resources, a lack of commitment

between the parents, new maternal romantic partnerships, a lack of time and/or availability, and a hostile or contentious relationship between the parents (Cabrera, Ryan, Mitchell, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008; Cutrona, Hessling, Bacon, & Russell, 1998). However, if the parents have any relationship, even a friendship, fathers are more likely to remain involved over time (Cabrera et al., 2008). Thus, the nature of the mother-father relationship is vital to understanding patterns of father involvement.

Bidirectional Nature of Father Involvement and Coparenting

Coparenting relationships, or the overlapping responsibility in raising a child, form early in the child's life, even if the parents are not involved in a romantic relationship (Carlson & McLanahan, 2007). Supportive coparenting relationships are those in which each parent, through joint investment in raising the child, provides the other parent with emotional and functional assistance in the parenting role, while actively communicating regarding the child's needs (McHale & Irace, 2011; Feinberg, 2003). Unfortunately, as compared with married couples, the coparenting relationships of unmarried parents are more unstable (Lichter, Qian, & Mellott, 2006) and most unmarried couples will dissolve their coparenting relationship early in their child's life (McLanahan, 2009). This dissolution is likely due to a lack of commitment to the other parent (Nock, 1995), or formation of new romantic relationships, resulting in disengagement over time (Gibson-Davis, 2008; Kamp Dush, Kotila, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2011). Parents who were in a romantic relationship that has ended face a particular challenge maintaining a supportive coparenting environment, due to negative feelings and possibly conflict stemming from the dissolved relationship (Kamp Dush et al., 2011).

In fragile families, the quality of the coparenting relationship and its likelihood of continuation over time may be necessarily influenced by the involvement of the father in

parenting. For instance, in order to have a coparenting relationship, there must be two parents invested in child rearing (McHale & Kuersten-Hogan, 2004). Thus, if the father continues his active involvement with the child, it is likely that he will also be more supportive in his coparenting role. For example, in other longitudinal studies of the influence of father involvement on coparenting, a father's engagement in play activities with his child was predictive of later coparenting support among married couples (Jia & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2011).

It has been suggested that the father-child relationship is more sensitive to outside influences, and as such, the quality of the coparenting relationship serves as a support system for fathers in their parenting role and can affect fathering behavior to a large degree (Fagan & Cabrera, 2012), regardless of the romantic relationship status. For instance, in their study of nonresidential low-income fathers, Coates and Phares (2014) found that coparenting relationship quality was associated significantly with levels of paternal involvement. Coparenting has been considered as having both a direct and indirect effect on father involvement, due in part to the greater sensitivity of fathers to their relationship with the mother (Coates & Phares, 2014). However, fathers in highly conflictual coparenting relationships are less likely to display positive parenting practices (Elliston, McHale, Talbot, Parmley, & Kuersten-Hogan, 2008). In vulnerable populations of never married families, a supportive and functional coparenting relationship may be of particular importance to father involvement and may serve as a protective factor (Varga, Gee, Rivera, & Reyes, 2014), in that father's involvement with his children may be beneficial for family members only if the coparents are able to maintain collaboration and agreement on parenting practices and engage in harmonious conversations about their children.

Maternal Functioning

It has been well documented that maternal functioning has significant effects on the parent-child relationship. For instance, maternal depression has been considered as a risk factor for impaired parenting (Wang, Wu, Anderson, & Florence, 2011). The parenting style of mothers who are depressed is characterized by irritability, hostility, and disengagement from their child (Lovejoy, Graczyk, O'Hare, & Neuman, 2000). On the other hand, children of mothers who report high life satisfaction tend to display fewer behavioral challenges, more prosocial behavior, and less shyness (Brajsa-Zganec & Hanzec, 2014). However, there is variability within the functioning and outcomes of children, so it is important to discover the pathways and processes that may lead to adversity or resilience in mothers, particularly in vulnerable families.

Coparenting and Maternal Functioning

The majority of empirical literature examining coparenting after birth has been limited to the time period of infancy or early childhood, and has found supportive coparenting to be associated with parental social, emotional, and psychological well-being, even when controlling for the parental marital or romantic relationship (Cummings, Merrilees, & George, 2010; Hock & Mooradian, 2013). Similar to the function of coparenting as a support for fathers in their parenting role, support from the father in their parenting provides young mothers with a sense of competence and positive adjustment (Feinberg, 2003). Thus, coparenting support is associated with less maternal distress (Solmeyer & Feinberg, 2011). On the contrary, when a mother is feeling tense or anxious about her relationship with her coparent, she is more likely to use less effective parenting strategies and feel stressed in her interactions with her child (Amato, 1998). Coparental conflict, undermining, and discrepancies in childrearing beliefs have been associated with maternal psychological distress and depression (Dorsey, Forehand, & Brody , 2007; Feinberg, 2003; Solmeyer & Feinberg, 2011), difficulties in maternal adaptation, and

maladjustment to adverse situations (Conger et al., 2002; Jones, Forehand, Dorsey, Foster,& Brody et al., 2005).

Father Involvement and Maternal Functioning

Scholars have primarily considered the influence of a father's involvement on his children, but some have also considered the impact of fathering behavior on other members of the family. For instance, involvement is beneficial for maternal outcomes, with mothers of any age demonstrating more emotional well-being (Cutrona et al., 1998; Mallette, Futris, Brown, & Oshri, 2015), and displaying improved maternal functioning (Turner, Grindstaff, and Phillips, 1990). However, lower levels of father involvement, especially when the child is young, is associated with mothers' higher depressive symptoms (Paulson, Dauber, & Leiferman, 2006; Sejourne, Vaslot, Beaume, Goutaudier, & Chabrol, 2012). In other longitudinal examinations of vulnerable families (Laxman et al., 2015), as well as in fragile families (Slade, 2013), early father involvement is predictive of maternal depression later in the child's life.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Life course perspective (LCP) has been instrumental in fathering research because it incorporates trajectories, such as family conditions that change frequently over time (Elder, 1998). The trajectory of fathering behavior, which influences and is influenced by changes in the family (Fagan, 2014), may evolve over time, and fathers may be more or less involved at differing time points. For example, associations between early and later father involvement have been identified using LCP as a framework (Cabrera et al., 2008). LCP has four main tenants that help to understand non-residential fathering and how it is associated with the coparenting relationship (Scott et al., 2010). First, a father's personal agency is his choosing to parent his child(ren) either directly or indirectly through life factors (Elder, 1998). Second, the concept of

linked lives is one that explains that a young father relies on relationships with significant other people and that his coparenting relationship with the child's mother is a prominent factor in his choice and ability to parent (Scott et al., 2010). Third, individual and familial paths of development, kin networks, and roles change and develop throughout history and time, and thus it is not possible to understand the experience of fathers by looking at their families at just one point in time. Last, context (such as living and relationship arrangements) is crucial to understanding involved or uninvolved fathering behavior (Dyer, Pleck, & McBride, 2012). This theory has merit for understanding how and why unmarried fathers may become and remain involved in the lives of their children, and emphasizes the important nature of the father-mother relationship in that process.

Likewise, the spillover hypothesis, drawn from family systems theory, social learning theory, the socialization hypothesis, and sociological theory, may provide insight into how the quality of the coparental relationship will spill over and affect parents and their parenting behaviors (Erel & Burman, 1995). The first mechanism is derived from family systems theory and suggests that parents will unite by blaming their children for their problems, thereby ignoring conflicts and problems within their own relationship (Erel & Burman, 1995). A second mechanism, derived from social learning theory, posits that the dysfunctional and functional coparenting relationships will be modeled within the parent-child relationship. The third mechanism supposes that parents who experience disputes over childrearing will display poor communication and inconsistent or incongruent methods of parenting. The last mechanism suggests that conflict within a coparental relationship will cause parents to be more emotionally stressed and less available for their children (Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988). Based on this hypothesis, the ability of the parents to coparent effectively would be associated with a more

involved, higher quality father-child relationship, whereas coparental conflict would be likely to result in inconsistent or uninvolved fathering behaviors. There has been empirical support for this hypothesis (Fagan & Cabrera, 2012; Erel & Burman, 1995) in explaining how behaviors within the coparenting relationship can spill over to affect the father-child relationship.

Current Study

Coparenting arrangements and relationships are never static (Feinberg, 2003), and the complexity and variability of family structure has made conceptualization and measurement of coparenting difficult. There continue to be many gaps in understanding regarding processes and variables that affect and are affected by coparenting behaviors. The majority of studies use small samples that are not representative of the general public (McHale & Irace, 2011). Longitudinal designs have been used to better understand causality and directionality, but they typically deal with a fairly short time period (less than three years) that may not account for major changes in development or family shifts over time (McHale & Irace, 2011). Similarly, fathering behavior is likely to change over time and in response to many internal and external risk factors (e.g., psychological functioning, familial changes, new partners, child birth, age, marital status and quality, child characteristics, etc.) so understanding the complexity of father involvement would work best when multiple time points are considered (Phares & Compas, 1992). However, the majority of literature on this topic uses cross-sectional data, which not only invalidates any claims of directionality between variables, but also does not allow for examinations of change in father involvement over time (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Marsiglio & Cohan, 2000). In order to combat these limitations, the current study examines whether there are concurrent bidirectional influences of coparenting and father involvement and the impact of coparenting and father involvement trajectories on maternal functioning. The current study is

based on four waves of data collection spanning the nine years of time following the birth of a child born into a fragile family. As illustrated in Figure 1, we developed the following hypotheses: (1) The initial level of coparenting support influences the level of change in father involvement; (2) The initial level of father involvement influences the rate of change in coparenting support; (3) Maternal repartnering influences baseline coparenting support and father involvement; (4) Maternal repartnering influences trajectories of coparenting support and father involvement; (5) The rate of change of coparenting support influences maternal functioning when the child is age nine; (6) The rate of change of father involvement influences maternal functioning when the child is age nine.

Methods

The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study is considered to be an excellent dataset for examination of fathering from a life course perspective (Fagan, 2014). The Fragile Families study began in 1998 and follows a new birth cohort of children in 20 U.S. cities to learn more about the circumstances and experiences of unmarried parents and their children in the early years of their child's life. The total sample of 4,898 births includes 3,712 unmarried parents and a comparison sample of 1,186 married parents. The weighted sample data are representative of nonmarital births to parents residing in cities with populations over 200,000. New mothers were initially interviewed in person at the hospital, and the fathers of their children were interviewed either at the hospital or someplace else as soon as possible after the birth. Mothers and fathers were also surveyed when their child was one, three, five, and nine years old. Children were additionally surveyed when they were nine years old. For nonmarried parents, the response rate at birth was 87 percent for mothers and 75 percent for eligible fathers. Of the mothers interviewed at the child's birth, there was an 89, 86, 84, and 72 percent follow-up at 1-, 3-, 5-

and 9-years, respectively (Carlson et al., 2011; Slade, 2013). Measures in the current study are based solely on reports from mothers, because they were more likely to participate and less likely to drop out of the study than fathers.

Sample

The current sample includes 1,623 mothers who were unmarried at the time of the child's birth, who remained unmarried throughout the nine years of data collection, and who reported that the father of their child was available for involvement with their child (e.g., alive, not incarcerated). Parental and child demographic information was collected at the time of the focal child's birth. The age of the mothers ranged from 15 to 48 years (M=25.1, SD=5.6), and 13.3% of mothers were White, 61.1% were African American, 23.0% were Hispanic and 2.5% were "Other." Focal children were 47.3% female. According to paternal reports, the age of the fathers ranged from 15 to 53 years (M=26.14, SD=6.8); 16.7% were White, 65.7% were African American, and 17.7% were "Other." Most of the fathers (64.9%) did not reside in the same household with the mother and focal child at the first follow-up interview (Year 1) Last, almost half of the mothers (49.4%) reported being in a romantic relationship with the biological father at Year 1.

Measures

Control Variable. At each time point, *maternal repartnering* was assessed by a single question: "Are you currently involved in a romantic relationship with someone other than [FATHER]?" Responses were recoded (*yes*=1; *no* = 0) such that *yes* was indicative of repartnering at any time point during years one through five.

Supportive Coparenting. Supportive coparenting was measured using a 6-item scale, and was reported by mothers at years one, three, and five. Questions measured key aspects of

supportive coparenting, including interparental cooperation, communication, and the extent to which parents respected and valued each other's parental roles (Cohen & Weissman, 1984). The same items have been used to measure supportive coparenting in other research utilizing these data (e.g., Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008). Items included (a) "When [FATHER] is with (child), he acts like the father you want for your child," (b) "He supports you in the way you want to raise (child)," (c) "You can trust [FATHER] to take good care of child," (d) "He respects the schedules and rules you make for child," (e) "You and [FATHER] talk about problems that come up with raising child," and (f) "You can count on [FATHER] for help when you need someone to look after child for a few hours." Response options when the child was one were (1) rarely true; (2) sometimes true; and (3) always true. However, response options at years three and five included a never true option: (1) never true/rarely true; (2) sometimes true; and (3) always true. Mean scores were computed at each wave (α = .893; .902 & .890, respectively), with higher scores reflecting more supportive coparenting behaviors.

Father Involvement. Father involvement at each time point was measured using maternal reports of the father's caregiving activities during the past month. The questions on this scale, which are reflective of the "engagement" dimension of involvement (e.g., Pleck, 1987), assessed 10 parenting activities, including participation in childcare activities (e.g., assist child with eating, put child to bed), playing (e.g., play imaginary games with him/her), and affection (e.g., tell child he loves him/her, hug or show physical affection to him/her). Participants described the number of days per week that the father engaged in each activity. Mean scores were computed for father involvement at each wave (α = .930; .920 & .919, respectively). Higher scores indicate more frequent father involvement.

Maternal Functioning Outcomes. *Maternal Depression* was assessed by the Composite International Diagnostic Interview – Short Form (CIDI-SF), Section A (Kessler, Andrews, Mroczek, Ustun, & Wittchen, 1998) in which respondents reported whether or not they had experienced feelings of depression that lasted for two weeks or more within the past year. Mothers who answered "no" were recoded with a score of 0. If they answered "yes," they were asked more specific questions about 1) losing interest, 2) feeling tired, 3) change in weight, 4) trouble sleeping, 5) trouble concentrating, 6) feeling worthless, and 7) thinking about death. These answeres were treated as a count variable, in which each response of "yes" was counted as a depressive symptom. This resulted in a possible maximum score of 8, including the initial question and seven stem questions, which indicated the highest number of depressive symptoms, and a minimum score of 0, indicating that they had not experienced feelings of dysphoria or anhedonia in the past year. *Maternal Life Satisfaction* was assessed with a single item in which respondents answered how satisfied (1 = *very dissatisfied* to 4 = *very satisfied*) they were with their life overall. Higher scores were indicative of more life satisfaction.

Analysis

Data were analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM) involving univariate and parallel process latent growth curves (LGC) based on the three time points of data. Statistical methods typically used to assess change over time do not allow for examination of within family trajectories, only between family changes. The use of growth curve models may improve this by examining interindividual differences in intraindividual change over time (Jung & Wickrama, 2008). All analyses were performed using M*plus* Version 7.31 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2015). Missing data was analyzed with the M*plus* missing data default, estimating the model under missing data theory using all available data (Full Information Maximum Likelihood; FIML).

Analyses were performed in two main phases. First, univariate growth curves were modeled with no covariates to investigate initial levels and rates of change in maternal reports of coparenting support and father involvement. Variances in the intercept and rate of change indicate individual differences at baseline and rates of change respectively. For the current study, baseline (Year 1) for all models reflected maternal reports one year after the baseline interview at birth. Each individual trajectory contained a unique intercept (ν), a linear, time-varying slope (η), and time-specific measurement error (ε). Thus, this level 1 measurement can be represented as:

$$Y_i = \nu_i + \Lambda\eta_i + \varepsilon_i$$

or expanded algebraically as:

$$\begin{bmatrix} Y_{1i} \\ Y_{2i} \\ Y_{3i} \end{bmatrix} = \begin{bmatrix} \nu_{1i} \\ \nu_{2i} \\ \nu_{3i} \end{bmatrix} + \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 1 \\ 1 & 3 \\ 1 & 5 \end{bmatrix} \begin{bmatrix} \eta_{1i} \\ \eta_{2i} \end{bmatrix} + \begin{bmatrix} \varepsilon_{1i} \\ \varepsilon_{2i} \\ \varepsilon_{3i} \end{bmatrix}$$

where η_{1i} reflects the initial status at year 1 and η_{2i} reflects the growth rate factor. The lambda matrix ($\Lambda\eta$) contains factor loadings, specified as [1 3 5], that reflect the linear trajectory across three time points at equal intervals.

Second, in order to test hypotheses 1 and 2, we modeled the two levels of the latent growth curves simultaneously using a parallel process LGCM, which examined repeated measures of coparenting support and father involvement simultaneously. To test hypotheses 3 and 4, we incorporated a covariate to explain individual differences in baseline and growth over time as a function of maternal repartnering. In the last part of this phase, we tested hypotheses 5 and 6 by regressing two maternal outcomes (i.e., depression and life satisfaction), measured when the focal children were 9 years old, onto the slopes of coparenting support and father involvement.

The evaluation of model fit was based on the chi-square (χ^2), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker Lewis Index (TLI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Good model fit indicates consistency with the data and is required before interpretation of causality in a structural model (Kenny, 2010). A non-significant chi-square test indicates a good model fit (Carmines & McIver, 1981), however in samples larger than 400, chi-square is almost always statistically significant (Kenny, 2010), so in the current study, we relied on alternative measures of fit. For TLI and CFI, a value above 0.90 is acceptable, with values above 0.95 indicating good fit. For RMSEA and SRMR, a value of less than 0.08 is acceptable (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 3.1 presents means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for all study variables. The descriptive statistics showed the pattern of decreasing coparenting support and father involvement from years one to five. On average, mothers reported a small number of depressive symptoms, and high life satisfaction at year nine. Specifically, 73.7% of mothers reported that they had experienced no depressive symptoms during the past year. Of the remaining 26.3% mothers who did report depression in the past year, the average number of depressive symptoms was approximately four, with 15.3% of mothers reporting experiencing five or more symptoms. Additionally, in total, approximately 62% of mothers reported repartnering at some point between year one and five. During each time point, 16.1%, 27.8%, and 37.3% of mothers reported that they had begun a relationship with a new partner at years one, three, and five, respectively.

Unconditional LGCM

The unconditional LGCM with three repeated measures (1-, 3-, 5-years) of coparenting support provided an adequate fit to the observed data ($\chi2(1) = 44.83$, $p < .001$, CFI=.95, TLI=.86, RMSEA=.17 [90% CI, .13-.21], SRMR = .04). Results for the coparenting model, presented in Table 3.2, indicated statistically significant intercept variance ($\sigma_{I)}$, indicating variability in initial levels of coparenting support between individuals. The slope variance ($\sigma_{s)}$ was also significant, indicating variability in the rate of change between individuals. A slope parameter estimate (μ_s) was statistically significant and negative, indicating that coparenting support tended to decrease over time. A significant negative covariation ($\sigma_{I\text{-}s}$) between the intercept and linear growth terms suggested that higher initial levels of coparenting support were associated with a faster rate of decrease in the level of coparenting support over time.

The linear unconditional model was also estimated for father involvement over the three time points, and this model had excellent fit to the data ($\chi2(1) = .094$, ns, CFI=1.00, TLI=1.00, RMSEA=.00 [90% CI, .00-.05], SRMR=.003). Results for the father involvement model are presented in Table 3.2 and indicated that there was statistically significant intercept and slope variance. A statistically significant negative slope mean indicated that fathers' involvement with their children decreased over time. A significant negative correlation between the intercept and slope factors suggested that higher initial levels of father involvement were associated with a faster rate of decline in father involvement over time.

Conditional LGCM: Parallel Process Growth Model

Results from the full parallel process growth model are shown in Table 3.3. The model had good fit to the data ($\chi2(18) = 122.09$, $p < .001$, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.06 [90% CI, 0.05 - 0.07], SRMR = 0.06). To examine hypotheses (1) and (2), we investigated bidirectionality in the effects of initial status and linear growth over time of both father

involvement and coparenting support, structural paths were examined between the intercept and the slope factors across the two constructs. These crossed paths were examined to determine whether the initial levels of coparenting support or father involvement predict one another's linear growth over repeated measurements. Covariances were estimated between the intercept and slope factors within construct as well as between the intercept factors across construct and between the slope factors across construct.

Bidirectional relations between the intercept and linear slope factors across coparenting support and father involvement indicated a significant positive path from the coparenting support intercept factor to the father involvement slope factor. In other words, mothers reporting higher initial levels of coparenting support reported a slower rate of decrease in father involvement over time. Results also showed that the father involvement intercept factor significantly and positively predicted the coparenting support slope factor. That is, mothers who reported higher initial levels of father involvement perceived a slower deceleration in coparenting support over time. To examine hypotheses (3) and (4), we examined the initial levels and rate of change of coparenting support and father involvement as a function of maternal repartnering. Mothers who had repartnered were found to report lower initial levels of father involvement and coparenting support, as well as steeper declines in coparenting support over time, but reported no significant differences in change in father involvement over time.

To examine hypotheses (5) and (6), we investigated whether changes in coparenting support and fathers' involvement were predictive of maternal functioning. Two maternal outcomes (i.e., depression and life satisfaction), measured when the children were age nine, were regressed onto the slopes of coparenting support and father involvement. Results, presented in Table 3.3, showed a significant negative association between the slope of coparenting support

and maternal depression, indicating that mothers reporting steeper declines in coparenting over time also reported higher levels of depression when their children were nine years of age. Results also showed a significant negative path from the slope of father involvement to maternal depression and a significant positive path from the slope of father involvement to maternal life satisfaction, indicating that steeper declines in father involvement led to more depression and lower life satisfaction at age nine.

Discussion

Life course perspective posits that the role that a father plays in his child's life will develop and change over the course of the child's life, due to a variety of life factors, as well as personal and relational characteristics (Elder, 1998). Additionally, the spillover hypothesis suggests that the coparental relationship between mothers and fathers will affect the parenting behaviors of the fathers, whereby fathers in supportive coparenting relationships will be more likely to demonstrate more frequent involvement (Erel & Burman, 1995). The purpose of the current study was to investigate the life course of unmarried mothers and fathers in fragile families through the examination of reciprocal relationships between perceived coparenting support and father involvement using a longitudinal sequential design. This study presents novel information on the concurrent and reciprocal longitudinal relationships between these two constructs, as well as their long-term effect on maternal functioning.

The results of this study show that coparenting support for these unmarried parents declined over the time period from year one to year five. This finding is consistent with other studies of parents who have experienced a relationship dissolution (Kamp Dush et al., 2011), and also consonant with the idea that having a less securely committed romantic relationship may also mean less investment in and dedication to the coparenting relationship, which thereby may

be more susceptible to decline over time (Kamp Dush et al., 2011; Nock, 1995). The mothers' repartnering was also predictive of both the initial level and the slope of coparenting support, indicating that mothers who had a new partner were more likely to report lower levels of support when their children were young and to report a steeper decline in coparenting from year one to five. This is consistent with past research that indicates that involvement with a new partner may decrease the motivation that the mother has to devote to coparent with the biological father (Kamp Dush et al., 2011). Interestingly, our results from the unconditional model also indicated that the initial level of coparenting negatively predicted the rate of increase in coparenting over time, which suggested that those with the highest initial levels of coparenting support had the largest declines in coparenting over time. This may be due to the fact that those who started low on supportive coparenting stayed low, whereas those who started higher had more opportunity for larger decreases in support over time.

Mothers' reports of fathers' involvement also declined from age one to age five, which is a finding that replicates prior research on this population of fragile families (Slade, 2013). Especially amongst unmarried coparents, fathers spend less time involved in play and caretaking as their child gets older. Mothers who became romantically involved with a new partner were also significantly more likely to report less father involvement when their child was one. This finding is fairly common among examinations of father involvement (Cabrera et al., 2008), and has been attributed to the fathers being left out of parenting, and to exclusionary gatekeeping behavior on the part of the mother due to a desire to maintain a new family-like relationship with the new partner (Tach, Mincy, & Edin, 2010). Similar to coparenting support, mothers who reported the highest amounts of father involvement when their child was one also reported the steepest decreases in father involvement over time. These particular findings are somewhat

counterintuitive, and certainly contrary to most of the extant literature, which suggests that for unmarried couples, early father involvement is predictive of sustained father involvement into toddlerhood (Cabrera, Fagan, & Farrie, 2008). It has been suggested that fathers are more sensitive to relational difficulties than mothers (Fagan & Cabrera, 2012), so perhaps for unmarried fathers, the lack of a committed relationship is even more disruptive to those fathers who were frequently involved with their children early on. It is also likely that those fathers who were highly involved may have had more frequent contact with the mother and thus, more opportunity for disagreements, which may have discouraged them from engaging in regular interactions as the child aged.

Consistent with LCP theory, spillover hypothesis, and prior literature (Coates & Phares, 2014), coparenting support was predictive of the rate of change in father involvement, such that higher initial coparenting support acted as a buffer for the decline in involvement. Conversely, father involvement was also predictive of the change in coparenting support over time, such that mothers reporting high levels of father involvement early on in the child's life were more likely to report a slower decline in coparenting support. These results remained robust, even when controlling for maternal repartnering. These combined results underscore the reciprocal and interconnected nature of the relationship of the parents as it relates to raising their child and a father's active involvement in parenting his child. Based on the spillover hypothesis, when parents do not display support and cooperation in their parenting relationship, they may be more stressed and are less likely to be available to their children. Our findings align with this hypothesis and demonstrate that fathers' involvement is even more likely to drop off quickly when a supportive coparenting relationship is lacking.

In the same way that fathers seem sensitive to their relationship with the mother, maternal functioning also seems to be impacted by changes in the fathers' involvement and coparenting support. We found that mothers who reported the steepest decreases in the amount of time that the father spent with the child over time were more likely to report lower levels of life satisfaction and higher levels of depression when their children were nine. Similarly, mothers who reported more drastic declines in the amount of coparenting support they received from the father reported higher levels of depression when their children were nine. These results remained, even when accounting for new romantic relationships. These results are consistent with past research (Dorsey et al., 2007; Slade, 2013), but extend prior findings by explicating how trajectories and rates of change of coparental and paternal behaviors among unmarried parents affect long-term maternal functioning.

Implications

Our results demonstrate a clear need for targeted early intervention with both parents to promote involved fathering behavior and enhance coparental relationships. The timing of programming is particularly important, as our results indicated that for unmarried fragile families, fathers' involvement in coparenting and caregiving begins to wane starting about a year after their child's birth. It has been suggested that education on healthy relationships could be most beneficial at certain transition points, such as the birth of a baby (Halford, Markman, Kline, & Stanley, 2003). Thus, family focused programming that teaches healthy coparenting skills during pregnancy or early in a child's life may serve a preventative function by enabling parents to learn and practice positive relationship behaviors before support begins to decline. However, our findings indicated that high levels of early supportive behavior may not be enough to maintain co-caregiving relationships over time. Booster sessions that reinforce healthy

relationship skills over time could assist with retention of the learned skills (Markman & Rhodes, 2012) and allow educators to reevaluate coparenting arrangements, new romantic partnerships, and involvement at each follow-up session. Knowledge of changes to family structure and functioning could allow for individualized instruction and inclusion of specific topics within the program curriculum, such as information regarding the development and maintenance of healthy step-families, negotiation of certain coparenting tasks, or communication about child support.

Although children's outcomes are typically examined in the literature, understanding how fathers' parenting behaviors affect the functioning of the mother is of particular use to those who seek to improve familial well-being, especially in vulnerable or fragile populations, and may provide insight into designing and implementing family focused interventions. Specifically, maternal depression, which has been identified as a significant risk factor for child and maternal health and well-being, is estimated to be experienced by approximately 30 percent of unmarried women (Wang et al., 2011). Understanding how coparenting and father involvement are connected to maternal functioning among unmarried mothers could enable practitioners to identify mothers who may be at highest risk for depression. The current findings indicate that identification and encouragement of support and involvement of both parents over time, regardless of new romantic partners, may combat depression and strengthen life satisfaction of unmarried mothers.

Limitations and Future Directions

The large sample size, as well as the use of LGCM, was a strength of this study, which provides insight into the interlinked nature of the coparenting relationship and a father's involvement with his children over time. However, there are some limitations of the study. First, the data derive from maternal self-reports, which might not be an accurate representation of

the actual paths of father involvement and coparenting support over time. Although fathers were interviewed in the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study, the fathers who participated were less likely than the mothers to respond to all questions. Thus, the amount of missing paternally reported data in the variables of interest did not allow for robust examination. Future research would benefit from examination of fathers' responses to better understand how they report changes in their own parenting and coparenting behaviors. Additionally, the coparenting support measure used in The Fragile Families and Wellbeing Study only considered supportive and cooperative coparenting behaviors, and primarily considered supportive behaviors on the part of the father towards the mother. However, research has demonstrated multiple facets of coparenting (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001; Waller, 2012), that encompasses both maternal and paternal supportive and conflictual behaviors. Thus, the data for this population precluded us from examining how conflict and bidirectional supportive behaviors within the coparenting relationship affect fathering and maternal functioning. Finally, the results of the current study are only generalizable to unmarried, low-income parents, and our findings may only be relevant for this specific population. Due to increased access to resources, the associations between coparenting support, father involvement, and maternal functioning may differ for unmarried parents who have higher income or live in affluent communities.

Conclusion

Regardless of the above limitations, the present findings provide new information about the transactional processes between coparenting support and father involvement in a sample of unmarried parents in fragile families. The current study adds to the theoretical understanding of fathering and coparenting behaviors, and also provides insight into the reciprocal roles that mothers and fathers play in raising their children. Understanding how parenting relationships

function amongst vulnerable families may support the development of interventions and programming for low-income nonmarital parents. As prior research has shown, the coparenting relationship may have drastic and immediate effects on the amount of time a father spends with his child (Carlson et al., 2008), but often this relationship has been examined through cross-sectional designs that do not give an accurate picture of how these two constructs develop and intersect over time. Our findings underscore a need to assist unmarried parents with developing and maintaining a healthy and supportive coparenting environment. Based on our results, a supportive coparenting relationship when the child is young may not be enough to sustain the relationship over time. However, when fathers are actively involved as supportive coparents *and* as caregivers from the beginning, the coparents may be better equipped to show resilience and positive functioning.

Table 3.1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (*n* =1623)

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**
1. Coparenting Support Year1	--								
2. Coparenting Support Year3	.538**	--							
3. Coparenting Support Year5	.406**	.571**	--						
4. Father Involvement Year1	.505**	.342**	.253**	--					
5. Father Involvement Year3	.315**	.543**	.343**	.451**	--				
6. Father Involvement Year5	.307**	.376**	.526**	.389**	.514**	--			
7. Maternal Depression	-.060	-.101**	-.122**	-.005	.032	-.029	--		
8. Maternal Life Satisfaction	.071*	.115**	.106**	.009	.056	.123**	-.252**	--	
9. Maternal Repartnering	-.238**	-.310**	-.345**	-.153**	-.234**	-.305**	.024	-.050	--
M (SD)	2.538 (.558)	2.347 (.637)	2.340 (.620)	3.475 (1.930)	3.096 (1.744)	2.667 (1.799)	1.178 (2.357)	3.200 (.699)	.621 (.485)
Range	1-3	1-3	1-3	0-7	0-7	0-7	0-8	1-4	0-1

***$p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; *$p < .05$

Table 3.2

Univariate Growth Curves of Coparenting Support and Father Involvement

	Intercept (I)		Slope (S)		Covariance
Model	Mean μ_I	Variance σ_I	Mean μ_s	Variance σ_s	I-S $\sigma_{I\text{-}s}$ [95% CI]
Coparenting Support	2.552***	.324***	-.056***	.017***	-.550 [-.633, -.480]
Father Involvement	3.648***	2.175***	-.228***	.067**	-.440 [-.659, -.256]

Note. Standardized covariate values presented.
**$p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 3.3

Parallel Process Growth Curve Model of Coparenting Support and Father Involvement over Five Years and Their Influence on Maternal Well-being Outcomes at Year 9.

	B (SE)	95% CI	β (SE)	95% CI
Parallel Process Latent Growth Curve Model				
Coparenting Support (I) → Father Involvement (S)	**.442 (.050)**	**[.345, .540]**	**.694 (.093)**	**[.512, .876]**
Father Involvement (I) → Coparenting Support (S)	**.039 (.005)**	**[.029, .050]**	**.666 (.078)**	**[.513, .819]**
Maternal Repartnering Covariate				
Repartner → Coparenting Support (I)	**-.243 (.033)**	**[-.308, -.178]**	**-.325 (.041)**	**[-.406, -.244]**
Repartner → Coparenting Support (S)	**-.023 (.011)**	**[-.045, -.001]**	**-.149 (.073)**	**[-.293, -.005]**
Repartner → Father Involvement (I)	**-.667 (.122)**	**[-.906, -.428]**	**-.258 (.047)**	**[-.349, -.166]**
Repartner → Father Involvement (S)	-.059 (.038)	[-.134, .016]	-.124 (.079)	[-.279, .031]
Maternal Functioning Outcomes				
Coparenting Support (S) → Maternal Depression	**-.028 (.007)**	**[-.043, -.013]**	**-.231 (.074)**	**[-.376, -.086]**
Father Involvement (S) → Maternal Depression	**-1.042 (.455)**	**[-1.935, -.149]**	**-.102 (.044)**	**[-.189, -.016]**
Coparenting Support (S) → Maternal Life Satisfaction	.003 (.002)	[-.001, .008]	.095 (.070)	[-.042, .232]
Father Involvement (S) → Maternal Life Satisfaction	**.466 (.141)**	**[.190, .741]**	**.154 (.045)**	**[.066, .243]**

Note. Significant values indicated in bold.

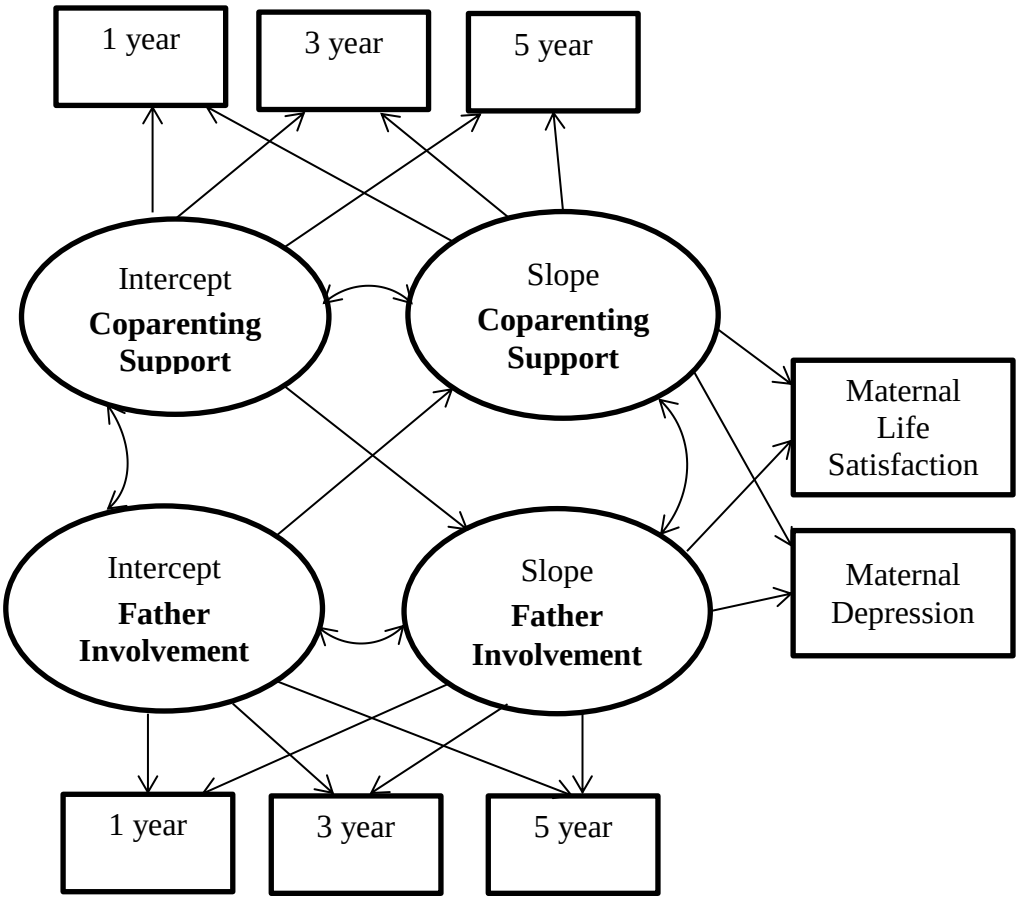

Figure 3.1. Parallel process growth curve model of coparenting support and father involvement over five years and their influence on maternal well-being outcomes at year 9. Covariates were excluded for ease of presentation.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate associations between coparenting relationships, father involvement, and family adaptation among adolescent parents and fragile families, with an overall goal of better informing family-strengthening programs designed for vulnerable populations of families. Using family resilience theory as an overarching framework for the manuscripts, we examined these complex relationships using two different analytic techniques. First, we utilized a 3-step latent profile analysis to determine group differences in the coparenting styles of adolescent mothers using a conceptual framework that emphasized the links between parental resources, coparenting, and parental functioning. Secondly, consideration of a life course perspective, as well as principles from the spillover hypothesis, led to an examination of the interactive nature of coparenting and father involvement over time, and the subsequent influence on maternal functioning among a sample of unmarried mothers from fragile families. To accomplish this, we utilized a bidirectional latent growth curve analysis, which is a more sophisticated method to analyze longitudinal associations, as compared with traditional methods. Although each study utilized differing theoretical perspectives, our results were consistent across studies, and supported by tenants of family resilience theory.

The current studies offer additional insight into this area of parenting research by exploring different facets of how coparenting both impacts and is impacted by fathering behavior, as well as how these processes are associated with maternal functioning. By doing so, this work advances the literature on father involvement, coparental process, and their

interconnected nature. For the remainder of this chapter, some of the central tenets of family resilience theory are revisited, along with discussion of how the two studies supported and were supported by the theoretical framework. This is followed by sections presenting support for the conceptual model presented in Chapter 1, future directions for research, and implications of these findings for family policy and intervention.

Family Resilience Revisited

Resilience is fostered in families when members show the ability to reorganize in response to change. Specifically, families that demonstrate flexibility are more adaptive in times of change such as parental separation (Walsh, 2013). They may restructure relationships or interactive patterns in order to meet new demands or needs. In addition to being able to change, however, families must also be able to stabilize in the presence of changes, so as not to seriously disrupt family functioning (Walsh, 2013). Emotional connections between family members, also known as family cohesion (Olson & Gorell, 2003), affective involvement, or family connectedness (Walsh, 2013) are considered to be positive emotional bonds that help a family to rise and adapt to challenges and display resilience in times of stress. On the other hand, families that show low levels of connectedness or cohesion are more likely to show signs of dysfunction. Similarly, effective communication between family members is instrumental in the decision-making process and is an important way that families make meaning in times of stress. As such, effective communication is viewed as a resource for families (Patterson, 2002) that includes open emotional expression, clarity, and collaborative problem solving. Decision making and problem solving is achieved through negotiation, compromise, and reciprocity. Open emotional expression is the sharing of feelings and emotions, clarity is the sending of clear and consistent messages in both words and actions, and collaborative problem solving is identifying problems

and working together to come up with ways of dealing with them. Communication is especially important for families in times of stress. Resilient families and family subsystems also often demonstrate the ability to manage conflict, which depends on communication and problem solving.

In the two manuscripts detailed in the earlier chapters, family cohesion, communication, and collaboration are represented in the coparenting relationship. In families, coparenting relationships, which rely on positive communication, collaboration, and support, can function as a protective factor in the midst of adversity. This aspect of family resilience theory was supported by the prior findings in two distinct adverse family situations. For example, in Chapter 2, mothers who reported more cooperation in the coparenting interactions between themselves and the fathers were also likely to describe low levels of parenting stress and high feelings of competence as parents, even in the face of an adverse situation, which in this case was represented by becoming a parent at a young age. In Chapter 3, we saw that steep declines in coparenting support over the course of five years were related to greater declines in life satisfaction and increased depression at year nine among unmarried, low-income mothers. These findings, which focused mainly on maternal functioning, nonetheless highlight the importance of the coparental relationship as a vital interpersonal relationship within the family that has important connotations for the well-being of individual family members.

Although derived from systems theory, the concepts of equifinality and multifinality, employed in developmental psychology (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1996), have been considered from a resilience process perspective (Oshri et al., 2015) and may help illustrate the potential diversity of experiences and outcomes. In families, there are myriad contextual, individual, and family level factors that contribute to adaptation and their influence on adaptation will vary by

individual and by family (Ciccheti & Rogosch, 1996). Equifinality refers to the concept that disparate paths will lead to similar outcomes, while multifinality assumes that different outcomes will emerge from comparable starting points. Consistent with the concept of multifinality, our results revealed that contextual factors were associated with heterogeneity in coparenting and father involvement. In support of the concept of equifinality, the studies presented in the earlier chapters considered coparenting and fathering behaviors of two distinct vulnerable family populations, but found similar maternal functioning outcomes.

The study of resilience began with a heavy focus on individual resilience. Family resilience theory is a more recent concept, with literature focused on studying the family as a unit whose characteristics change over time, rather than the historical approach of studying individual characteristics (such as academic achievement or self-efficacy) at a single point in time. A family is considered to be resilient when it has encountered a challenge and experiences good outcomes. These outcomes can come in the form of recovery, sustained functioning, or growth (Murray & Zautra, 2012). The outcome of resilience does not have to include "super functioning" or flourishing, but simply sustaining or maintaining normal functioning in the face of crisis (Ungar, 2012). This change in focus highlights strengths of families, or certain characteristics or qualities of some families that have allowed them to cope successfully when encountering adversity. For example, family resilience literature stresses the following important points about resilience. First, family resilience does not present as all or nothing; in other words, there exists a continuum of resilience, where families can be more or less resilient, or they can demonstrate resilience in some situations and not in others. Second, resilience is not a label that can or should be applied to some families and not others. It is instead a path that families may follow when facing a challenge (DeHaan, Hawley & Deal, 2013). And third, all

families have the potential to show resilience and may show it in different ways; there is no "one size fits all" model of resilience that can be applied to all families (Walsh, 2002). Similarly, resilience has also been considered as a developmental pathway, in which individuals and families are developing over time at multiple levels of context and the interactional processes between these systems predict differing developmental outcomes (Schoon, 2012). Taking a developmental view of resilience into account may allow for consideration of the importance of temporal component and how the individual or family reacts or processes over time (Hawley, 2013; Walsh, 2013).

To account for these various views of family resilience as a continuum and as a pathway, we used statistical approaches that would best elucidate familial differences in functioning and patterns of change over time. The first manuscript utilized a person-centered method of analysis that accounted for relationships between individuals by classifying them into groups of other similar individuals (Jung & Wickrama, 2008). The second manuscript utilized longitudinal data covering a time period in which there was likely to be considerable change in the family unit. Since relationships between non-residential fathers and their children, as well as with the mother of their children, are most likely to decline during the first years of the child's life, the initial time point was a year after the birth of the child, and additional time points were assessed when the child was three, five, and nine. This allowed for examination of both the rate of change and the consequences of coparenting and father involvement over the course of the child's early years (Curran, Obeidat, & Losardo, 2010). Family resilience theory both supported and was supported by these results. Although each manuscript examined mothers from different family situations, the distinct interindividual and intraindividual characteristics that were discovered in

both studies show considerable variation in how parents interact and how they are involved with their children, which was related to unique and quantifiable differences in maternal functioning.

Henry, Morris, and Harrist (2015) posited that families have the potential for positive adaptation based upon protection available through multiple family levels and adaptive systems as well as their connections with ecosystems. The studies described in this dissertation add to the existing family resilience research by providing a look at how contextual factors as well as coparental and paternal behaviors may be influential for at-risk mothers' adaptation. Continued examination of resilience in vulnerable families may provide professionals and educators with the potential to help families identify and grow their strengths, while mitigating risk factors, allowing them the ability to adapt, even in adverse situations.

Conceptual Model Revisited

A conceptual framework was presented in the first chapter, which described how context internal and external to the family may serve as risk and protective factors that are linked to coparenting and father involvement. For example, parental factors such as age, educational attainment, and employment status have been found to be related to both father-child engagement and the nature of the coparental relationship (Coates & Phares, 2014; Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jessee, 2011). Results from Chapter 2 supported the idea that contextual parental resources may be linked with interaction patterns among young parents. In Chapter 3, for unmarried mothers in fragile families, maternal repartnering as a contextual factor was associated with lower initial levels of father involvement and coparenting support, as well as declines in coparenting support over time. These findings reinforce the necessity to consider contextual factors to better understand how they may function and influence relationship and resilience factors within families (Rutter, 2012).

The conceptual model presented in Chapter 1 highlighted the interconnected nature of coparenting and father involvement on individual and family adaptation. For example, fathers in highly conflictual coparenting relationships are less likely to report a positive parent-child relationship (Elliston, McHale, Talbot, Parmley, & Kuersten-Hogan, 2008), whereas coparenting support is associated with less stress in the parent-child relationship (Solmeyer & Feinberg, 2011). When parents have more cooperation and less conflict in their coparental relationship, it may spill over to enhance the parent-child relationship (Allen & Daly, 2007; Bunting & McAuley, 2004; Fagan & Cabrera, 2012). While the aforementioned manuscripts did not examine the parent-child relationship per se, coparental support and cooperation between the parents was associated with the fathers' positive engagement, as well as the mothers' well-being. Originally the conceptual model displayed a directional arrow from coparenting toward father involvement, however, after consideration of the findings presented in the earlier chapters, it seems more precise to revise this pathway to a bidirectional arrow that more accurately reflects the interconnected nature of these concepts.

Future Directions

Family Functioning

Anderson, Amanor-Boadu, Stith, and Foster (2013) described family resilience theory as addressing three key domains of family functioning that are considered to be aspects associated with family resilience: belief systems; organizational patterns and communication; and problem-solving patterns. Walsh posited that family belief systems influence how the family will perceive and respond to adversity (Walsh, 2013). Families can make meaning of adversity by seeing it as a shared challenge and by engaging in collaborative problem solving. Essentially, when family members join together to work through a challenge, it strengthens their ability to

overcome it (Walsh, 2013). Well-functioning families display collaboration and the ability to communicate together about what has happened to them, allowing them to problem-solve and envision future possibilities (Walsh, 2013). In the preceding chapters, the focus was on risk and protective factors, their association with coparenting and fathering behaviors, as well as the reciprocal nature of coparenting and fathering and their linkages with maternal functioning. In addition to these important constructs, it would be useful to study overall family functioning and its relationship to the other constructs in the conceptual model.

Family functioning is a multidimensional concept that includes family cohesiveness in terms of flexibility, perseverance, and behaviors such as interaction, problem solving, and working together to achieve shared goals (Holtom-Viesel & Allan, 2014; Walsh, 2012). Family functioning can serve as a contributor to or a buffer for the effect of risk factors on family adaptation (Oshri et al., 2015). Highly cohesive families tend to demonstrate emotional connectedness within the interparental subsystem (Shigeto, Mangelsdorf, & Brown, 2014). On the other hand, families whose relationships are characterized by anxiety, low levels of closeness and intimacy, observed distress and hostility, low self-reported relationship quality, defensiveness, and low engagement in couple discussions may also demonstrate unsupportive coparenting (Mangelsdorf et al., 2011). Although distinct from the coparenting relationship, management of the interparental relationship centers on the quality of the parents' open and respectful communication, mutual support and collaboration, and management of relational conflict. There is a positive association between relationship quality and quality of the parent-child relationship and the ability of the parents to effectively manage conflict within their relationship is associated with a better parent-child relationship (Easterbrooks & Emde, 1988).

Certain aspects of family functioning, such as coping strategies and communication, may also have an indirect effect on the association between father involvement and family adaptation over time. Knowing that a father is involved may set up a higher quality father-child relationship and a supportive environment for children in which they are in an optimal situation for experiencing positive well-being (Adamsons & Johnson, 2013), which is associated with adaptive child characteristics, such as high self-esteem, psychosocial development, successful school functioning, and less externalizing behavior (Steinberg, 2000). However, low levels of paternal involvement are linked with poor connectedness between family members and poor parent-child relationships (DuMont, Ehrhard-Dietzel, & Kirkland, 2011), which is associated with negative individual developmental, emotional, and academic outcomes (Allen & Daly, 2007; Amato, 1998; Davies & Cummings, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 1990).

Contextual Factors

Many contextual factors have been considered as risk and protective factors that may be impactful for variability in father involvement, coparenting and family adaptation over time. Although data precluded our ability to consider all possible contextual factors in this dissertation, there are several that merit consideration in future research. As an example, child temperament may be related to parenting factors (Hetherington, 1988). Child temperament in infancy and toddlerhood has been found to correlate with coparenting behavior (Solmeyer & Feinberg, 2011), with difficult child temperament predictive of more frequent and intense undermining coparenting interactions (Cook, Schoppe-Sullivan, Buckley, & Davis, 2009). Children with a difficult temperament may be more of a challenge to coparent (Cook et al., 2009) due to the possibility that strategies developed between the parents may not work on more intense children, leading to undermining and conflictual behaviors (Feinberg, 2003). Similarly, aspects of child

temperament are more highly associated with paternal than maternal involvement (McBride, Schoppe, & Rane, 2002) and fathers of children with a difficult temperament may be less likely to establish and maintain involvement (McBride et al., 2002).

Lastly, parental perception of the community in which they live may have an influence on parental involvement (DuMont et al., 2011). For example, in communities with lower socio-economic status in which there are few family resources, parents may feel more isolated and have fewer opportunities for socialization and childcare (Korbin & Coulton, 1997). A lower socioeconomic status and a lack of community resources may put a family at risk for experiencing less adaptation following a crisis event (Norris et al., 2002), whereas the availability and accessibility of community resources may strengthen families and promote adaptation (Ungar, 2012). A lack of resources has been a factor associated with a decrease in the parents' ability to maintain a healthy parent-child relationship (DuMont et al., 2011). Fears that the community may be dangerous have been associated with less access to resources and poorer parent-child relations (Korbin & Coulton, 1997), whereas parents who perceive their neighborhood as trustworthy and beneficial demonstrate more positive parenting (DuMont et al., 2011; Furstenberg, 1993). Thus, better understanding of the communities in which families live may increase confidence when examining aspects of parenting.

Implications

National Healthy Marriage Initiative funding served as a catalyst for the development of relationship education and responsible fatherhood programming nationwide. While these programs are instrumental in addressing the quality of couple and marital relationships and may also include information on parenting, the focus of these programs has not been to develop healthy coparenting or co-caregiving relationships. In an effort to provide holistic services, it

would benefit family support programming to include components that promote collaboration with childcare and healthy communication skills between any pair or group of child caregivers, as well as that promote positive and healthy father involvement at a national level through development and advancement of programs and policies (e.g., parental leave policies) that support positive and egalitarian paternal involvement. Much like relationship education, these programs could target many family groups, including step-families, military families, adolescent-headed families, divorcing or divorced parents, incarcerated parents, and kinship, foster, and adoptive parents. Building these relationships for the benefit of the children in these families could serve as a foundation to strengthen and improve family and individual well-being.

Transformations in perception and societal norms regarding coparenting roles will occur through plans of action and dissemination of literature on the diversity and supportive nature of fathering behavior. Higher rates of immigration, cultural diversity, and the recent legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States also provide new ideas about possibilities, values, and norms for fathering behavior and coparenting roles within families. Differing viewpoints make a universal view of fatherhood obsolete and challenge stereotypes (Cabrera et al., 2000). As the United States continues to grow, develop, and diversify, so will models of fathering behavior and coparental roles in family systems. A more nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness of coparenting and fathering and their influence on individual family members and their resilience can better elucidate how these complex systems simultaneously function and evolve.

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