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THE PREDICTION OF MARITAL QUALITY BY PARENTING SATISFACTION AND PARENTING STRESS

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated answers to three questions. First, what factors or groups of factors were most related to parenting satisfaction and parenting stress? Second, what is the relationship between parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, and marital quality? Last, what factors are most related to positive and negative parenting behaviors? The direction of this current study and, in particular, the assumptions that underlie the expectations postulated have their origins in family stress theory.

A second analysis of data from the National Survey of Families and Households (1987-1988) was conducted. The total number in this study sample was 3709 persons.

Correlation and multiple regression analysis were used to explore the relationships between parenting satisfaction, stress, marital quality and parenting behaviors.

The most statistically significant finding of this study was that parenting satisfaction and parenting stress were strongly related to marital quality. Also, it was found that parenting stress and parenting satisfaction were stronger predictors of marital quality for men than for women. These results imply that contrary to conventional ideology about the relative importance of family roles and relationships to men and women, it may be that family

relationships are more central to the perception of marital quality and ultimately the well-being of men than women.

Other results of the regression analyses indicated that parents' perceptions of child was a significant predictor of parenting stress, parenting satisfaction, and both positive and negative parenting behaviors. Parents' perception of child was a significant predictor in the regression equations for these variables for parents of all ages of children, with the exception of positive parenting behaviors for parents of children ages birth to four.

Also, according to this study, parents with higher education tend to behave more positively toward their children, even though they report less satisfaction with parenting.

Past research on the effects of children on marital quality has focused primarily on the presence or absence of children, not on the specific impact of satisfaction or stress associated with the parenting experience.

Thoughtful research that reflects the complexity of the parenting experience is needed in the study of the impact of children on marriage.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most parents will readily acknowledge that they consider their children to be their most cherished "possessions." However, they seem to be very much a mixed blessing of joy and burden. To be sure, the emotional ups and downs and the constant demands on parents to meet their children's endless needs can be overwhelming and exhausting. It is my feeling that most parents truly love their children, want the best for them, and are thus often more anguished by their perceived failings in this role in life than almost any other. Children require an enormous amount of time, energy, money, love, knowledge, and almost every other resource imaginable from their parents. Furthermore, some children are more difficult to rear than others; and parents come to the task with varying degrees of resources to parent.

Most parents consider parenting to be one of the most important but difficult tasks in life. All too often, reports of child abuse and parental neglect give evidence of the inability of some parents to cope with parenting. Perhaps what many people really want is to have the children they love, without the responsibility of parenting them. Of course, this is an impossibility, as children and the responsibilities of parenting are inseparable. Indeed,

parenting is a life-time commitment from which there is no socially acceptable escape. Furthermore, children affect every aspect of a parent's life, including the relationship with their spouse.

Children affect their parents' marriage in a complex combination of joy, pleasure, and alternately stress and pain. There are many aspects of having children and watching them grow that parents find very satisfying and fulfilling (Pittman, Wright, & Lloyd, 1989). However, most recent research indicates that children are more a source of stress for parents and have a negative effect on marital quality, at least during the child-rearing years (Glenn, 1990). Generally, marital quality appears to be lowered by children because they precipitate negative effects such as less spousal interaction, increased conflict over finances, and a more traditional division of labor (Glenn, 1990; Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983).

Indeed, research shows that "the most consistent negative effect of children is on marital satisfaction" (Goldsteen & Ross, 1989, p. 506). In fact, many researchers have found a U-shaped trend in marital satisfaction--lowering with the advent of children and rising again as they leave the parental home (Anderson et al., 1983). Additionally, this decline in marital satisfaction seems to be more pronounced for wives than husbands (Glenn, 1990; Belsky, Lang, & Rovine, 1985).

On the other hand, while the presence of children decreases marital quality and sense of well-being for parents, it also increases life meaning. As Umberson and Gove state, "Among the married, those with children in the home have the poorest affective well-being and the lowest levels of satisfaction . . . (and the) highest levels of life-meaning" (Umberson, & Gove, 1989, p. 452). Furthermore, despite the consistent finding that the presence of children is related to a decline in marital quality, most parents report that their children have a positive effect on them (White, Booth, & Edwards, 1986). Belsky and Rovine (1990) found, in a longitudinal study of parents over three years, that about 16 percent of the marriages studied were affected negatively, 50 percent remained the same, and some 20-35 percent were positively affected by the transition to parenthood.

These findings indicate a considerable degree of variance in the effect of children on marriage, as opposed to the view of a decline only in marital quality. Furthermore, some researchers suggest that the marital quality is lower for parents because those with poor marriages are less likely to divorce than childless couples. If this is true, then it is possible that the relationship of children and decline in marital quality is spurious (Glenn, 1990; Renne, 1970).

However, it seems most likely that children do influence their parents' marriage positively or negatively,

or even both simultaneously in a rather complex blend of effects. I propose that decline or positive increase in marital quality for parents is related to the relative degrees of parental satisfaction or parental stress, that is, parents who are more satisfied with parenting may experience a higher level of marital quality, and, likewise, parents who are more stressed by parenting will experience lower levels of marital quality.

The presence of children seems to be related to some degree of lowered marital quality for most parents (Belsky, Spanier, & Rovine, 1983). It seems plausible, then, that parents who have particularly difficult children or a difficult parenting situation and are thus experiencing considerable parenting stress would evidence an even greater decline in marital quality (Belsky, 1990a). However, simply having a difficult child may not necessarily predict lower marital quality as much as does the parents' response to having a difficult child. The ability to cope with challenging situations is, in turn, determined by other resources that the parent may or may not have. Furthermore, it could be that parenting satisfaction and parenting stress act as mediator variables between child and parent characteristics and between demographic and social variables and are responsible for the positive or negative effects on the marriage.

Family Stress Theory and Marital Quality Theory are the theoretical frameworks that have formed the basis for conceptualization of this research study.

Family Stress Theory

Family stress theory influences the literature regarding the effects of children on the family and, in particular, on the marital relationship. The direction of this current study and, in particular, the assumptions that underlie the expectations postulated have their origins in family stress theory.

The foundation of research on family stress rests primarily on the ABC-X family crisis model developed by Hill (1949) and McCubbin and Patterson's (1983) expansion of this model into the Double ABC-X model of family behavior.

In Hills' ABC-X model, the stressor (A) interacts with (B) the family's resources to meet the stressor, and (C), the family's perception of the crisis to produce (X), the family crisis (Dyk, 1987). The Double ABC-X model includes the coping strategies that families use to deal with the stressor after the crisis. The specific area of parenting stress falls under this broader umbrella of family stress theory.

Parenting is considered a normal developmental stressor event in the life of families (Boss, 1988). Many parents would agree that it is also a chronic stressor. A

highly demanding parenting situation, such as parenting an attention deficit disorder child or even parenting several young "normal" children, could perhaps be seen as acute stressors at times. Boss (1988) asserts that many dysfunctional families are "not sick families; they are just highly stressed" (p. 11).

Families develop their own unique mechanisms for dealing with stress. Dysfunctional coping such as abusing children, drinking, or overeating compounds family stress (Boss, 1988). Negative parenting behaviors could be seen as dysfunctional coping mechanisms in families, an attempt by the parents to deal with stressful situations related to parenting. High demand parenting, such as parenting a child with a more difficult temperament, would seem likely to evoke more negative parenting behaviors.

In Family Stress Theory, the family's perception of the stressor is an extremely important factor. In this research, parents' perception of child characteristics is analyzed as a predictor of parenting stress and parenting satisfaction, as well as of parenting behaviors.

Further, consistent with this construction of family stress theory the parents' perceptions of parenting itself, as operationalized by parenting satisfaction and parenting stress, are used to predict marital quality.

In sum, obtaining a greater understanding about family stress, and thus generating ideas for helping families

manage stress, is the goal of family stress theorists and of this research study.

Marital Quality Theory

The basis for most research on marital quality has been somewhat atheoretical, arising more from practical questions about marriage than from any one theoretical framework (Glenn, 1990). However, variations on exchange theory have influenced the direction of marital quality research at different times (Glenn, 1990). It has also been classified as a middle-range theory. These are theories that are "modest in scope and generality, relatively close to data, easily tested, and easily revised" (Holman & Burr, 1980, p. 11).

For this study, the focus is on the body of literature within marital quality theory relating to the effect of children on marriage. This study specifically challenges the finding that children have only a negative effect on marriage with the intention of clarifying whether or not negative effects exist.

Therefore, this study investigates answers to three questions. First, what factors or groups of factors are most related to parenting satisfaction and parenting stress? What variables that form the parenting context (demographic, parent, and child characteristics) are related to parenting satisfaction and parenting stress? Under child characteristics, the study explores the

hypothesis that parents' perception of their child as having more negative than positive personality characteristics will be positively related to parenting stress. Likewise, the study is expected to find that parents' perception of their child as having positive characteristics will be related to greater parenting satisfaction.

Second, the relative effects of parenting satisfaction and stress on marital quality will be analyzed with the expectation that parenting satisfaction is positively related to marital quality and that parenting stress is negatively related to marital quality. Figure 1 diagrams the expected relationships among these variables.

Lastly, as shown in Figure 2, the relationship between parenting satisfaction, parenting stress and parenting behaviors will be explored. It is anticipated that parenting satisfaction will be positively related to more positive parenting behaviors and that parenting stress will be positively related to more negative parenting behaviors.

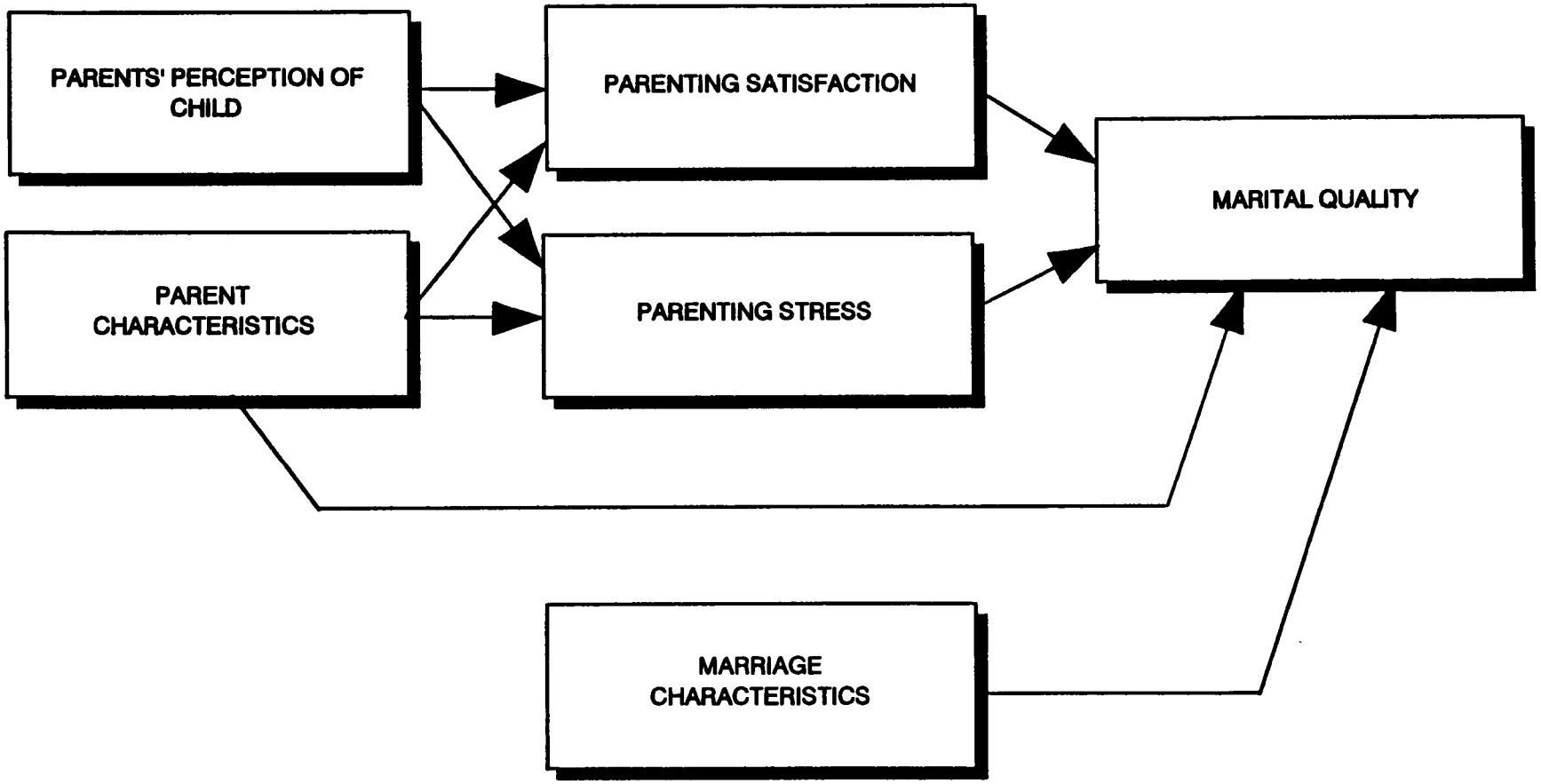

Figure 1. Hypothesized prediction of marital quality by parenting satisfaction and parenting stress.

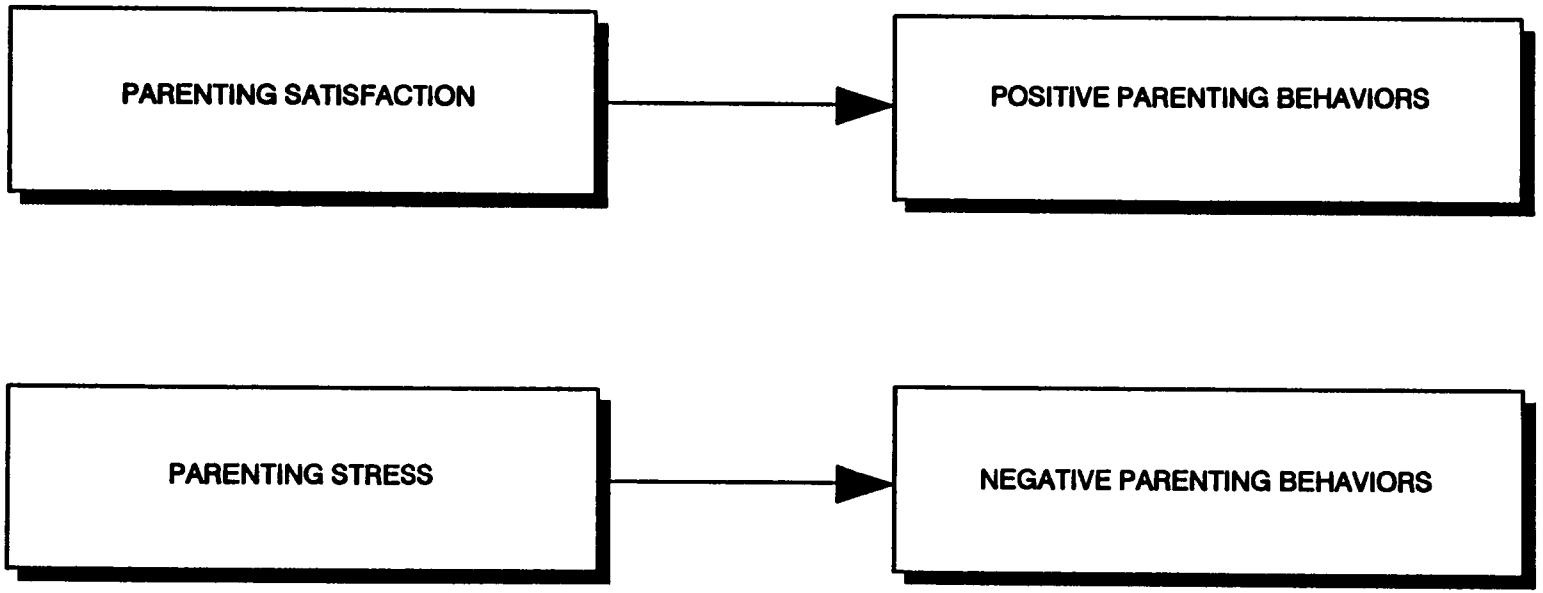

Figure 2. Hypothesized prediction of positive and negative parenting behaviors by parenting satisfaction and parenting stress.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW OF FACTORS INFLUENCING PARENTING SATISFACTION, PARENTING STRESS, MARITAL QUALITY, AND PARENTING BEHAVIORS

Parenting Satisfaction

For this study, parenting satisfaction is defined as a subjective feeling of gratification, pleasure and fulfillment associated with the parental role. This concept has been largely ignored in the literature concerning marriage and parenting (Chilman, 1980), though it may well be an important factor that accounts for variations in marital quality for parents. As Goetting (1986) stated in a review of parental satisfaction, "Very little can be stated with any degree of certainty regarding satisfaction in the parental role" (p. 101). However, among the things that Chilman (1980) reported from her research with parents that parents do find satisfying about parenthood are: watching their children grow, companionship, and love for their children (Chilman, 1980). Of lesser importance were traditional values such as passing on the family name or beliefs (Chilman, 1980).

Using data in a national probability sample, Ishii-Kuntz and Ihinger-Tallman (1991) looked at first-time married and remarried parents in an attempt to separate out the effects of family type on satisfaction with marriage

and parenting. They found no significant differences in marital satisfaction, but they did find some differences in parenting satisfaction between the two groups. Stepparents reported less satisfaction with parenthood. In contrast, first-time married biological parents reported a higher level of satisfaction with parenthood.

Parenting Stress

Parenting stress is herein defined as a subjective feeling of anxiety, disturbance, tension and displeasure in association with the parenting role. Parenting stress is thought to be the result of a complex interplay between parent and child characteristics and life situation factors (Abidin, 1990). Defining parenting stress, or any type of stress, has consistently been problematic for researchers. High stress may be conceptualized as an excess of demands upon limited resources wherein the situation that was simply a challenge becomes overwhelming, and the system is stressed. For many people, parenting is a rewarding challenge; for less fortunate ones it is more a source of draining stress. The ability of parents to respond to stress is determined by available affective and instrumental resources (Boss, 1988).

It is understood that parents experience many positive and negative emotions as a normal function of parenting. Likewise, it is quite possible, indeed most normal, for parents to feel stressed by an experience that also gives

them a great deal of satisfaction. Indeed, for the purpose of study these two emotions have been separated more than perhaps they are in the reality of parent-child relationships. Nonetheless, while it is important to realize that parents' experience both stress and satisfaction in parenting, of special concern are parents who seem to experience stress as the overriding emotion in interactions with their children. It is these global assessments of parental satisfaction and parenting stress that are the focus of this study.

For the purpose of this study an analytic distinction has been made between parenting satisfaction and parenting stress. It is assumed that parents are able to make this distinction even though in reality the concepts are interrelated. Parenting satisfaction and parenting stress are not treated as two ends of a continuum, but as separate dimensions of parenting.

Marital Quality

Marital quality has been defined as "how good the marriage is from the standpoint of the spouses at one point in time, or as a combination of the spouses' feelings and relational characteristics at one point in time" (Glenn, 1990, p. 821). Factors influencing marital quality besides the transition to parenthood include duration-of-marriage effects. Marital quality tends to decline in the first years of marriage with or without children (Glenn, 1990).

White and Booth (1985), in a longitudinal study of parents and non-parents, found that marital quality declined at about the same rate over time. Therefore, some of the negative effects of children on marriage reflected in the transition to parenthood literature may, in fact, be due to duration-of-marriage effects.

However, in a study of older marriages, Lee (1988) found that no other non-marital roles except for the parental role lead to a decline in marital quality. Increased time spent with friends was found to be positively related to marital quality (Lee, 1988).

Regarding gender effects, research suggests that a small portion of wives may account for much of the decline in marital quality reported by women in studies of children and marital quality. Specifically, mothers with two young children, of which at least one is a male, report lower marital quality than other wives (Abbott & Brody, 1985). Also, mothers of young children who are classified as low-income and who work full-time report unusually low levels of marital quality (Schumm & Bugaighis, 1986). Differences in basic attitudes toward life are associated with significant effects on marital quality. Bowen and Orthner (1983) found that marriages in which the husband has more traditional attitudes and the wife has more modern views tend to be associated with unusually low marital quality.

These differences in fundamental approaches to life may be responsible for some of the decline in marital

quality that occurs with the transition to parenthood. It is easy to see how parents with such different beliefs may find this conflict glaringly evident and problematic with the addition of children to the family unit. The wife may need her traditional husband to really help her for the first time. He, in turn, may feel that child-care is not in his job description. With the advent of children, disappointment and conflict can wear on this type of marriage. It may well be that parenting satisfaction is strongly related to the ability to co-parent. Couples engaged in a conflict of beliefs about family roles may be unable to co-parent at all.

Negative and Positive Parenting Behaviors

Negative parenting behaviors are specifically defined in this study as spanking, slapping or yelling at children. Positive parenting behaviors are defined as praising and hugging children, and, for older children, also allowing children to help set family rules. In review of the literature on marital quality, no research was found that specifically combines marital quality, parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, and parenting behaviors. For this reason, research has been reviewed that explores other factors commonly related to marital quality--parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, and parenting behaviors.

Parent Characteristics

Well-being. In a study comparing parents and non-parents, married and single (Umberson & Gove, 1989), it was found that parents "do not significantly differ from non-parents on any of the measures of affective well-being (happiness, positive affect, agitation, depression), or either measure of satisfaction (home and life)" (p. 451). Parents did report higher levels of life-meaning, and self-esteem in an over-all measure of well-being, and lower levels of meaninglessness (Umberson & Gove, 1989). However, for the married, parents with children in the home had lower levels of well-being, and significantly higher levels of life-meaning (Umberson & Gove, 1989). It appears that much of the positive effects of children that parents report involve a greater sense of life meaning.

These findings challenge as incomplete the conclusion that children "tend to lower their parents' marital and global happiness as long as they live in the parental home and . . . that the effects continue to be on balance negative after the offspring leave home and when the parents are late-middle-aged and elderly" (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982, p. 71). Unquestionably, certain aspects of personal and marital happiness are negatively affected by children, but other aspects of happiness, such as life-meaning, are not examined in many studies.

Generally, parenthood itself has been found to be associated with lower levels of depression (Umberson, 1989). Depression in parents has been found to be related to withdrawal from the child and general inability to lead and be assertive in the parenting role (Abidin, 1983).

Research findings indicate that "mothers who are depressed tend to be less affectionate, responsive, and spontaneous with their infants" (Belsky, 1990b, p. 886). Depressed mothers also tend to be irritable and negative in their interactions with older children (Belsky, 1990b) and more hostile and rejecting (Webster-Stratton, 1990). The interdependent nature of parent-child and parent-to-parent relations is apparent when mothers feel overwhelmed and become depressed in response to a difficult, demanding child. They may become further depressed by hostile reactions from frustrated spouses who blame them for their parenting failures. In fact, regarding hyperactive children, Mash and Johnston (1990) assert that "parenting efficacy may not be low in new parents but may decrease over time and eventually lead to a caregiving style characterized by helplessness, unresponsiveness, and withdrawal" (p. 321).

Lastly, mothers who report feeling more burdened by their children have lower levels of psychological well-being than do mothers who feel less burdened (Umberson, 1989).

Self-worth. In Belsky's (1990b) review of literature on children' social and emotional development, he described a consistent finding in the research that parents who are psychologically healthy and mature are most able to provide children with the kind of nurturant parenting that they need for healthy development.

Emotional support, that is support of self-esteem within the marriage, is related to higher levels of wives' self-esteem (Beach & Nelson, 1990). In fact, "receiving affirmation within the marital dyad was related to lower levels of depressive symptomatology, higher levels of self-esteem, and increased feelings of mastery" (Beach & Nelson, 1990, p. 247).

Parents' feelings of high self-worth is also related to more effective communication with and discipline of pre-adolescent and adolescent children (Small, 1988). Furthermore, Belsky (1990b) says that emotionally secure parents who have "worked through the difficulties of their childhood are apparently protected against inflicting them on their own children" (p. 887).

Social support. The presence or absence of social support has been found to have some very important effects on parenting and marital quality. Social support appears to have the effect of minimizing the effects of parental stress, while social isolation exacerbates parental stress (Webster-Stratton, 1990; Gjerdingen, Froberg, & Fontaine,

1990). In research with new mothers, social support was found to have a positive effect on their mental health (Gjerdingen et al., 1990). In fact, Belsky (1990a) states that "when instrumental and emotional supports are available to relieve stressed parents, especially demanding children need not adversely affect the husband-wife bond" (p. 194).

Lack of social support is associated with child neglect and abuse (Abidin, 1983). Parents of special needs children report less marital conflict and lower overall family stress when the medical support services that they needed were available (Belsky, 1990a). Social support can serve as a buffer to parental stress as mothers with very irritable babies benefit from the support of friends and relatives (Belsky, 1990b). Also, mothers with more community support are more positive, affectionate and caring toward their infants and preschoolers (Belsky, 1990b). Also, social isolation has been associated with dysfunctional parenting and with conduct-problems in children (Webster-Stratton, 1990). On the other hand, a close, supportive social network has been found to be related to parents' increased feeling of competence and emotional responsiveness, and to fewer punitive interactions with children (Webster-Stratton, 1990).

The presence or absence of spousal support has been found to have some very important effects on parental stress and marital quality. It has been shown that a

supportive spousal relationship often serves to prevent the intergenerational transfer of abusive, negative and rejecting parenting behaviors (Belsky, 1990b). Emotional and instrumental spousal support has been associated with greater parenting efficacy for both mothers and fathers (Belsky, 1990b). Ideally, spouses will support one another in the challenge of parenting for the sake of their children and their marriages; yet at times doing so is difficult. In a discussion of spousal support in very difficult circumstances such as unemployment or chronic illness, Ross, Mirowsky, and Goldsteen (1990) stated that "many people buckle under the strain of providing social support, particularly in difficult circumstances" (p. 1072). This could help explain the higher incidence of divorce among children of hyperactive and Downs syndrome children (Fischer, 1990; Belsky, 1990a).

Parents' health status. Children in the home do not increase parents' health status (Ross et al., 1990). In fact, Gove (1984) found the presence of preschoolers and of greater numbers of children associated with lower health status for women. However, in general being married (as opposed to being single) is related to greater emotional and physical health (Ross et al., 1990).

Low socio-economic status is strongly related to poor health largely because of the stress involved in living

with economic hardship (Ross et al., 1990). In a discussion of the impact of economic hardship on health, Ross et al. (1990) stated that "low generalized resistance increases the risk of infectious disease and of chronic diseases such as cancer" (p. 1072). Furthermore, it seems that poor health status could have serious implications for parenting. For example, parenting while one is struggling with health problems would be more difficult than parenting in a healthier state.

Child Characteristics

Child temperament. There has been a tendency in past research to lump all children together when studying the effects of children on marital quality. This practice ignores differences among children in their potential effects on their parents and on the home environment. Carolyn Webster-Stratton (1990) stated that a "difficult child causes more stress for parents and has the potential to undermine parental functioning" (p. 305). Included in this idea of a "difficult" child are characteristics such as: hyperactivity, hyperexcitability, moody temperament, defiance, aggression, unresponsive, little need for sleep, and being physically or mentally handicapped (Abidin, 1990; Belsky, 1990b). Obviously, the experience of parenting is greatly influenced by child characteristics, that may be quite independent of parenting competency.

The experiences of different parents of same-aged children can depend on many factors including these child characteristics. Likewise, the experience of a parent is very different with each child.

Among child characteristics that parents find stressful is a moody or difficult temperament. This may be seen in the baby who is easily irritated and upset but is very difficult to comfort--and, therefore, cries a great deal. Also, the child who does not easily adjust to new people or situations is harder for parents to care for. Some children have difficulty adapting to and, consequently overreact to, changes in routines, are easily upset, and are difficult to calm. Parenting infants who are considered more temperamentally difficult (e.g. who are unpredictable or unadaptable) is associated with greater decline in marital quality (Belsky & Rovine, 1990c).

Parents of children with moody of difficult temperaments often experience problems in developing a relationship with their children and may feel rejected by them (Abidin, 1983). Other children are not particularly responsive to parental affection, and the parents may find it hard to bond to them (Abidin, 1983). This would very likely decrease parental satisfaction. Parents of demanding, intrusive infants report lessened marital satisfaction (Belsky, 1990a). Apparently, this is due to the competition of the child for adult attention disrupting the parents' interactions (Belsky, 1990a). And it would

seem likely that the whiny, fussy child would have the same effect of interrupting parents' attempts to communicate.

Parents find babies who are irritable and cry a lot and who are not terribly responsive to comforting very hard to deal with (Wilkie & Ames, 1986). Parents feel exhausted, helpless, and angry and are more rejecting toward their difficult baby (Wilkie & Ames, 1986). In addition, difficult babies, as described by parents, have been found to be associated with greater declines in marital satisfaction than "easy" babies (Belsky, 1990a).

Mothers of hyperactive children report considerably more stress than do mothers with normal children (Fischer, 1990). Parents of hyperactives, particularly younger ones, experience more feelings of "depression, self-blame, social isolation, and incompetence in parenting skills" (Fischer, 1990, p. 338). Both hyperactive boys and girls seem to elicit the same effect of increasing parental stress (Fischer, 1990).

Also, hyperactivity has been found to be related to greater marital discord. In one study, the presence of a hyperactive boy in the home was related to the highest level of marital conflict and maternal depression, although mothers of hyperactive girls also reported higher levels of conflict and depression than parents of normal children (Fischer, 1990). Researchers disagree on the nature of causality between hyperactive children and marital conflict. Some argue that increased marital discord causes

hyperactivity, while others claim that hyperactive children provoke increased marital dysfunction (Fischer, 1990). However, regardless of the original cause of hyperactivity, hyperactive children appear to have a profound effect on their families, particularly on their parents' marriages. Fischer (1990) reported "more than three times as many mothers of hyperactives had separated or been divorced from the biological fathers" (p. 351). This fact is an important qualification of the findings of other researchers that the presence of children increases marital stability (Belsky, 1990a). Also, families with hyperactives were two times as likely to have been in family therapy than normal families (Fischer, 1990).

Research results are mixed on parenting stress and marital quality in families with special needs or handicapped children. The literature on chronically ill children does not seem to support the idea that "excessive levels of parenting stress or dysfunctional family functioning are inevitable outcomes" (Abidin, 1990). However, parents of autistic children have been found to experience greater parenting stress and lower marital satisfaction primarily because of their child's lack of responsiveness (Abidin, 1990).

Also, concerning retarded children, one study found that the degree of retardation was positively related to lower marital happiness for wives (Belsky, 1990a). In studies of families with Downs syndrome children,

researchers have found more divorced or very conflicted marriages when compared to families of normal children (Belsky, 1990a). Conversely, it has also been found that some marriages with a Downs child appear to better, more warm and close, than marriages with normal children (Belsky, 1990a). This finding lends support to the idea that, while having a Downs child may break a poor marriage, it may make a good one stronger (Belsky, 1990a).

Number and ages and sex of children. Some research suggests that number and ages of children are related to parenting stress and marital quality. Concerning numbers and ages of children, satisfaction with marriage decreases with increase in the number of children (Belsky et al., 1983; Abbott & Brody, 1985) most especially with the addition of young children (Ross et al., 1990).

Generally, parents of children under 18 report higher levels of agitation and lower happiness levels than do non-parents (Umberson & Gove, 1989). Specifically, parents seem to find caring for small children most stressful (Abidin, 1983). This is quite logical considering the time, energy and expense that caring for young children demands. Preschool children have been found to have a negative effect on marital satisfaction and companionship (Schumm & Bugaighis, 1986). Also, preschool children are perceived as more of a burden than older children by mothers (Goldsteen & Ross, 1989). Parents of pre-schoolers report the lowest

levels of spousal support of all married couples (Ross et al., 1990). Researchers have found "evidence for an adverse effect of preschool children upon marital satisfaction, companionship, and related variables, especially for mothers employed full-time" (Schumm & Bugaighis, 1986). Most divorces occur here at this demanding time in the family life cycle (Carter & McGoldrick, 1989).

On the other hand, parents of grown children report higher levels of affective well-being and life satisfaction than do either parents with children in the home or non-parents (Umberson & Gove, 1989). Parents whose children have been launched report an "increase in sense of equity in the relationship" (Belsky, 1990a, p. 183).

Some possible reasons for the negative effect younger children have on parents individually, as well as on overall marital quality, include: economic strain of caring for children, the increased amount of time and energy demands, restraints on parents' personal choices and freedoms, increased conflict over role responsibilities between spouses, less time for leisure activities, and for spouses to be together alone (Umberson & Gove, 1989).

Multiple transitions among children in the family are also associated with declines in marital quality, such as an older child entering adolescence while a younger one is first entering school (Belsky, 1990a). So, it is also important to consider the larger framework of family dynamics when looking at marital quality at any one time.

The effect of transition to adolescence on marital quality is less clear, although some cross-sectional studies indicate that marital quality declines at this point (Belsky, 1990a) when parents are involved in their own mid-life transitions (Strong & Devault, 1989). More longitudinal studies are needed to determine the effects of adolescents on marital quality.

In one provocative study, Abbott & Brody (1985) concluded that marriages in which there are preschool boys and a mother who works full-time seem to be particularly at risk for lower marital satisfaction. This is thought to be caused by the fact that boys are generally more demanding, active, and require more monitoring than do girls (Belsky, 1990a; Abbott & Brody, 1985). Also, fathers may be more involved in the rearing of boys and are perhaps more likely to question mothers' behavior management of boys, resulting in more conflict (Abbott & Brody, 1985). It appears from Abbott and Brody's work that boys, especially preschool boys, may have a more negative effect on marital quality than do girls.

Abidin (1983) characterized parents experiencing a high degree of parental stress as being in two groups: those with difficult children and those with difficult situations. Difficult situation factors include low income, divorce or death of a spouse, and major life events that are stressful (Abidin, 1983). Life stress has the effect of

intensifying the total stress that the parent is experiencing (Abidin, 1983).

Marriage Characteristics

Marital conflict and conflict management. Schaap, Buunk, & Kerkstra (1988) found in their study of 86 non-distressed and distressed couples, that distressed couples tend to engage in more destructive communication than do non-distressed couples. Furthermore, the researchers concluded that all conflict styles measured in their study (pushing-aggression, avoidance, compromise, soothing, and problem-solving) were negatively correlated with marital satisfaction, except for problem-solving.

In addition, laughter and attentiveness seem to characterize happy marriages, while negativity, coerciveness, and defensiveness are more characteristic of distressed marriages (Schaap et al., 1988). Indeed, Gottman's (1982) review of the literature, concluded that "satisfied couples are more positive and less negative to one another than are dissatisfied couples" (p. 114). Moreover, Gottman (1982), in his explanation of his theory concerning outcomes of conflict in marriage, asserted that conflict resolution is related to improvement in marital satisfaction, while unresolved conflict "will continue to create irritability, anger, and disagreement" (p. 83). Schaap et al. (1988) also found that distressed couples reported more conflict and time engaged in conflict than

non-distressed couples did, despite the fact that they were more conflict-avoiding.

The demands of parenting seem to increase the potential for conflict in marriage. It appears that many fathers consider parenting the domain of their wives as roles become more traditionalized with the birth of children (Glenn, 1990). Therefore, when there are problems, husbands tend to blame their wives, judging them as incompetent (Wilkie & Ames, 1986). Furthermore, especially difficult children tend to increase marital discord at the same time that they create the need of their mothers for more support and assistance from their husbands, thus setting the scene for increased potential for conflict (Belsky & Rovine, 1990).

In addition, blaming can become a patterned reaction to parenting stress in which the husband blames the wife and she responds by feeling more defensive and more and more inadequate in the parenting role. For example, babies who cry a great deal are associated with more marital conflict. Wilkie and Ames (1986) found in their study of infant crying and parental stress that "when the baby cries more, fathers are apt to blame mothers for this difficult situation" (p. 549). The mother in turn views parenthood and the child more negatively when the baby cries more (Wilkie & Ames, 1986).

Interestingly, in the research on depression, a strong connection between depression and marital discord has been

found (Beach & Nelson, 1990). Conflict is associated with depression and with feeling less loved, cut-off, distrustful of the other spouse, and generally unsupported (Beach & Nelson, 1990). It is easy to see how a very fussy or demanding baby could contribute to greater conflict and disagreement in marriage and lower overall marital quality.

Clearly, excessive and unresolved conflict in marriage is deleterious to marital quality. However, some level of conflict apparently is good for marriage. Conflict and disagreements within marriage have been found to be related to lower concurrent marital satisfaction but also to improvement in the marriage over time (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989).

In sum, children increase the potential for conflict in marriage. Conflict in marriage is inevitable and not necessarily bad for marriages. Ultimately, the amount of conflict and disagreement, the degree of negative affect involved, and how the conflict is resolved seem to be the important factors affecting marital quality.

Social activities. In a study of older marriages, Lee (1988) found frequent interactions with friends to be the strongest determinant of marital satisfaction. Webster-Stratton (1990), in her review of research on family stress, described the social support network of a family system as a buffer that can mediate the effects of stressors.

Demographic Characteristics

Education. Belsky (1990b), in his review of the literature on determinants of parent-child relations, found that more education and income is generally related to parents being "more involved, less restrictive, punishing, and controlling; and more positively affectionate and responsive toward their offspring than parents of lower socioeconomic status" (p. 885). Furthermore, Ross et al. (1990) stated that there is a consistent connection between higher physical and mental health and socioeconomic status in the literature on family health. Poorly educated persons are more vulnerable to unemployment, to being sick, to having inadequate access to health care, and to being exposed to more dangerous conditions in their occupations (Ross et al., 1990). Low socioeconomic status is also associated with higher rates of infant mortality, mental illness, and suicide (Ross et al., 1990). Low socioeconomic status is also related to higher divorce rates (White, 1990).

Education enables people to see options and alternatives, to use available social, financial, and cognitive resources to cope with hardships, and "gives them a sense of mastery" (Ross et al., 1990, p. 1072).

On the other hand, Chilman (1979) in her study of parents, found no significant differences in parental satisfaction between parents of different socioeconomic status. Moreover, Hoffman (1978), in her research with a

nationwide sample, found that higher levels of education were associated with less positive feelings about parenting in women. Veroff, Joseph, Douvan & Kulka (1981) found in their research that highly educated parents find parenting less fulfilling than do parents with less education. One interpretation offered by Veroff et al. (1981) for these interesting findings is that perhaps more educated parents are more aware of advantages and disadvantages of parenting. Furthermore, Heiss (1976) suggested that parents with high levels of education may experience more conflict between parental and other roles.

In any event, from the research in this area it appears that although highly educated parents have some advantages in resources and behave more positively with their children, they may actually be slightly less satisfied with parenting than parents with lower levels of education.

In summary, many factors affect parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, marital quality and parenting behaviors. Based on the literature from these varied areas, it seems that there may be a strong relationship among parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, marital quality and parenting behaviors. Many questions remain unanswered concerning the nature of the relationship between these areas. What factors, of all the possible demographic, social, child and parent characteristics factors, seem to most relate most strongly

to parenting stress? To parenting satisfaction? Also, how does parenting stress affect marriage? How significant is the relationship? How is marriage affected by parenting satisfaction, if at all?

Finally, this study explored how parenting stress and satisfaction impact the parent-child relationship, as well as actual parenting behaviors. Do parents who report more parenting stress also engage in more negative parenting behaviors? Does parenting satisfaction relate to more positive parenting behaviors? These are the questions that will be addressed by this study.

The relationships between these key variables will be examined and defined by this study. Specifically, the aim of this study was to determine what factors determine parenting satisfaction and parenting stress, and how parenting satisfaction and parenting stress affect marital quality and parenting behaviors.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Source of Data

A secondary analysis of data from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) was conducted. This collaborative research effort is a comprehensive collection of information about many subject areas involving families. There is a wealth of information within this data set pertaining specifically to parenting and marriage. The NSFH contains extensive interviews with 13,017 persons age 19 or over, in 9643 households. It is a representative sample of United States households.[1] In the study, one adult from each household was randomly chosen to be the primary respondent.

From this larger sample, married couples were selected who had at least one child under age 17 living in the home. The children included biological children, step-children, adopted children, and foster children. The total number in this study sample was 3709 persons. There were slightly (11.6 percent) more female than male primary respondents in the sample; the average level of education was 13.02 years, and the average number of children was

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[1]Black and Hispanic households were oversampled to ensure sufficient numbers of cases for subgroup analysis. But, case weights have not been used to adjust the sample.

2.02 per household. There was a large proportion of families with a child under age five in the home (54%). Therefore, a majority of the families in this sample were families with young children. Most are biological parents, and almost half had some education beyond high school. Additional descriptive characteristics of the sample are indicated in Table 1.

Social Scientists have found that responses to questions are often biased by the social desirability of the question (Babbie, 1992). It appears that some of the responses in this study may be influenced by this phenomenon. For example, scores on parenting satisfaction and marital quality may be biased in a positive direction by the social desirability of reporting satisfaction with marriage and parenting. Regarding the parenting satisfaction, in a national survey of parents, very few (only 4 percent) reported that children were a source of distress (Pittman, Wright, & Lloyd, 1989). It seems that underreporting of parental stress is likely in studies of parental satisfaction. It follows then that the scores for parenting stress in this study may be biased in a negative direction, as people tend to overreport satisfaction and underreport stress.

The mean for negative parenting behaviors was higher than expected given the social undesirability of negative parenting behaviors. This could be an indication that many parents find spanking to be an acceptable form of

Table 1. Sample Characteristics (N=3709)

	Percent
Gender	
Male	44.2
Female	55.8
Education	
Less than high school	14.7
High school	41.0
Some college	23.0
Four year college degree	10.6
Graduate education	8.5
Doctoral degree	2.0
Number of children	
One child	35.3
Two children	39.7
Three children	17.2
Four children	5.3
Five children	1.5
Six children	0.6
Over six	0.5
Relationship of child to respondent	
Biological child	90.8
Step-child	6.3
Adopted child	2.6
Foster child	0.4
Age of youngest child in household	
Birth to two years	35.5
Three to five years	18.8
Six to eleven years	23.3
Eleven to seventeen years	22.5

N=3709

discipline. Regardless of acceptability, these behaviors are apparently often used as it has been found that parents react with negative, controlling, parenting behaviors toward children who are "disobedient, negative, and/or highly active" (Belsky, 1990b, p. 886). Additional descriptive statistics of the variables measured in this study are indicated in Table 2.

Description and Validation of Measures

From the questions asked of respondents, those pertaining to marital quality, parental satisfaction, parental stress, and parenting behaviors were selected for the data set. Scales for measuring these variables were developed for this study. Other independent variables were selected with the intention of analyzing their effect on the dependent variables of parental satisfaction, stress, marital quality, and parenting behaviors.

Scales and indices were created to measure those independent variables, including: education, marital conflict, marital discord, social activities, well-being, self-worth, parent health, and parents' perception of child. Parenting satisfaction and stress were also used as independent variables in this study to predict marital quality and parenting behaviors in the multiple regression analyses.

The responses to the original questions were all recoded so that high scores represent high scores on the

Table 2. Variable Descriptives

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum	N
Marital quality	26.66	6.19	0.00	35.00	3360
Parenting satisfaction	16.69	3.92	0.00	21.00	3397
Parenting stress	5.19	2.39	0.00	14.00	3391
Marital conflict	13.22	7.25	7.00	42.00	3275
Conflict management	7.34	5.35	3.00	27.00	3709
Self-worth	16.03	2.18	4.00	20.00	3448
Well-being	46.99	9.25	1.00	56.00	3173
Social support	2.83	0.67	0.00	6.00	3487
Social network	8.69	4.01	0.00	25.00	3288
Parents' health	33.64	2.80	7.00	35.00	3468
Parents' perception of child 0-4	16.06	1.98	9.00	20.00	890
Parents' perception of child 5-11	25.68	2.60	15.00	30.00	1207
Parents' perception of child 5-11	25.68	2.60	156.00	30.00	1207
Parents' perception of child 12-18	25.55	2.93	12.00	30.00	1089
Positive parenting behavior 0-4	7.74	0.70	2.00	8.00	951
Positive parenting behavior 5-18	9.99	1.46	3.00	12.00	2510
Negative parenting behavior 0-4	4.52	1.53	2.00	8.00	951
Negative parenting behavior 5-18	4.60	1.28	2.00	8.00	2568
Education	13.02	2.88	0.00	20.00	3692

variable measured. For example, a high score on parenting stress indicated that the parent was experiencing a high degree of stress as defined by this study. All measures and their component items are included in the Appendix. For some of the more specific questions, parents with more than one child were asked to answer in terms of a "focal" child in the household.

Tests for concurrent validity were conducted using Pearson correlations with the result that the measures correlated with items selected as validators as expected. These validation tests are described in subsequent sections.

Parenting satisfaction. This scale consists of three items in which parents rated their feelings about parenthood on a semantic-differential scale of one to seven. Questions including whether or not they considered parenting to be interesting or boring, a task that is appreciated or unappreciated, and lonely or sociable were asked. The reliability coefficient on this scale is .80. In attempts to assess the validity of this instrument, Pearson product moment coefficients were calculated for the scale with items chosen as validators. Previous research suggested that parenting satisfaction should correlate positively with self-worth and with well-being. Also, it was suspected that parenting satisfaction would correlate positively with marital quality. As expected, parenting

satisfaction was significantly correlated with self-worth (r=.2169), marital quality (r=.4373), and well-being (r=.1947), p<.01.

Concerning predictive validity, parenting satisfaction correlated with self-reports of positive parenting behaviors (.0973), and (.1768), at the .01 level of significance. Also, parenting satisfaction was negatively correlated with negative parenting behaviors for all ages (r=-.1709, p<.05, and r=-.1201, p<.01).

Parenting stress. Two items were used to measure parenting stress. These items were the scores on a scale 1 to 7 for the questions: (a) Is parenting overwhelming or manageable?, and (b) Do you feel you do the task poorly or well? The reliability coefficient for this scale was .37. The alpha is very low because these two questions measure different aspects of parental stress. However, because feelings of being overwhelmed and of doing a poor job at parenting are both thought to be important components of parenting stress, both questions were included in the measure.

For the purpose of concurrent validation, Pearson product moment correlations were calculated. Parenting stress correlated with marital quality (r=-.3430), with well-being (r=-.1966), and with self-worth (r=-.1762) at the .01 level of significance.

Also, concerning predictive validity, parenting stress correlated with negative parenting behaviors (r=.1503) for parents of children ages birth to five, and (r=.1334) for parents of children aged five to 17, both significant at the .01 level.

Marital quality. The quality of the marriage was measured by five items that asked respondents to rate (1 to 7) their feelings about marriage on a semantic-differential type scale. Subjects rated their marriage on subjective perceptions such as whether marriage is interesting or boring, and whether they felt appreciated or unappreciated in the marriage. The reliability coefficient on this scale was .96. In validation work with this instrument, marital quality significantly correlated as expected with marital conflict (r=-.1502), marital discord (r=-.2561), and well-being (r=.3070) (significant at .01 level).

Positive parenting behavior: Ages 0-4. Because the experience of parenting is thought to be different for parents of different ages of children, the parenting measures have been separated by age categories. The parent behavior measures are divided between preschool and all children over 5 years of age. This first measure was a self-report by parents of children ages birth to four of their behavior with their children. There are two items that ask parents how often they praise and hug their children on a scale of one (never) to four (very often).

Positive parenting behaviors for children ages 0-4 was significantly correlated with parenting satisfaction (r=.0973, p<.01).

Positive parenting behavior: 5-17. Parents of children aged 5 to 17 reported how often they praise, hug, and allow their children to help set rules in this self-report measure of parenting behavior. It was significantly correlated with parenting satisfaction (r=.1768, p<.01).

Negative parenting behavior: Ages 0-4. This is a two-item, self-report measure of parents' negative behavior. Parents were asked how often they spank, slap, or yell at their child. The measure was significantly correlated with parenting stress (r=.1503, p<.01).

Negative parenting behavior: 5-17. With this measure consisting of two questions, parents of children ages 5-17 reported how often they spank, slap, or yell at their children. The measure was significantly correlated with parenting stress (r=.1334, p<.01).

Well-being. This is an eight-item measure of parents' sense of emotional well-being. The reliability coefficient is .87. Correlation coefficients were calculated with items expected to be positively correlated. Well-being was significantly correlated with parenting satisfaction (r=.1947), marital quality (r=.3070), and self-worth (r=.2644) (p<.01).

Self-worth. This single item-index assessed the respondents feelings of worth or self-esteem in relation to others. The measure was significantly correlated with well-being (r=.2644), parenting satisfaction (r=.2169), and marital quality (r=.2644) ($p<.01$).

Regarding predictive validity, self-worth was correlated with positive parenting behaviors for parents of all ages of children (r=.0895, .1335, $p<.01$). It was also correlated with negative parenting behaviors for all ages of children (r=-.1328, .1104, $p<.01$).

Social support. There were three questions concerning social/emotional support in this social support measure. Respondents were asked if they had anyone they would call in three different types of emergency situations. The reliability coefficient was .5191. Social support was significantly correlated with positive parenting behaviors for parents of all ages of children (.0876,.0767, $p<.01$). The term social support should not be over-generalized. The specific operationalization of social support for this study is a measure of perception of access to resources.

Parents' health. This is a four-item assessment of parents' health status. A high score indicated good to excellent health. The reliability coefficient for this measure was .80. Parents' health was significantly correlated with well-being (.2076), self-worth (.1369),

parenting stress (-.1762), and parenting satisfaction (.2169) ($p<.01$).

Parents' perception of child: Ages 0-4. Like the parent behavior measures, these measures of parents' perception of children were divided into categories by age of child. These age groupings were: preschool (0-4), school-age (5-11), and teen-agers (11-17).

This scale for children aged birth to four consists of six questions that measure such character traits as being cheerful, or fussy and irritable, and whether or not the parents consider the child more easy or difficult to raise. All the questions were coded in a uniform direction. Therefore, a high value on this variable was regarded as an indication of parents' perception of more positive, or easy personality characteristics. Likewise, a low score on this measure indicated the parents' perception of more negative, or difficult personality traits in the child. For example, if a parent responded to the question, "Would you describe child as particularly easy to raise?" with a "No", this was coded as a low score on this item. Thus a low score indicated the parents' perception of a "difficult" characteristic.

The reliability coefficient (.55) was relatively low, due, probably, to the variety of personality traits measured that fall under the broad category of child personality characteristics. For example a child could be

fearful (a difficult characteristic) but not be aggressive (also a difficult characteristic). However, the items all tapped relevant characteristics, as there are many character traits that fall under the categorization easy or difficult. Therefore, this measure was included in the analysis.

In validation work with the measure, it was found that parents' perception of child personality correlated with parenting satisfaction ($r=.1036$), self-worth ($r=.2080$), and well-being ($r=.2425$) ($p<.01$). Also, regarding predictive validity, parents' perception of positive child personality characteristics correlated with negative parenting behaviors ($r=-.2893$) ($p<.01$).

Parents' perception of child 5-11. This is a measure of parents' perception of child character traits for children aged five to eleven. The reliability coefficient was .6234. For the purpose of validation, Parents' perception of child characteristics correlated significantly as expected with parenting satisfaction ($r=.2330$), self-worth ($r=.1915$), and well-being ($r=.1214$) at the .01 level of significance. Concerning predictive validity, there was correlation of ($r=-.2516$) with negative parenting behaviors and ($r=.1449$) with positive parenting behaviors ($p<.01$).

Parents' perception of child: 12-17. Parents' perception of child characteristics for children aged

twelve to eighteen were measured with this scale. The reliability coefficient was .6900. Pearson correlations were calculated with items to examine concurrent validity with the result that perception of positive child characteristics correlated with parenting satisfaction (r=.3145), self-worth (r=.1821), and well-being (r=.1226) at the .01 level of significance. Also, regarding predictive validity, positive child characteristics correlated with positive parenting behaviors (r=.2241) and with negative parenting behaviors (r=-.2656) ($p<.01$).

Marital conflict. This seven-item scale measures the frequency of disagreement among couples in seven different areas. The reliability coefficient for this measure was .7200. For the validation of this instrument, Pearson correlations were calculated, with the result that it was correlated with marital quality (r=-.2561), self-worth (r=-.1253), and well-being (r=-.2130). Concerning predictive validity, marital conflict was correlated with marital conflict management (r=.2148) ($p<.01$), a self-report of conflict management behaviors in marriage.

Marital conflict management. This is a self-report measure of conflict management behaviors within the marriage. There were three items that ask how often couples yell, argue, hit or throw things at each other. The reliability coefficient was .9700. A high score on this measure was coded to indicate more violent behaviors such

as yelling or hitting. A lower score was coded to indicate a more low-key conflict management style characterized by more negotiation and discussion. Marital conflict management was correlated with marital quality (r=-.1502) and with well-being (r=-.1100) (p<.01).

Social activities. This is a seven-item scale measuring frequency of interaction with relatives, friends, and acquaintances in different social settings. A high score on this measure indicated that the respondent is involved with a large social network. The reliability coefficient was .7200. The measure was significantly correlated with marital quality (.0903) (p<.01).

Analytic Strategy

First, Pearson product moment coefficients, shown on Table 3, were computed for all variables to indicate the direction and strength of correlations between variables. Then, multiple regression equations were calculated separately for the prediction of each of the following: parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, marital quality, and positive and negative parenting behaviors. The items selected for entry into the multiple regression equations seemed likely to be strongly related to the dependent variables based on findings in previous research and data from the correlations matrices. The equations representing the best predictions of the dependent variables are found in Chapter 4.

Table 3. Pearson Correlation Coefficients

	PARSAT	PARSTRES	MARQUAL	PPBEH.0-4	PPBEH.5-18	NPBEH.0-4	NPBEH.5-18
PARSAT		-.1555**	.4373**	.0973**	.1768**	-.0709*	-.1201**
PARSTRESS	-.1555**		-.3430**	-.0386	-.0768**	.1503**	.1334**
MARQUAL	.4373**	-.3430**		-.0080	.0759**	-.1714**	-.1303**
PPARBEH 0-4	.0973**	-.0386	-.0080			.0316	
PPARBEH 5-18	.1768**	-.0768**	.0759**				.0336
NPARBEH 0-4	-.0709*	.1503**	-.1714**	.0316			
NPARBEH 5-18	-.1201**	.1334**	-.1303**		.0336		
SELF-WORTH	.2169**	-.1762**	.2801**	.0895**	.1335**	-.1328**	-.1104**
WELL-BEING	.1947**	-.1966**	.3070**	.0441	.0449*	-.0796*	-.1279**
SOCSUPP	.0272	-.0068	.0326	.0876**	.0767**	-.0401	.0470*
PHEALTH	.0748**	-.0574**	.0982**	.0624	.0612**	-.0251	-.0092
CONFLICTMN	-.0915**	.0210	-.1502**	-.0719*	-.0314	.0494	.1007**
MARCON	-.0995**	.1103**	-.2561**	-.0394	-.0370	.0579	.2287**
SOCACT	.0947**	-.0070	.0903**	.0018	.1091**	-.0134	.0532*
PPCHILD 0-4	.1036**	-.1277**	.1416**	.0406	.0384	-.2893**	-.2399**
PPCHILD 5-11	.2330**	-.1522**	.1909**		.1449**		-.2516**
PPCHILD 12-18	.3145**	-.2838**	.2370**		.2241**		-.2656**
EDUCAT	.0000	-.0075	.0048	.1337**	.1650**	-.1003**	-.0282

*p<.05; **p<.01 (2-tailed).

Two regression procedures were used. First, the predictor variables were entered in the regression equations using forward variable selection. This method enters the variables with the greatest predictive power into the equation in successive steps until no additional variables can meet minimal criteria for entry, $p<.05$.

Second, predictor variables were entered into the equation using forced entry. This second method forces the entry of all predictor variables into the equation simultaneously. The forced entry method allows for the comparative performance of all hypothesized predictors. There was little substantive difference in results obtained by the two procedures, and results are shown only for the method of forced entry.

To determine that the independent variables were not affected by multicolinearity, tolerance levels were calculated for all variables. The high tolerance levels (ranging from .79 to .99) indicated little intercorrelation between independent variables in the equations.

In Chapter 4, are four sections of results representing the outcome of the multiple regression analysis for parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, marital quality and parenting behaviors.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Prediction of Parenting Satisfaction

Because differences were expected in the prediction of parenting satisfaction, stress and negative and positive parenting behaviors for parents of different ages of children, separate regression analysis were computed for each of the three child age categories: 0-4, 5-11, and 12-17.

The results for the prediction of parenting satisfaction for parents of children aged birth to four years old are shown in the first column of Table 4. As indicated in the table, four variables: greater self-worth, greater feelings of emotional well-being, education, and parents' perceptions of child were significant predictors of parenting satisfaction for parents' of children in this age group.

For parents of children aged five to eleven, high self-worth, parents' perception of easy child characteristics, low parenting stress, high well-being, and less education combined to predict parenting satisfaction with an overall R^2 of.17, that is shown in the middle two columns of Table 4.

Parenting satisfaction for parents of children aged twelve to seventeen was determined to be a function of

Table 4. Standardized Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Education, Parent Characteristics and Child Characteristics on Parenting Satisfaction.

	Parenting Satisfaction					
	Age 0-4		Age 5-11		Age 12-17	
	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol
Demographic variables						
Education	-.09*	.95	-.06*	.92	-.04	.97
Parent characteristics						
Parenting stress	-.05	.92	-.15*	.93	-.24*	.87
Self-worth	.15*	.83	.19*	.88	.16*	.90
Well-being	.10*	.82	.14*	.86	.09*	.89
Social support	-.05	.97	.04	.98	-.02	.98
Parents' health	.04	.91	.01	.92	.02	.96
Child characteristics						
Parents' perception of child characteristics	.08*	.93	.18*	.94	.21*	.90
Overall R^2	.07*		.17*		.21*	

N= 890, 1207, 1089
*p<.05

parenting stress, parents' perception of child characteristics, self-worth, and well-being. The overall R^2 was .21. Parenting stress appeared to be more of a problem for parents of teen-agers than for the other parents in this sample.

Parents' perception of child characteristics was important for all age groups; however, it appeared to be most important in predicting parenting satisfaction for parents of older children, particularly teen-agers. Also, positive perception of the child was important even for parents with high self-worth and well-being. Greater feelings of self-worth and well-being were significant predictors of parenting satisfaction for all parents.

Prediction of Parenting Stress

Parenting stress was analyzed as a function of parent, child, and demographic variables. Within these categories of variables, low self-worth seemed to be the most important predicting variable for parenting stress for parents of very young children. Also, low sense of well-being, as well as parents' perception of more difficult child characteristics (a low score on the child characteristics scale) were determinants of parenting stress.

For parents of children aged five to eleven, low parenting satisfaction, low sense of well-being, more difficult child characteristics, and low self-worth

combined to predict 10 percent of the variance in parenting stress.

The cause of parenting stress for parents of teen-age children appeared most strongly related to low parenting satisfaction, more difficult child characteristics, low sense of well-being, and low self-worth. The overall R^2 was .18.

Among education, parents' health and social support none were significant predictors of parenting stress for this sample. Self-worth, well-being, and child characteristics were the only variables with significant standardized beta coefficients common to parents of all three age groups. The complete results of the regression analysis are represented in Table 5.

Prediction of Marital Quality

In an attempt to determine the separate contributions of marriage, parent, and demographic characteristics to marital quality, predictor variables were separated into these specific categories.

Included in marriage characteristics were: marital conflict, marital discord and social activities. Social activities was considered to be a characteristic of the marriage because the questions asked appeared to be more related to marriage and family activities (church-going, visiting relatives, participation in clubs etc.) than individual activities.

Table 5. Standardized Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Education, Parent Characteristics and Child Characteristics on Parenting Stress.

	Parenting Stress					
	Age 0-4		Age 5-11		Age 12-17	
	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol
Demographic variables						
Education	.01	.94	-.01	.92	.05	.97
Parent characteristics						
Parenting satisfaction	-.04	.93	-.17*	.85	-.24*	.84
Self-worth	-.17*	.84	-.07*	.85	-.09*	.88
Well-being	-.14*	.83	-.12*	.85	-.14*	.90
Social support	.00	.97	.06	.99	-.04	.99
Parents' health	.03	.92	-.02	.92	.06	.96
Child characteristics						
Parents' perception of child characteristics	-.08*	.93	-.10*	.91	-.17*	.89
Overall R^2	.08*		.10*		.18*	

N= 890, 1207, 1089
*p<.05

The parent characteristics category was comprised of self-worth, well-being, parenting satisfaction, and parenting stress. Here, self-worth and well-being were included because they seem to measure more individual characteristics of a parent as opposed to marital or family characteristics.

Education was the demographic variable used to measure the effects of socio-economic status on marital quality.

After determining which variables to include, separate regression equations were calculated using the forward selection and forced entry methods. The results of the forced entry method are represented below in Table 6. Four different equations were calculated in the following four steps.

First, since I expected marriage characteristics to be strong predictors of marital quality, the first regression equation calculated included the marriage characteristics as shown in Table 6, Model I. These variables alone determined 11 percent of the variance in marital quality.

Second, as depicted in Table 6, Model II, parent characteristics were entered into a separate regression equation, with the result that parent characteristics alone accounted for 30 percent of the variance in marital quality.

Third, both marriage and parent characteristics were included in the equation shown in Table 6, Model III. Together, these sets of variables determined 35 percent of

Table 6. Regression of Marriage and Parent Demographic Characteristics on Marital Quality

	Model I		Model II		Model III		Model IV	
	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol
Marriage characteristics								
Conflict management	-.18*	.95			-.11*	.92	-.11*	.92
Marital conflict	-.24*	.94			-.16*	.92	-.16*	.91
Social activities	.10*	.99			.05*	.97	.05*	.98
Parent characteristics								
Self-worth			.12*	.88	.09*	.86	.10*	.85
Well-being			.17*	.89	.11*	.87	.11*	.84
Parenting satisfaction			.30*	.89	.30*	.87	.29*	.88
Parenting stress			-.24*	.91	-.26*	.91	-.26*	.91
Demographic characteristics								
Education							-.04*	.95
Overall R^2=	.11*		.30*		.35*		.36*	

N=3360
*p<.05.

the variance in marital quality. Because there was an increase in R^2 in Model III above than in either Model I or Model II, it was apparent that marriage and parent variables provide unique contributions to the explanation of the variance in marital quality. In addition, comparing the R^2 for Model III with the R^2 for Model I it was revealed that, when combined with marriage characteristics, parent characteristics still determined 24 percent (35-11) of the variance in marital quality. Further analysis of the variance is depicted in Figure 3. Among all the variables, parenting satisfaction and parenting stress had the highest significant standardized beta coefficients (.30,-.26, $p<.01$).

Last, education was entered with all the other variables in the regression equation. As is apparent in Table 6, Model IV, education contributed very little additional to the prediction of marital quality.

Table 6, Model IV, shows that the model that best accounts for the variance in marital quality includes these variables in order of greatest contribution (most to least): parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, marital conflict, conflict management, self-worth, well-being, social activities, and education. These variables predicted 36 percent of the variance in marital quality.

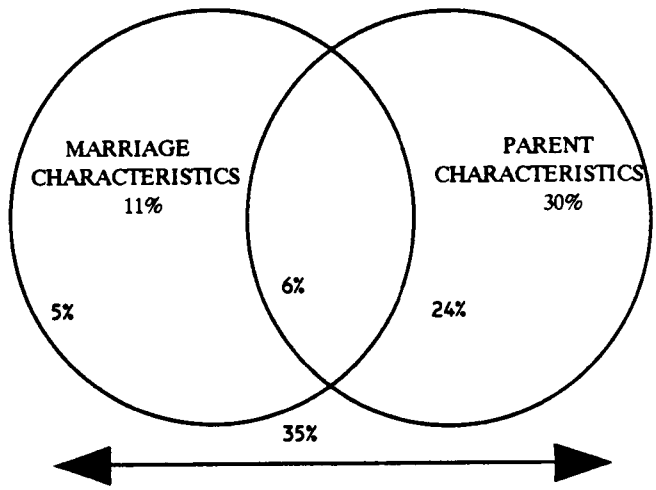

Figure 3. Variance analysis for marital quality. The contribution of parent characteristics to marital quality (net of their joint impact with marriage characteristics) was 24% of the 35% of the variance, or a total of 69% of the explained variance. Clearly, parent characteristics dominate the explanation of marital quality.

Prediction of Marital Quality by Gender

Separate models were predicted for marital quality for men and women. Although, the basic prediction models for marital quality for men and women were similar, there were some interesting gender differences.

Marital quality for women was enhanced by their social activities, while quality of marriage for men appeared to be unaffected by the presence of social activities, as had been found in previous research.

There were also some differences in the relative impact of both parenting satisfaction and parenting stress for men and women. For men, these factors appeared to be more important in determining marital quality. In fact, for men, their standardized beta coefficients for parenting satisfaction and parenting stress were two to three times greater than their standardized betas on the marriage characteristics.

Also, the relative importance of parenting versus self measures (parenting satisfaction and stress versus self-worth and well-being) was different for men and women. That is, although the variables operated in the same way for men and for women, for men the difference between self measures and parenting measures was greater. Table 7, depicts these differences.

Table 7. Regression of Variables on Marital Quality by Gender

	Women		Men	
	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol
Demographic variables				
Education	-.03	.96	-.05	.94
Marriage characteristics				
Conflict management	-.08*	.94	-.11*	.94
Marital conflict	-.20*	.95	-.17*	.95
Social activities	.11*	.98	-.01	.98
Parent characteristics				
Parenting satisfaction	.24*	.91	.35*	.91
Parenting stress	-.23*	.91	-.30*	.91
Self-worth	.10*	.86	.08*	.86
Well-being	.11*	.87	.08*	.87
Overall R^2=	.36*		.38*	

N= 1638, 2071
*p<.05.

Prediction of Positive and Negative Parenting Behaviors

The predictions of parenting behaviors have been separated into age categories (see Table 8), to ascertain whether or not there were variations in determinants of behavior for parents with different aged children.

Positive parenting behaviors (hugging, praising) for parents of very young children seemed to be best predicted by parenting satisfaction and education. However, the R^2 (.07) was quite low. For parents of school age children, positive parenting behaviors were predicted most by education, parenting satisfaction, parents perception of child characteristics, and self-worth.

The results for parents of teen-agers were similar to those for school-aged children' parents in that parenting satisfaction, child characteristics, education, and social support were significant predictors of positive parenting behaviors. Parenting satisfaction was the one variable common to all three groups of parents.

Most interesting, although higher education was negatively related to parenting satisfaction, it was a strong predictor of positive parenting behavior.

Negative Parenting Behaviors

As shown in Table 9, negative parenting behaviors (spanking, slapping and yelling) were predicted by parents' perceptions of more difficult child characteristics, less

Table 8. Standardized Regression Coefficients for the Effects of Education, Parent Characteristics and Child Characteristics on Positive Parenting Behaviors

	Positive Parenting Behaviors					
	Age 0-4		Age 5-11		Age 12-17	
	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol
Demographic variables						
Education	.13*	.96	.19*	.92	.11*	.96
Parent characteristics						
Parenting satisfaction	.18*	.96	.13*	.84	.16*	.80
Self-worth	.02	.85	.11*	.85	.01	.89
Well-being	.00	.85	-.02	.84	-.08*	.88
Social support	.04	.96	.03	.97	.12*	.99
Parents' health	.04	.91	.03	.92	.02	.96
Child characteristics						
Parents' perception of child characteristics	-.04	.90	.10*	.91	.16*	.84
Overall R^2	.07*		.10*		.10*	

N= 890, 1207, 1089
*p<.05

Table 9. Regression of Education, Parent Characteristics and Child Characteristics on Negative Parenting Behaviors

	Negative Parenting Behaviors					
	Age 0-4		Age 5-11		Age 12-17	
	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol	Beta	Tol
Demographic variables						
Education	-.19*	.95	-.05	.92	-.02	.99
Parent characteristics						
Parenting stress	.15*	.92	.06	.90	.04	.82
Self-worth	-.05	.85	-.07*	.85	-.02	.89
Well-being	-.04	.85	-.06	.84	-.03	.88
Social support	.03	.96	.09*	.98	.02	.99
Parents' health	.04	.91	.00	.92	.05	.97
Parents' satisfaction	-.06	.96	-.04	.84	-.08*	.79
Child characteristics						
Parents' perception of child characteristics	-.21*	.90	-.22*	.91	-.23*	.83
Overall R^2	.15		.10		.09	

N= 890, 1207, 1089
*p<.05

education, and higher parenting stress, for parents of very young children. The overall R^2 was .15.

For parents of school age children, negative parenting behaviors were predicted by parents' perception of negative child characteristics, low self-worth, and education. The overall R^2 was .11.

Parents' perceptions of child and parenting satisfaction were significant predictors of negative parenting behaviors for parents of teen-agers. Parents' perceptions of child was the only variable with significant standardized beta coefficients common to parents of all age groups.

Parents' perception of difficult child characteristics were the strongest predictors of negative parenting behaviors (slapping, and yelling) for parents of all ages of children.

Education was negatively related to negative parenting behaviors for all parents.

The basic results of the various multiple regression analyses for the prediction of parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, marital quality, and positive and negative parenting behaviors are portrayed in the following models (Figures 4 and 5). These models were created to provide a larger picture of the combined results of regression analyses. Only predictor variables that were significant for the prediction of parenting satisfaction

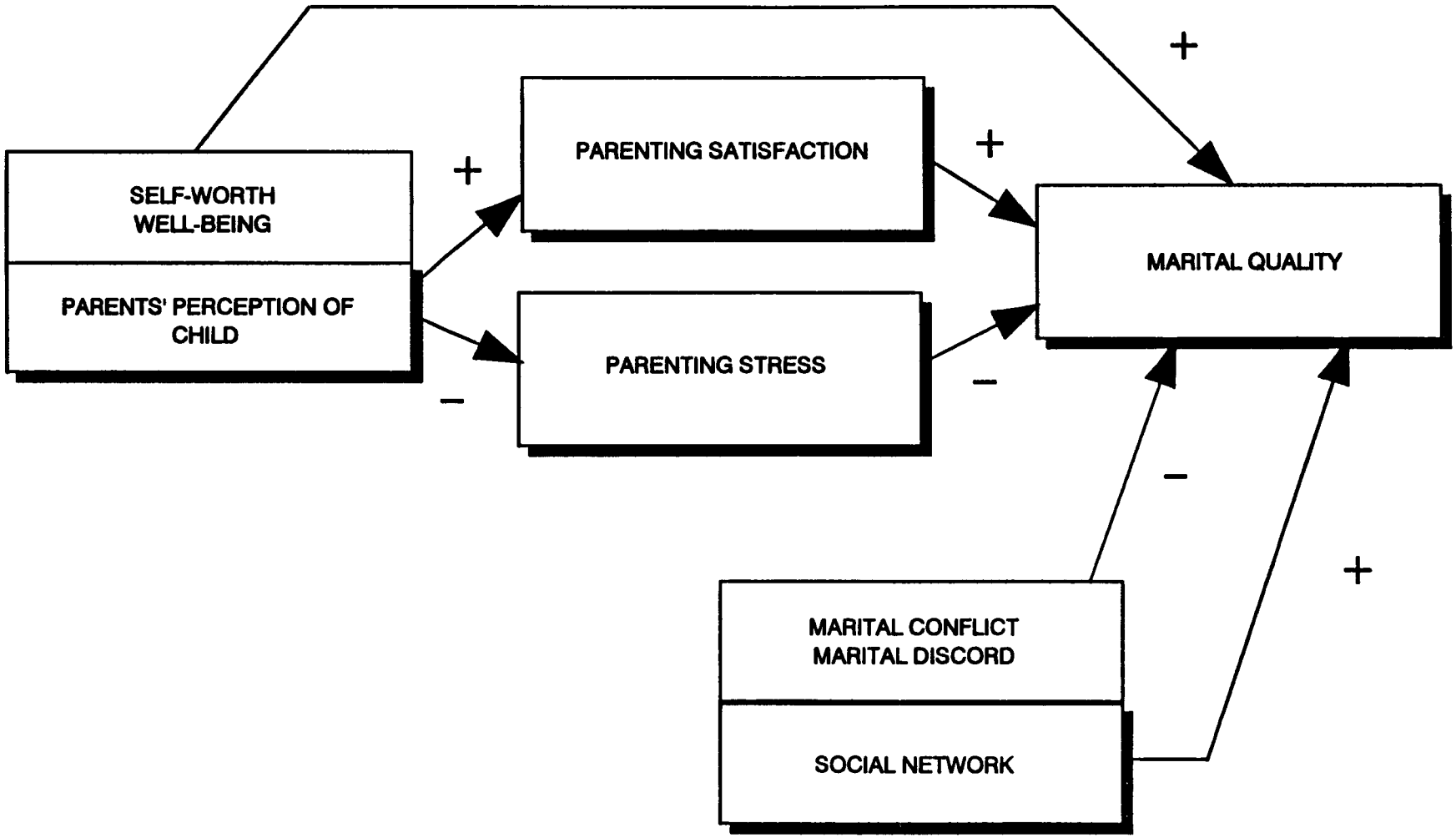

Figure 4. Prediction of marital quality by parenting satisfaction and parenting stress.

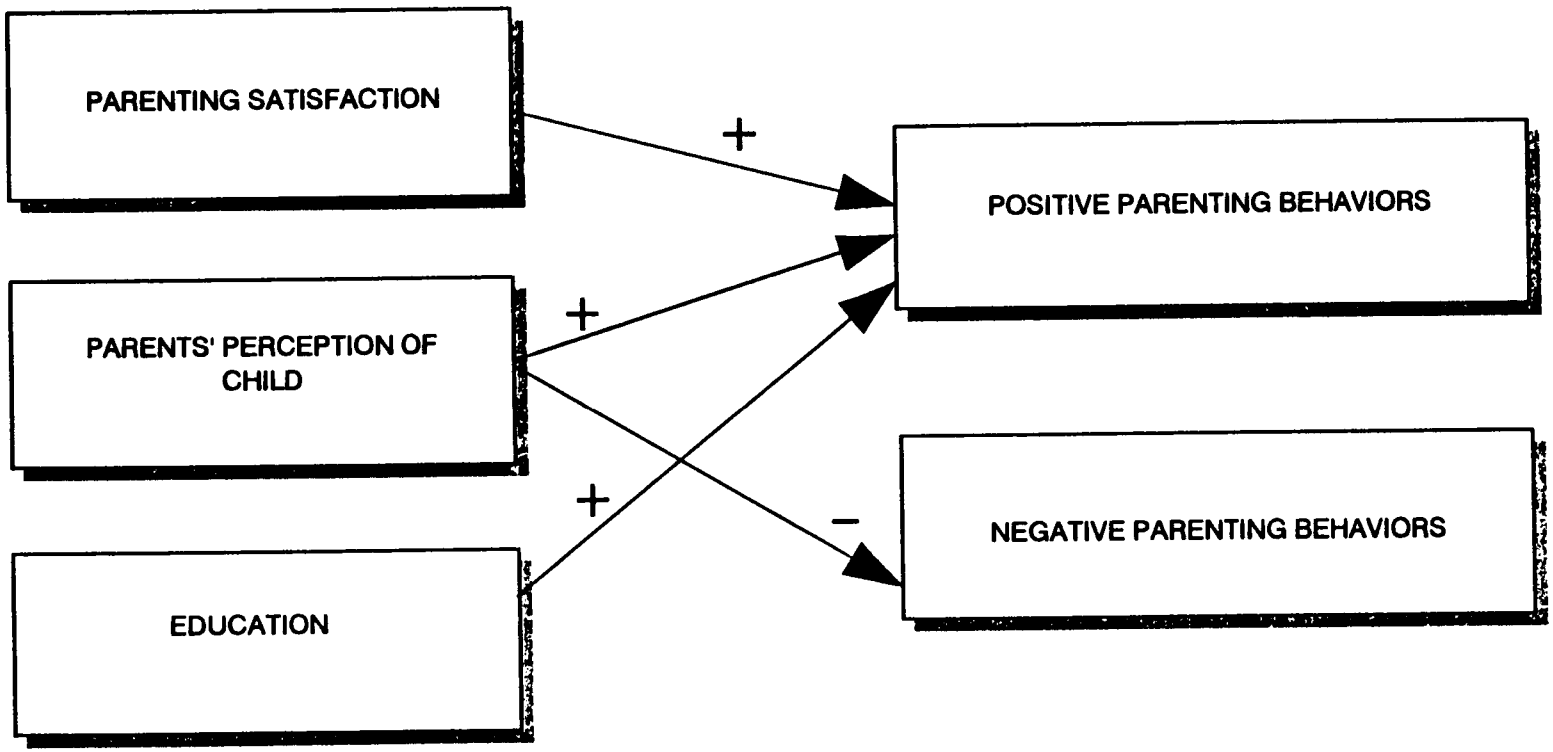

Figure 5. Prediction of positive and negative parenting behaviors.

and stress to parents of all age groups are included in the models.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

At the outset of this research endeavor, several questions were postulated regarding factors affecting parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, marital quality, and parenting behaviors. Some answers confirm the results of previous research, and others suggest possibilities for future research.

First, this study focused on the effect of parents' perceptions of child on parenting satisfaction. The results of the multiple regression analyses confirmed the expectation that these two variables are positively related. Parents' perceptions of child are included in the regression equations with significant beta coefficients for all ages of children. These findings from the regression analysis are consistent with the picture portrayed by the correlation coefficients, that is, parenting satisfaction is positively correlated with parents' perception of child for all ages of children.

Another question regarding child characteristics examined in this study concerned whether or not parents' perceptions of their child are related to parenting stress. Again, as was expected, parents' perceptions of child were demonstrated to be related to parenting stress by the multiple regression equations.

The regression analysis confirmed the previous findings that parents' perceptions of child are negatively correlated with parenting stress for all parents.

The third, and the most central question of this research was: How are parenting satisfaction and parenting stress related to marital quality? The results of the regression analyses demonstrate that parenting satisfaction is related to marital quality and that parenting stress is inversely related to marital quality. The correlation matrix generated first revealed that parenting satisfaction and parenting stress are strongly correlated with marital quality. Furthermore, parent characteristics explain .24 percent of the variability in marital quality, net of their joint relationship with marital characteristics. In fact, it is clear that parent characteristics dominate the explanation of marital quality.

The last question addressed by this study involved the examination of factors predicting actual parenting behaviors. Regarding positive behavior, parenting satisfaction was included in the regression equations predicting positive parenting behaviors for parents of children of all ages.

There was less support from the regression analyses for the expectation that parenting stress is related to negative parenting behaviors, as parenting stress was a significant predictor of negative parenting behaviors only for parents of children ages birth to four. However,

parenting stress and negative parenting behaviors were positively correlated for all parents. A summary of the results predicting parenting satisfaction, parenting stress, and positive and negative parenting behaviors for parents of all ages of children is included in Table 10.

It should be particularly noted that parenting stress appeared as a significant predictor of negative behaviors for parents of children ages birth to four years, the age group most vulnerable to child abuse. Evidently, the combination of parents' negative perception of their child, high parenting stress, low self-worth, low emotional well-being, and low education are major predictors of negative parenting behaviors for parents of young children. Carrying this a step further, it seems that this combination could also place the child at higher risk for child abuse.

It seems that one of the most significant findings of this research was that parents' perception of child were strongly related to parent attitudes and behavior for parents of all ages of children. It is understood that the measures in this research contained parents' subjective assessments of child characteristics. Therefore, parents' attitudes or perceptions were measured, not actual child personality or behavior. The parent may well be accurate in assessing child characteristics, or the parent may be biased by other unknown factors in the appraisal. Regardless, it was the parents' attitude or perception of

Table 10. Summary of Results: The Prediction of Parenting Satisfaction, Parenting Stress, and Positive and Negative Parenting Behaviors.

Parents of Children Aged 0-4 Years	Parents of Children Aged 5-11 Years	Parents of Children Aged 12-18 Years
Parenting satisfaction: Self-worth Well-being Education Parents' perception of child	Parenting satisfaction: Self-worth Parents' perception of child Parenting stress Well-being Education	Parenting satisfaction: Parenting stress Parents' perception of child Self-worth Well-being
Parenting stress: Self-worth Well-being Parents' perception of child	Parenting stress: Parenting satisfaction Well-being Parents' perception of child Self-worth	Parenting stress: Parenting satisfaction Parents' perception of child Well-being Self-worth
Positive Parenting behaviors: Parenting satisfaction Education	Positive Parenting behaviors: Education Parenting satisfaction Self-worth Parents' perception of child	Positive Parenting behaviors: Parents' perception of child Parenting satisfaction Social support Education
Negative Parenting behaviors: Parents' perception of child Education Parenting stress Self-worth Well-being	Negative Parenting behaviors: Parents' perception of child Social support Self-worth	Negative Parenting behaviors: Parents' perception of child Parenting satisfaction

the child that were measured, and these attitudes and perceptions often drive their parenting behaviors.

The results of the regression analyses indicated that parents' perception of child was a significant predictor of parenting stress, parenting satisfaction, and both positive and negative parenting behaviors. Parents' perception of child was a significant predictor in the regression equations for these variables for parents of all ages of children, with the exception of positive parenting behaviors for parents of children ages birth to four.

The fact that parents' perception of child characteristics was negatively related to positive behaviors for very young children is somewhat baffling, even though the relationship is not significant. It could be that "easy" babies elicit less response in general from busy parents, including positive behaviors, than more demanding babies.

At any rate, the strongest relationship by comparison of the beta coefficients was between parents' negative perceptions of child and negative parenting behaviors (spanking, slapping, and yelling).

There are several implications of this finding that seem worthy of consideration. First, it is a particularly disturbing connection due to the fact that, drawing from what is known about children, it is likely that parents' perceptions often have the effect of producing more of the behavior in children that may have originally influenced

the parents' attitude, whether positive or negative. That is, children who are perceived as "bad" may become so in fulfillment of parental expectations; and, although actual causal relationships cannot be inferred from these results, it is possible that a pattern of negative interactions and behaviors between parent and child, even abuse could result. Second, perceptions (how a parent views their child) is influenced by factors in the parenting context that may be completely unrelated to the child or his/her behavior. It would be interesting to see, all other factors being equal, if parents who are experiencing a high degree of life stress have more negative perceptions of their children than do parents in more favorable situations.

Another interesting finding is that the relative importance of parents' perceptions of child seem to increase with the advancing age of the child. Among all the age categories, it is the most important for parents' of teen-agers for all of the predicted variables (parenting satisfaction, stress, and positive and negative parenting behaviors). These results generated more questions about the differences in parenting teen-agers versus parenting younger children. Perhaps teen-agers are indeed more difficult, moody, and temperamental than younger children. Or, it could be that the adolescent's budding maturity engenders ambivalent feelings toward him/her in parents who are simultaneously experiencing their own loss of youth.

Regardless, this one variable seems to have a pervasive effect on the parent-child relationship, as it affects parents' feelings of satisfaction or stress with parenting and actual parent behaviors.

Clearly, parents' perceptions of child are an important predictor of parents' feelings about parenthood and of their parental behaviors. In addition, parents' perceptions of children, child personality and child behavior are factors with rather complex origins. Since the effects of parents' perceptions seem to have such a broad scope, further research into determinants of parents' perceptions of child and predictors of child behavior is warranted.

The findings are of particular interest given the fact that much of the literature on parenting seems to focus on "generic" parenting, treating all children and parents as if they were the same. Clearly, children and parents have very different personalities and respond to the world in very different ways. Further research on child personality and on factors related to parents' perceptions of children, combined with teaching efforts aimed at helping parents to understand, and thus be more effective parents to their individual children, are needed.

The finding that parents' perception of child was a very important predictor of parenting behaviors, parenting satisfaction, and parenting stress is not surprising when considered within the framework of family stress theory.

In family stress theory the perception of the stressor is thought to have a strong impact on the effect of the stressor event. For this study the stressor event was the child, and parents' perceptions of child is equivalent to Hills' family perception of the crisis, while parenting behaviors, and attitudes (parenting satisfaction and parenting stress) were the outcomes.

The results of this study also indicate that parents' sense of self-worth and well-being is related to parenting satisfaction. This finding underscores the need for parent educators, mental health counselors, and professionals in the areas of child development and family studies to be emotionally supportive of parents in their child-rearing efforts. Indeed, it seems that a primary role of parent helpers should be emotional support, especially since, as indicated by this study, higher feelings of parenting satisfaction are strongly related to positive parenting behaviors.

Therefore, from the results of this study, mental health professionals interested in increasing positive parenting behaviors should focus on increasing parenting satisfaction.

It seems especially critical that parents involved in high-demand parenting receive encouragement from sources of support, particularly from professionals from whom they seek help. Respite care may also be very important for highly stressed parents, as it gives them a chance to

replenish the emotional resources that are so necessary to be good parents and good marriage partners.

Self-worth and well-being are related to a persons' perception of their situation. It may be that the result of the stressor event, in this case children, is most affected by the parents' perception of the stressor (Boss, 1989). Parents' perceptions of their children are in turn most likely influenced by their own feelings of self-worth and well-being. Perception of stressors is further affected by available resources to meet demands made upon the system (Boss, 1988). Does the parent feel competent about parenting? What kind of social support does the family have? How is the family doing financially? Is the couple able to co-parent? These are questions about emotional, relational and physical resources that profoundly affect the parenting experience, as well as parents' perceptions of their children.

High self-worth and emotional well-being are very important resources necessary for effective parenting. Optimally, these resources are present before parenting begins. But, they are also dynamic attributes that are affected by a parents' perception of past and present successes and failures. It is easy to see how parenting a particularly demanding child could lead to lower emotional well-being in a parent and, thus, render the parent even less able to parent effectively.

Bettelheim (1987) stated that "to be a good enough parent one must be able to feel secure in one's parenthood, and one's relation to one's child" (p. 13). Helping parents to focus on their own strengths, the strengths of their unique child, and their family strengths could enable parents to feel more secure about parenting and about themselves. In working with parents, parent helpers could focus on "inducing them to develop their own insights about child-rearing and attitudes appropriate not only to their purposes but also the person they are and to their child" (Bettelheim, 1987, p. 6).

Also, parents' personal feelings of self-worth and well-being may relate to the ability to enjoy children. Emotionally secure parents may find the antics of their children not just frustrating, but fascinating and engaging.

According to this study parents with higher education tend to behave more positively toward their children, even though they are also less satisfied with parenting. Thus, it appears that positive parenting behaviors can be produced via two different mechanisms--higher levels of education, and satisfaction with parenting. The finding that less education correlates to higher parenting satisfaction is somewhat surprising. However, it is consistent with the conclusions of other researchers, notably Hoffman (1978) and Veroff et al. (1981) that higher education is related to less parenting satisfaction.

The relationship between education and parenting satisfaction in this study is perhaps best understood in terms of role salience. That is, persons with more education most likely have other roles in life from which they derive satisfaction and form a basis for their identity. For example, involvement in other roles beyond the role of homemaker or mother only is related to greater physical and psychological well-being in women (McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1989). The parental role may, therefore, be a less important source satisfaction for parents with more education in comparison to persons with less education.

It is also possible that more educated parents may have relatively more difficulty enjoying parenting partly because it is so unpredictable (it is impossible to control outcomes) and so ambiguous for people who are achievement- and result-oriented. Also, their expectations of themselves and their children may be higher at the outset, leading to some disappointment when they are faced with the difficulties and drudgeries that are part of the daily reality of caring for children. On the other hand, higher education is associated with more positive parenting behaviors. This finding lends support to the value of parent education as a means of improving parenting skills. Perhaps more educated parents are better able to understand child development, as well as more knowledgeable about and willing to try less punitive methods of child management

than their less educated counterparts. Indeed, less education is related to more negative parenting behaviors for parents of children ages birth to four. Again this result confirms the need for parent education to improve the quality of parent-child relations especially for parents of young children.

The most significant finding of this study was that parenting satisfaction and parenting stress were strongly related to marital quality. Past research on the effects of children on marital quality have focused primarily on the presence or absence of children, not on the specific impact of satisfaction or stress associated with the parenting experience. Yet, the results of this study clearly indicate that they are important variables in predicting marital quality for married couples who are parents. In fact, the results of this study lend credence to the view that parenting satisfaction and parenting stress are mediating variables that account for differences in marital quality. The most important factor appears to be not simply the presence of children only, but whether the parent is satisfied, dissatisfied, or stressed by parenting. It may well be that the 20 to 35 percent of couples who felt their marriages improved with the addition of children in Belsky and Rovine's (1990) longitudinal study were experiencing more satisfaction with parenting than were the 16 percent who were negatively effected. Likewise, those couples who

reported a decline in marital satisfaction were perhaps experiencing more stress in the parenting role.

There are some important implications of these findings for marital therapy for couples with children. It seems likely that teaching parents better parenting skills and positive ways of coping with parenting stress, as well as improving their self-esteem could have the added benefit of improving the marital relationship. Also, specific interventions used to help couples should consider parent and child personalities with the aim of helping parents deal with their children. In sum, parents' perceptions of child characteristics seem to be very important in determining whether parents are more satisfied or stressed by parenting. Also, the results of this study indicated that parenting satisfaction and stress have a strong impact on the marital relationship.

It is recognized that the relationship between marital quality and parenting satisfaction and stress is probably not uni-directional only, but, rather, is bi-directional. Parents with poor marriages are less likely to be able to handle the demands of parenting. Likewise, parenting stress or satisfaction affects the marriage regardless of how poor or how excellent it is. Apart from expert knowledge of a particular family, it appears that only longitudinal studies could differentiate whether parenting stress is negatively affecting the marriage or if, instead, the poor marital relationship produces parenting stress.

It remains to be seen whether or not marriages experience serious decline because of parenting stress, and why. It could be that certain types of marriages are more vulnerable to parenting stress. Relationship patterns established before children are born into the family may greatly affect a couples ability to parent. Couples ability to co-parent and support one another in raising their children could also affect parenting satisfaction and stress. Future research could focus on the marital characteristics associated with parenting satisfaction and stress.

The finding that parenting satisfaction and parenting stress were slightly more important as predictors of marital quality for men than for women is worthy of further investigation. This may be best explained by the results of other studies which have found that marital and family relationships appear to be more important to the emotional well-being of men. Women typically have far more sources of emotional support than men and larger friendship networks (McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1989). These other relationship may help insulate them from the negative effects of parenting stress. On the other hand, family relationships are very often the only source of emotional closeness or intimacy in life for men, and not surprisingly marriage is generally more beneficial for men than women. As Ross et al. (1990) state, "Although marriage generally protects and improves health, it protects men's well-being

more than women's" (p. 1062). Also, in his study of single men and women, Williams (1988) found that single men are more depressed and have more psychological symptoms than single women, though all groups were more depressed than married men and women. It stands to reason that turmoil in family relationships may have a more negative effect on men than women.

In sum, contrary to conventional ideology about the relative importance of family roles and relationships to men and women, it may be that family relationships are more central to the perception of marital quality and ultimately the well-being of men than women. In addition, based on the results of this study, it could be said that fathers' positive involvement with children may have the effect of strengthening marriage (if involvement enhances parenting satisfaction and thus marital quality). Conversely, father-distance, more the traditional form of American Fatherhood, is detrimental not only to children, but to marriage itself.

Parenting satisfaction may be very important to the well-being of men because of this link to marital quality, as married men report greater psychological well-being than single men (Williams, 1988). The results of this study support the current trend of greater father involvement in families as being a very positive change for children and marriages. Furthermore, if greater marital quality

increases the likelihood of marital success, then father involvement may actually promote marital stability.

In summary, the results of this study indicate that there is a great deal about the satisfactions and stresses of parenting and their affect on marriage that have not been accounted for in past research on the effect of children on marital quality. The results of the present study provides impetus for future research on the effects of parenting on marriage, particularly for fathers. Future research needs to include study of both negative and the more elusive positive effects of parenting on marriage. It seems that simple measures of happiness may largely miss the greater impact children have on parents' sense of life-meaning. In the long run, children may actually improve marital happiness and an even-less studied dynamic, the depth of the marital relationship. Many couples report feeling closer because of the trials that they have endured together, many of which were brought on by children.

Equivocal, ambivalent feelings go hand-in-hand with parenting satisfactions and stresses, as raising children is alternately beautiful and mundane, exquisitely joyful and painful. Furthermore, parenting is a journey of learning. It is an invitation to explore oneself and to learn more about our partner, and how painful and inspiring these revelations can be. With little ones modeling us, our faults become glaringly evident. More ambivalence is created in that we must not only care for our children, but

also be good people for them. Spouses and children surely bring out the worst and best in us all. Likewise, in the combining of spousal and parental roles there is conflict and fulfillment.

In this present study, sources of parenting satisfaction and parenting stress have been delineated and examined regarding their effect on marital quality. Abidin (1983) characterized parents experiencing a high degrees of parental stress as being in two groups: those with difficult children and those with difficult situations. Of special concern are the marriages and the children of parents who have both.

Most of the research on children and marital quality up to this point has focused on outcome rather than process. I think it is important, in order to help distressed couples, to understand the different ways that the stresses of parenting affect marriage. For this reason, more research on the processes by which parenting satisfaction and stress affect marital quality is needed.

Children affect marriage through satisfactions and stresses, through a myriad of emotions. Measuring their net effect on a life or on a marriage is very difficult indeed. Longitudinal studies need to be performed in order to really access the impact of their presence. However, it is clear that parents and their marriages, (the very partnership that often creates the children) are very much affected by parenting satisfactions and stresses.

Consequently, thoughtful research that reflects the complexity and richness of the parenting experience is needed in the study of the impact of children on marriage.

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APPENDIX

DESCRIPTION OF MEASURES

Parenting Satisfaction Scale
Defined as a subjective feeling of gratification, pleasure, and fulfillment associated with the parental role.

	Var Name	Question
1.	E205A	Q.5 How would you describe the things you do parent? Would you say they were: Boring to Interesting scale: 0=no children, 1=boring to 7=interesting, missing values=8,9
2.	E205B	Unappreciated to Appreciated scale: 0=no children, 1=unappreciated to 7=unappreciated
3.	E205E	3. Lonely to Sociable scale: 0=nc, 1=lonely to 7=sociable

Parenting Stress Index
Defined as a subjective feeling of anxiety, disturbance, tension, and displeasure in association with parenting role.

1.	E205C	Overwhelming to Manageable scale: 1=manageable to 7 overwhelming
2.	E205F	Poorly done to Well done scale: 1=well done to 7=poorly done

Marital Quality Scale
Defined as subjective perception of how good marriage is/is not at a particular time.

	Var Name	Question
1.	E206A	Q.6 How would you describe the things you do as a husband or wife? Boring to Interesting scale: 0=not married, 1=boring to 7=interesting
2.	E206B	Unappreciated to Appreciated scale: 0=nm, 1=unappreciated to 7=appreciated
3.	E206C	Overwhelming to Manageable scale: 0=nm, 1=overwhelming to 7=manageable

4. E206E Lonely to Sociable
scale: 0=nm, 1=lonely to 7=sociable

5. E206F Poorly done to Well done
scale: 0=nm, 1=poorly done, 7=well done

Positive Parenting Behavior Ages 0-4
For children under 5 years

1. E902A Q. Please indicate how often you:
Praise Child
1=never
2=seldom
3=sometimes
4=very often
6=inappropriate
9=NA

2. E902C Cuddle or Hug Child
scale: 1=never to 4=very often

Positive Parenting Behavior Ages 5-17
Children Ages 5-17

Q. Please indicate how often you . . .

7. E1003A Praise child.
1=never
2=seldom
3=sometimes
4=very often
6=inappl
8=DK
9=NA

8. E1003B Allow child to help set rules.
6,7,9 missing vals

9. E1003D Hug child.
6,7,9

Negative Parenting Behaviors 0-4
Children ages 0-5

1. E902B Spank or slap child.
scale: 1=never to 4=very often

2. E902D Yell at child.
scale: 1=never to 4=very often

Negative Parenting Behaviors 5-17
Children ages 5-17

1. E1003C Spank or slap child.
   scale: 1=never to 4=very often

2. E1003D Yell at child.

Self-Worth Index

1. E1359L Q. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
   1=strongly agree
   2=agree
   3=neither disagree or agree
   4=disagree
   5=strongly disagree
   7-ref
   8=DK
   9=NA

Well-being Scale

1. E201 Q. Taking all things together, how would you say things are these days?
   scale: 1=very unhappy to 7 very happy

2. E202A Q. On how many days during the past week did you:
   Feel bothered by things that usually don't bother you?
   scale: 0=0 days to 7=7 days

3. E202B Not feel like eating; your appetite was poor?
   scale: 0=0 days to 7=7 days
   8=DK, 9=NA

4. E202C Feel that you could not shake of the blues even with help from your family or friends?

5. E202D Have trouble keeping your mind on what you were doing?

6. E202E Feel depressed?

7. E202F Feel that everything was an effort?

8. E202G Feel fearful?

Parents Health

1. E207 Q. Compared with people your age, how would you describe your health?
   1=very poor
   2=poor
   3=fair
   4=good
   5=excellent
   7=refused
   8=DK
   9=NA

2. E211A Q. Do you have a physical or mental condition that limits your ability to: Care for personal needs, such as dressing, eating or going to the restroom?
   1=yes
   2=No
   7=ref
   9=NA

3. E211B Move about the house?

4. E211C Work for pay?

5. E211D Do day-to-day tasks?

6. E211E Climb a flight of stairs?
   8=DK

7. E211F Walk 6 blocks?
   8=DK

Social Support

1. E215A Q. Suppose you had an emergency in the middle of the night and needed help. Who would you call?
   0=no-one
   1=friends, neighbors, co-workers
   2=sons/daughters 19+
   3=parents
   4=brother/sisters
   5=other relatives
   6=more than 1 code circles
   7=ref
   8=DK
   9=NA

2. E215B Q. What if you had to borrow $200.00 for a few weeks because of an emergency. Who would you ask?
scale: 0=no-one to 9=NA

3. E215C Q. Suppose you had a problem, and you were feeling depressed and confused about what to do. Who would you ask for help or advice?
scale: 0=no-one to 9=NA

Parents' Perception of Child Characteristics 0-4
(Age 0-4)

1. M289 Would you describe him/her as particularly easy to raise?
1=yes
2=no
6=inapplicable
9=NA

Q. Please tell me which statement has been often true, sometimes true or has not been true of child in the past 3 months.
1=often true
2=sometimes true
3=not true
6=inappl
9=NA

2. M295B Is fussy or irritable

3. M295D Loses temper easily

4. M295E Is cheerful and happy

5. M295F Is fearful and anxious

6. M295G Bullies, or is cruel or mean to others.

7. M295H Does what you ask.

Parents' Perception of Child Characteristics 5-11
AGES 5-11

1. M305A Is willing to try new things.
1=often true
2=sometimes true
3=not true
6=inappl
9=NA

2. M305B Is unhappy, sad or depressed.

3. M305C Keeps self busy.

4. M305D Loses temper easily

5. M305E Is cheerful and happy

6. M305F Is fearful and anxious.

7. M305G Bullies, or is cruel and mean to others.

8. M305H Does what you ask.

9. M305I Gets along well with other kids.

10. M305J Carries out responsibilities on his/her own.

Parents' Perception of Child Characteristics 12-17
AGES 12-17

1. M325A Is willing to try new things.
   1=often true
   2=sometimes true
   3=not true
   6=inappl
   9=NA

2. M325B Is unhappy, sad or depressed.

3. M325C Keeps self busy

4. M325D Loses temper easily

5. M325E Is cheerful and happy.

6. M325F Is fearful and anxious.

7. M325G Bullies, oris cruel and mean to others.

8. M325H Does what you ask.

9. M325I Gets along well with other kids.

10. M325J Carries out responsibilities on his/her own.

Marital Conflict Scale

1. E706A Q. How often, if at all, in the last year have you had open disagreements about each of the following?

Household Tasks.
01=never
02=less than once a month
03=several times a month
04=about once a week
05=several times a week
06=almost every day
06=inappropriate
97=ref
99=na

2. E706B Money

3. E706C Spending time together

4. E706D Sex

5. E706E Having another child

6. E706F Inlaws

7. E706G The children

Social Activities Scale

1. E216A1 Q. How often do you do the following things? Spend a social evening with:
Relatives?
0=never
1=several times a year
2=about once a month
3=about once a week
4=several times a week
7=ref
9=NA

2. E216A2 A Neighbor?
scale: 0=never to 4=sev. x week

3. E216A3 People you work with?
scale: 0=never to 4=sev. x week
missing values=7,8,9

4. E216A4 Friends who live outside your neighborhood?
scale: 0=never to 4=sev x week

5. E216B Q. Attend a social event at your church or synagogue?
scale: 0=never to 4=sev x week
missing vals=7,9

6. E216C Q. Go to a bar or tavern?
scale: 0=never to 4= sev x week

7. E216D Q. Participate in group recreational activities such as bowling, golf, square dancing etc.
scale: 0=never to 4= sev x week

Marital Conflict Management

Q. When you have a serious disagreement with your husband or wife, how often do you:

1. E707B Discuss your disagreement calmly?
1=never
2=seldom
3=sometimes
4=very often
5=always
6=inappropriate
7=ref
8=DK
9=NA

2. E707C Argue heatedly or shout at each other?

3. E707D End up hitting or throwing things at each other?

VITA

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