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THE EFFECTS OF MARITAL CONFLICT ON SIBLING RELATIONSHIPS

A Dissertation  
Presented for the  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Degree  
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Allison Mercedes Caban  
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The Parental Marital Questionnaire may be used without permission for educational purposes only.

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Sarah, my father Jerry, my sister Cynthia, my brother Ed, my sister-in-law Omar, my aunt Youvhan, my cousins Brenda, Karen, and Maiah, and to my loving husband Gary. Thank you for always encouraging me, believing in me, and wishing good things for me. You help me truly understand the meaning and importance of having a supportive family to help through the hard times. I also would like to thank my band of cheerleaders who have helped me remain optimistic and steadfast throughout this difficult process. Regina Holmes, Tedra Jamison, Laura Negel, Roxanne Manning, Priti Parekh, Robert Fields, Victoria McKeever; I thank you all for being such good friends. I really appreciate your kindness.

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## ABSTRACT

In an effort to capture college students' ( $N = 331$ , average age = 18.9 years,  $SD = 1.5$  years, 87% Caucasian, 74% have married parents) perceptions of conflict between their parents, the Parental Marital Questionnaire (PMQ) was developed in Study 1 of this investigation. The PMQ demonstrated good full-scale reliability ( $\alpha = .90$ ) and good reliabilities for its three factors (Intensity  $\alpha = .96$ , Negative Affect  $\alpha = .94$ , and Support  $\alpha = .96$ ). Further, the PMQ also showed consistent validity with 9 established measures of family and marital relationships. Taken together, the results of Study 1 suggest that the PMQ is a valid and reliable measure of college student's perceptions of interparental conflict between their parents. Study 2 used an independent sample of college students having at least one sibling ( $N = 207$ , average age = 19.6 years,  $SD = 4.1$  years, 83% Caucasian, 93% have parents who are married) to confirm the factor structure of the PMQ, as determined in Study 1, and to explore the association between interparental conflict and sibling relationship quality. Again, the PMQ showed good full-scale reliability ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and the same factor structure (subscale alphas for the Study 2 sample were: Intensity  $\alpha = .97$ , Negative Affect  $\alpha = .95$ , and Support  $\alpha = .96$ ) as in Study 1. Finally, the ratings on two sibling relationship scales; The Brother-Sister Questionnaire (BSQ; 1994) and a scale developed by Cicirelli (1980); were compared to PMQ subscale ratings. Correlational procedures show that the relationships of siblings in three age difference groupings (closest in age to the respondent [SIB1], next closest in age to the respondent [SIB2], and furthest in age from the respondent [SIB3]) on the two sibling relationship measures were negatively affected by perceptions of higher levels marital conflict between parents, and positively affected by perceptions of support between parents. Results of Study 2 confirmed the factor structure of the PMQ found in Study 1, and indicate that siblings who perceive higher levels of marital conflict between their parents have more difficult relationships with one another.

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## CHAPTER I

### Background

Marital conflict and its effects on individual children has long been a topic of investigation. Research in this area has identified a wide range of behavioral and emotional difficulties in children that are associated with exposure to marital conflict (see Grych & Fincham [1990] for a review). Marital conflict has been shown to put children at increased risk for a number of externalizing problems, such as conduct disorders (Rutter, 1971), aggression and noncompliance (Cummings & Davies, 1994; Emery, 1982; Jenkins & Smith, 1991; Jouriles, Barling, & O'Leary, 1987), and internalizing problems such as depression (Johnston, Gonzales, & Campbell, 1987), low self-esteem (Slater & Haber, 1984), and anxiety (Emery, 1982). Additionally, problems in social and cognitive competence have also been linked to marital conflict (Forehand, Lautenschlager, Faust, & Graziano, 1986). Overall, research on marital conflict and the family suggest that individual children are negatively affected by marital conflict. However, relatively little research has been conducted that focuses on the effects of interparental conflict on sibling relationships. The current investigation will examine marital conflict and how it affects the sibling bonding of late adolescents, thereby expanding the current knowledge about sibling relationships in an environment of parental conflict to include older children. One goal of the current study is to validate an original marital conflict measure to be used with late adolescents, as no such scales were available at the time of data collection. The other goal of the study is to determine whether perceptions of marital conflict between siblings are associated with stronger or weaker sibling bonds. Conflicting theories in the literature suggest that sibling bonds can help offset some of the distress in children due to marital conflict, and thereby the bonds become stronger; while other investigators report that sibling bonds erode in the presence of marital conflict. This study aims to provide further data to help resolve this division. A review of the literatures on the conceptualization of marital conflict, the mechanisms of marital conflict on individual children and siblings, and sibling relationship research will also be provided.

#### *Children Affected by Marital Conflict*

If divorce is viewed as an indication of some level of marital conflict (as the divorced couple found their disagreement irreconcilable) and given the current statistics on divorce, we can presume that a great number of children will be exposed to marital conflict. Approximately fifty

percent of all first marriages end in divorce, and it has been estimated that 40% of children born in the 1970s and early 1980s will experience a divorce (Glick & Lin, 1986; Norton & Moorman, 1987). Furthermore, given the even higher rates of divorce in remarried families (60%), some children may have multiple experiences of marital conflict from different parental figures. It should be clearly stated that it is not only the children of divorce and remarriage who are affected by marital conflict. Marital conflict also exists, in differing degrees, in troubled marriages, and in marriages in which the spouses are satisfied and remain together (Emery, 1982). Thus, marital conflict has the potential to impact the majority of American children.

### *Conceptualizing Marital Conflict*

Though the concepts of conflict and discord in marriage have been studied for many years, few scales have been developed to measure how marital conflict affects children. Part of the difficulty appears to be conceptual in nature, in that the elucidation of the link between marital conflict and child adjustment problems has been obscured by studies that failed to differentiate between marital dissatisfaction (i.e., perceptions of unhappiness in the marital relationship) and marital conflict (i.e., the expression and experience of hostility and anger; Burman, John, & Margolin, 1987).

Fincham, Grych, and Osborne (1994) reported in their review of the literature on marital conflict and child adjustment that “the studies reviewed operationalized marital discord in various ways, ranging from overall marital quality to overt conflict” (p. 128-129). For example, some studies measure the effects of marital satisfaction on children rather than marital conflict (Deal, 1996). It should be noted that there is sufficient evidence to support marital satisfaction and marital conflict as two distinct concepts (Grych & Fincham, 1990). To illustrate this point, it is possible for a couple to be satisfied in their marriage and still have episodes of conflict, or conversely, have little or no conflict and experience high levels of marital dissatisfaction. Research has shown that it is marital conflict that is associated with children’s adjustment problems rather than parents’ reports of general marital distress (Johnson & O’Leary, 1987). From this, it appears that marital conflict may be a more complex and specific term than originally thought. Current studies recognize the distinctions between marital satisfaction and marital conflict, and no longer use them as interchangeable concepts when investigating child outcomes.

Grych and Fincham (1990) also point out some other challenges to studying marital conflict. They state: “Marital conflict can vary in frequency, intensity, content, and resolution, and can be further separated into overt or covert forms. All marriages are characterized by some degree of conflict, and it is unlikely that all expressions of marital conflict are stressful for children” (pp. 267-268). Taken further, the changes that arise from conflict can help individuals, couples, and organizations learn to adapt and change in the face of difficulties (Straus, 1979). On the other hand, if conflict is not managed, it can lead to the harboring of hostility and resentment, which is likely to cause damage to the individual, dyad, or group. Marital conflict is not a discrete concept, but is expressed in an infinite number of ways, with each marital couple having a unique constellation of conflict dimensions. The authors go on to explain that it is important to investigate which dimensions of conflict are related to problems in children, as these elements exist to some degree in all relationships. Forehand and his colleagues, (1990) go a step further and propose that the current construct of marital conflict is too “simplistic” and does not allow for differentiation between more serious from more benign forms of conflict, nor does it take into account the possibility that there are qualitative differences between the conflict that occurs in intact marriages versus ongoing conflict between divorced parents. These authors suggest that the conceptual clarification of the marital conflict construct should describe both what marital conflict is and what it is not.

In addition, it is important to note that the effects of marital conflict have been distinguished from the effects of divorce and global marital distress in the clinical research. It has been shown that marital conflict is a better predictor of child adjustment than global marital distress or marital apathy (Emery & O’Leary, 1984; Jenkins & Smith, 1991). In terms of marital satisfaction, studies also indicate that it is not the loss of a parent through divorce that causes difficulties for children; rather, it is the hostile environment before and after parental separation caused by marital conflict that has been associated with negative outcomes (Emery, 1982; Peterson & Zill, 1986; Slater & Haber, 1984). Rutter (1971) established that the prevalence of conduct disorders in children of divorce correlates closely with marital discord, and that the prevalence of conduct disorders drops if the parental separation is followed by harmonious adult relationships in the new home in which the children live. More recently, Morrison and Coiro (1999) distinguished the effects of divorce from marital conflict. They found that for children ages 4-9 years, the effect of divorce is not necessarily better or worse for child outcomes, depending on the level of conflict in the home prior to the divorce:

The experience of parental separation and divorce is uniformly harmful to children (at least in the first years after disruption) regardless of how often their parents quarreled beforehand. However, parents remaining married is not a better alternative for children when conflict between the parents is high (Morrison & Coiro, 1999).

As research in this area has advanced, investigators have gained a better understanding of the ways in which children are affected by marital conflict, allowing for a better operational understanding of marital conflict as a theoretical construct. However, there are still a number of issues regarding marital conflict that are in need of clarification.

### *Dimensions of Marital Conflict*

The extant literature discusses several dimensions of conflict that are believed to comprise marital conflict. These aspects include overt and covert conflict, frequency of conflict, degree or intensity of conflict, content of argument, and, conflict resolution.

#### *Overt Conflict versus Covert Conflict.*

Marital conflict can be displayed in either of two forms: overt conflict and covert conflict. The basic distinction between the two forms is that overt conflict is considered to be more obvious and visible; whereas, covert conflict is thought to be more subtle and is not associated with behaviors commonly thought of as conflictual or angry, such as silence. Buehler, Krishnakumar, Stone, Anthony, Pemberton, Gerard, and Barber (1998) define overt conflict style as “hostile behaviors and affect which indicate direct manifestations of negative connections between parents,” while covert conflict style is “hostile behaviors and affect that reflect passive-aggressive ways of managing conflict between parents” (p. 235). Moreover, overt aggression is thought to harm others through damage, or threat of damage, to another’s physical or psychological well-being, and includes behaviors such as pushing, hitting, or intimidating others (Crick, Cases, & Mosher, 1997; McNeilly-Choques, Hart, Robinson, Nelson, & Olsen, 1996).

Some theorists believe that overt conflict may be related to externalizing problems in children, while covert conflict may be related to internalizing problems in children. It is thought that exposure to covert conflict may lead to feelings of confusion for the child due to being witness to conflict over which they have no control. Such children may attempt to create a safe environment for themselves by turning their feelings inward (Cummings & Davies, 1994), thereby such coping methods may lead to internalizing problems. However, Forehand, Wierson,

McCombs, Brody, and Fauber (1989) suggest that child internalizing problems could also result from overt conflict through a direct pathway, particularly when the marital conflict is intense. According to this hypothesis, the child may be overwhelmed by the conflict and display internalizing symptoms similar to behaviors characteristic of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as anxiety, depression, and restricted affect. Evidence for differences in outcomes due to the modes of conflict expression is found in a study by Buehler and colleagues (1998). The results of the investigation on a sample of Knox County, Tennessee youth found that covert conflict style is uniquely associated with youth internalizing problems, while overt conflict style is uniquely associated with youth externalizing problems. These findings were corroborated on a sample of youth in Ogden, Utah. Thus, mode of expression may be related to the type of child outcome that results, such that overt conflict leads to externalizing problems, while covert conflict leads to internalizing problems.

In another study that addressed both types of conflict, Buehler and her colleagues (1997) found that the average effect size for the association between parents' use of a covert conflict style and youth problem behavior (.28) was not statistically different from the average effect size for overt conflict style and youth problem behavior (.35). Thus, despite a number of theories hypothesizing significant differences between the effects of overt and covert marital conflict on children, in actuality, fewer differences may truly exist.

However, there has been a great deal of investigation specifically focused on the effects of overt conflict on children. This line of inquiry has revealed that overtly hostile and angry conflict between parents can have negative effects on children. It has been reported that a large proportion of children (25%-70%) exposed to physical (overt) conflict between parents manifest clinically-significant behavior problems (McDonald & Jouriles, 1991). Jenkins (2000) found that the frequency of children's expressions of anger were related to parents' physical expressions of anger, but were not related to parents' verbal expressions of anger. Children exposed to anger-based (overt) conflict between parents showed more frequent anger expression, more deviant anger expressions, and more frequent taunting than did children who were not exposed to anger-based conflict between parents. David, Steele, Forehand, and Armistead (1996) studied the role of family conflict and marital conflict in adolescent functioning and observed that marital conflict occurring in front of the child contributed unique variance to the prediction of child functioning. Furthermore, conflict in front of the child predicted not only concurrent internalizing and externalizing problems, but both types of difficulties one year later. Whitaker and Bry (1991)

revealed that parents of adolescents with problems exhibited significantly more frequent overt conflict than did parents of adolescents without problems. Taken together, these studies suggest that intense, overt marital conflict may have particularly negative effects on individual children and adolescents in the family.

*Degree versus Frequency of Conflict.*

Degree of conflict is believed to be an important dimension in the study of marital conflict as it may be that it is the level of conflict that differentiates the effects of marital conflict on children. A study conducted by Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1982) found that only the degree of conflict to which children were exposed was associated with child adjustment problems. However, researchers have found that intense, open, and angry arguments, even between parents who are dissatisfied in their marriages, were rarely reported (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, and Radke-Yarrow, 1981; Forehand & McCombs, 1989; Wasserstein & LaGreca, 1996). Given that incidents of intense, overt conflict in front of children are rare, it would seem that such measures might not be sensitive enough to discern the aspects of marital conflict that affect child outcomes. Therefore, high conflict may not occur often enough to explain the effects of marital conflict on the adjustment of children in the majority of households.

Given this discrepancy, others believe that it may be the frequency of conflict, rather than the degree, that most strongly impacts children. More frequent overt conflict has been related to increased behavior problems in children (Johnston et al., 1987). Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, and Radke-Yarrow (1981) also found that children exposed to frequent marital conflict reacted more intensely when exposed to subsequent episodes of marital conflict than did children who experienced conflict less often. Though the majority of the literature seems to support this idea (Grych & Fincham, 1990), Buehler and her colleagues (1997, 1998) separated mode of expression from frequency of conflict and obtained some important findings. Buehler, et al. (1997) found that both the average effect size parents' use of overt conflict style (.35) and covert conflict style (.28) were more strongly related to child outcomes than frequency of disagreements (.19). Further, Buehler and colleagues (1998) report that in reviewing two studies that included evaluation of both frequency of conflict and "hostile conflict style," frequency of disagreement was not related to youth problem behavior when "hostile modes of expression were controlled" (Buehler & Trotter, 1990; Jenkins & Smith, 1991). Thus, frequency of disagreement may not play a vital role in understanding the effect of marital conflict on children.

Other evidence supports the hypothesis that frequently-occurring open conflict is associated with increased behavior problems (Johnston et al., 1987; Wiersen, Forehand, & McCombs, 1988). In a study of naturally-occurring episodes of interparental anger, children exposed to more frequent marital conflict reacted more intensely when exposed to a later episode of parental conflict than did children who had experienced less frequent conflict (Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981). Additionally, children who witnessed two angry confrontations between adult experimenters in the laboratory behaved more aggressively toward a playmate than those who had observed only one such conflict (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985). Common sense suggests that children exposed to a great deal of marital conflict will “get used to it” (i.e., habituate; Jeffrey & Cohen, 1971). In fact, this is the opposite of what has been observed in various studies, at least at the level of emotional and behavioral responding. Greater experiential history of marital conflict predicts more negative emotions (e.g., distress and anger) and greater behavioral reactivity (aggression and mediation) in children’s responses to other conflict scenarios (Ballard, Cummings, & Larkin, 1993; Cummings et al., 1989). Davies and Cummings (1994) suggest that repeated exposure to conflict increases children’s feelings of emotional insecurity; thus, their capacity for regulating emotions and behavior is reduced, leaving them more prone to feelings of fear, distress, and anger. Essentially, increased exposure to interparental conflict potentially could have two contrasting effects, such that it might lead to either fewer behavioral problems because children become desensitized to marital conflict or more frequent conflict may sensitize children to conflict and lead to greater incidence of adjustment problems.

However, the majority of children in even the most angry of homes do not develop significant psychological disorders. The simple presence or frequency of global marital conflict alone may not be a strong predictor of child psychopathology (Jouriles, Murphy, Farris, Smith, Richters, & Waters, 1991). One study found that it was mothers’ aggressive tactics that were negatively associated with children’s problem-solving, rather than frequency of marital conflict (Goodman, Barfoot, Frye, & Belli, 1999). The authors speculate that the mixture of frequent conflict and mothers’ aggression resulted in the child “tuning out” the mother and, thereby, not being negatively influenced by her. In the low frequency conflict group, aggressive tactics by mothers were positively associated with children’s problem-solving abilities. Thus, some children benefited from escalation outcomes of marital conflicts, as long as those conflicts did not occur with high frequency. Others did not demonstrate significant behavior problems, even when marital conflict and aggression were high. Additional research is needed to explore how the

interaction of frequency and degree of marital conflict may allow children to benefit even from negative conflict characteristics. Thus, the relative contributions of degree and frequency of conflict to child problems remain unclear.

#### *Conflict Resolution.*

A recent line of inquiry by E.M. Cummings and colleagues (1985, 1989, 1996) has explored the effects of conflict resolution on children's emotional distress. Destructive adult conflict consists of high levels of anger, escalation of hostility, and the development of increasingly serious relationship issues over the course of the interchange (Davies, Myers, Cummings, & Heindel, 1999). Likewise, conflict is defined as constructive not only when adults resolve their differences in a mutually satisfying way, but also when they exhibit minimal, well-regulated (e.g., unreciprocated) periods of anger in a larger climate of warmth and the mutual validation of viewpoints.

This research has found that children's anger, aggression, and distress are significantly reduced when conflicts between adults are resolved. The results of a study by Davies, Myers, and Cummings (1996) indicate that both younger children and adolescents respond to the emotionality of conflict endings. Harmonious (positive) emotional endings elicited more positive and less negative responses than did hostile (negative) emotional endings across a range of responses hypothesized to reflect emotional security. Further, results from several of these studies demonstrate that after conflict has been resolved, children's emotional responses are not statistically different from responses to interactions in which there was no conflict (Cummings, Ballard, El-Sheikh, & Lake, 1991; Cummings, Pelligrini, Notarius, & Cummings, 1989).

Moreover, some benefits have been found for the use of positive conflict resolution. In families with low and moderate frequency of marital conflict, more reasoning used by mothers to resolve their marital conflicts was associated with higher average effectiveness of alternative solutions generated by children in response to hypothetical social problems (Goodman, Barfoot, Frye, & Belli, 1999). However, if the frequency of marital conflict was high, the extent to which reasoning was used was not related to children's social problem-solving ability. Because poorly resolved or chronic marital conflict is a powerful example of poor social problem-solving, it is plausible that children who are regularly exposed to marital conflict may be at risk for the development of poor social problem-solving skills (Petit, Dodge, & Brown, 1988).

Conversely, parents who successfully resolve their conflicts provide positive models of problem solving for their children that may, in turn, lead to children's increased social competence and coping skills (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Adolescents in one study who witnessed vignettes of a couple attempting to work through a problem together expected that the couple would have fewer relationship problems compared to another couple who demonstrated standard conflict. This may reflect a perception by adolescents that constructive conflict helps relationships. Another implication of these findings is that repeated exposure to constructive conflict may actually reduce concerns and promote adaptive functioning amongst children in some domains of functioning (i.e., positive, optimistic appraisals of adult relationship quality), even if mild occasional bouts of anger occur during the course of the interactional history (Davies, Myers, Cummings, & Heindel, 1999). If resolution of conflict neutralizes the negative effects of marital conflict, it may be an important aspect of the measurement of the effects of conflict on children (Davies, Myers, & Cummings, 1996).

#### *Reporting of Marital Conflict*

In studying marital conflict, some attention should be paid to who's perspective of the conflict is being given merit. Current literature suggests that the perspective of the child experiencing the conflict may be important to capture. Most studies of the relationship between marital conflict and child outcomes have utilized only parental reports of conflict. Given that children may have a different perspective of the marital conflict, it seems that they would provide the most accurate account of what they have experienced and how it has affected them. A parent may underestimate, or overestimate, the amount of spousal conflict actually perceived by their children as well as the degree to which the conflict may have affected their children.

With respect to the child's perspective in marital conflict research, the utilization of a late adolescent population may prove advantageous in further studies into the impact of marital conflict on sibling relationships. It has been found that children's ability to make causal connections and finer social-cognitive discriminations increase between childhood and adolescence. Adolescent children achieve a more sophisticated understanding of the psychological causes and consequences for participants of conflict than their younger counterparts (Davies, Myers, & Cummings, 1996). In fact, findings indicate that only late adolescents are able to discriminate between destructive and constructive conflict histories in their predictions of future inter-adult sadness and relationship problems (Davies, Myers,

Cummings, & Heindel, 1999). Given adolescents' more highly-developed cognitive abilities and emotional understanding, adolescents may be more capable of recognizing subtle covert conflict that may occur between their parents, expressing their feelings about the marital conflict they have experienced, and rating the quality of their sibling bond than would be younger children.

Lastly, Buehler, Krishnakumar, Stone, Anthony, Pemberton, Gerard, & Barber (1998) assert that adolescents' perceptions of marital hostility are likely to be a better gauge of child outcomes than the parental perceptions, which dominate the extant empirical literature, because they provide researchers with the most accurate index of what the child actually witnessed and understood about the conflictual situation. Thus, using an older adolescent population may be particularly advantageous in this investigation of family relationships and marital conflict. Additionally, adolescent-perceived and parent-perceived marital conflict have both been found to be related to levels of adolescent functioning (Forehand & McCombs, 1989). Thus, adolescent perspectives of marital conflict should yield useful and accurate information for study.

#### *Content of Argument*

Related to children's perceptions of conflict, the appraisals children make concerning conflict, may have consequences for their adjustment. Children who blame themselves for their parents' problems, or who feel threatened and unable to cope with their feelings, may become fearful and anxious (Fincham, Grych, & Osborne, 1994). Marital conflict that includes disagreements about parenting issues may lead to more frequent overt conflicts, which are particularly salient to children because they directly concern the children as such conflict often occurs in their presence. Therefore, disagreements about parenting may have a more powerful effect on children than conflicts concerning less personal subjects, such as family finances. This hypothesis is in-keeping with the findings that child-related marital conflict is associated with greater shame, self-blame, and fear of being drawn into the conflict and that higher self-blame for marital conflict is related to greater internalizing problems than is the overall frequency of marital conflict (Grych & Fincham, 1993; Jouriles et al., 1991).

However, arguments about children simply do not occur very often in most homes. In a study of adolescents, Forehand and McCombs (1989) found that less than 25% of arguments are about children. Moreover, of these arguments, less than 25% occur in front of the child (adolescent). Taken together, average adolescents are exposed to arguments pertaining to them less than once per month. Additionally, a study by Davies, Myers, and Cummings (1996) did not find support

for the hypothesis that child-related disagreements elicit more continuing insecurity in children than adult-related disagreements. The authors warn, however, not to assume that child-related disagreements do not evoke greater insecurity in children, given the work of Davies and Cummings (1994) and Grych and Fincham (1993), which have found support for child-related conflicts having a greater effect on children than those that do not involve the child. Instead, Davies, Myers, and Cummings (1996) suggest that their non-significant results may be due to flaws in study design and a small sample size. Nevertheless, investigations, to date, suggest that young adolescents are exposed to occasional (infrequent) child-related interparental conflict, but the degree to which child-related arguments impact children still remains unclear.

The research has shown that family relationships are altered in the context of marital conflict, but the questions of how and to what extent afford new opportunities for research. Children, in particular, have been shown to be significantly affected by marital conflict, such that marital conflict may lead to externalizing and internalizing problems in individual children. However, the mechanisms by which marital conflict has its effects on children are still under investigation.

#### *Mechanisms of Marital Conflict on Individual Child Outcomes*

Many theories have been developed to explain the associations between marital conflict and child outcomes. These mechanisms have been separated into direct and indirect processes for the purposes of the current investigation. Direct mechanisms directly and immediately impact the child; whereas, indirect mechanisms have their effect by modifying another aspect of the relationship between parents and children. Direct mechanisms under investigation include modeling and marital conflict as a stressor to the child. Indirect mechanisms include alterations in the parent-child relationship and changes in children's perceptions of themselves and relationships with others due to marital conflict.

#### *Direct Mechanisms*

##### *Modeling.*

Given children's tendency to imitate their parents (Bandura, 1973), it has been thought that exposure to marital conflict may lead children to behave aggressively in their own interpersonal relationships. Observing how parents treat one another when they disagree is likely to influence a child's internal working model of relationships (Bowlby, 1969), which could prove consequential

for various social interactions, including family relationships. For example, Brody, Stoneman, and Burke (1987) reported that parental conflict was associated with lower rates of prosocial behavior among siblings. Furthermore, Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, and Forehand (1992) found that parental perceptions of lack of family cohesiveness, parental inequality of treatment, and family conflict during discussions of sibling problems were linked to higher sibling conflict levels.

Grych and Fincham (1990) proposed that the modeling of behavior is not limited to the imitation of parental behavior by the child as it also involves the acquisition of information about the appropriateness of behavior. Children exposed to marital conflict may learn that aggression is an acceptable way to deal with frustrations and difficulties. Modeling may also have a disinhibitory effect on children's behavior. Thus, exposure to aggression during conflict may be seen by children as approval of aggressive behavior (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Waters (1987) stated, "fighting parents provide a model of conduct which does not foster development of self-restraint and containment of physical retaliation" (p. 14). Additionally, social learning theory proposes that it is a child's perception of the costs and benefits of particular behaviors during conflict that will determine the likelihood and type of behavior a child will imitate (DiLalla, Mitchell, Authur, & Pagliocca, 1988). For example, if a child views a conflictual event and perceives that the aggressor is rewarded for his/her behavior, it is more likely that the child will imitate that aggressive behavior. Therefore, exposure to marital conflict may give children the impression that they have permission to behave aggressively and lead them to believe that aggression is the best way to deal with interpersonal conflict.

Furthermore, researchers propose that exposure to frequent conflict not only provides a child with a repertoire of negative behaviors to emulate, but it also reduces children's opportunities to observe and practice appropriate interpersonal problem solving behaviors and encourages the adoption of maladaptive coping strategies for problem solving and conflict resolution (Mann & MacKenzie, 1996; Whittaker & Bry, 1991). Thus, parental modeling of conflict may affect children's behavior through a variety of mechanisms, including influencing the development of maladaptive internal working models of relationships that lead children to behave maladaptively in their relationships (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986), imitating poorly regulated emotions of parents (Stocker & Youngblade, 1999), and decreased opportunities to observe positive ways of managing conflict.

### *Marital Conflict as Stressor.*

As marital conflict has been shown to contribute to pathology in adults (Emery, 1982), it may have the same effect on children by exposing them to an intense stressor. Additionally, in the midst of marital conflict, parent's responsiveness to children's emotional needs may be reduced (Wasserstein & LaGreca, 1996), further heightening the distress being experienced by the child due to the marital conflict. Thus, not only does the child have stress due to experiencing parental discord, but this distress may be exacerbated by decreases in the ability of the parents to respond sufficiently to this need in their child. Repeated exposure to marital conflict has also been shown to compromise children's ability to manage emotional arousal when faced with later occurrences of conflict, leading to future adjustment problems (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Cummings, Zahn-Waxler, & Radke-Yarrow, 1981). Taken together, the stress of marital conflict coupled with a parent's diminished ability to respond over time may lead to emotional dysregulation in their children and adjustment difficulties.

### *Indirect Mechanisms*

#### *Altered Parent-Child Relationship.*

Margolin (1981) suggests that marital conflict affects children indirectly through altering some aspect of the parent-child relationship. One facet of the parent-child relationship that may be affected by marital conflict is effective parenting. It is thought that marital conflict causes a disruption in parenting practices, which leads to inconsistent discipline and, consequently, child problems (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Emery, 1982, Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wiersen, 1990; Harold & Conger, 1997; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). As children rely on parents to provide structure and predictability for them in times of family stress, children of parents who cannot provide stability, a sense of control, and expectations of appropriate behavior during conflict may be prone to "emotional and behavioral dysregulation and, accordingly, be at increased risk for behavior problems" (Cummings, Davies, & Simpson, 1994, p.142).

Parenting practices refer to the procedures used by parents to discipline, monitor, and control their children. Research suggests that close monitoring, consistent discipline, and authoritative parenting styles are generally considered to be important aspects of optimal parenting (Davies & Cummings, 1994). Two styles of maladaptive child-management techniques have also been identified. First, lax parental supervision and discipline predict children's aggression,

noncompliance, delinquency, and criminality (Loeber & Dishion, 1984; McCord, 1978). Second, harsh, strict discipline predicts a similar pattern of aggression, impulsivity, and delinquency (Hetherington, Stouwie, & Ridberg, 1971; Loeber & Dishion, 1984; Weiss, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1992), as well as social withdrawal (Crockenberg, 1987), and poor peer relations (Hart, DeWolf, Wozniak, & Burts, 1992).

There may also be a circular relationship between parental discipline and marital conflict such that inconsistencies in parents' parenting behaviors (e.g., rules, and discipline strategies) may exacerbate current marital tension. For example, children following one parent's rules may be perceived as misbehaving by the other parent, leading that parent to further discipline the child. The lack of parental disciplinary consistency is likely to undermine parental authority and induce behavioral problems in children. In some cases, one parent may defend the child and oppose the spouse, resulting in greater marital conflict (Grych, Fincham, & Osborne, 1994). This distress may be expressed openly, making both marital dissatisfaction and disparity between the parents more visible to the child, resulting in the potential for further behavioral problems in children.

Another aspect of the parent-child relationship that may be indirectly affected by marital conflict is the emotional availability of the parent. This potential effect can be further articulated into three categories: 1) emotional withdrawal or neglect, 2) emotional rejection, or 3) emotional negativity. A parent in the midst of conflict with a spouse may separate himself or herself from a child, especially from one who is having adjustment problems or behavioral difficulties (Fauber, Forehand, Thomas & Wierson, 1990). As Eno (1985) explains "unfortunately, it is often precisely when a parent is least available that the children most need parental attention to help them deal with their confusion, anger, and sorrow" (p. 142).

In terms of the effects of parental rejection, Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson (1990) reported that marital conflict is correlated with both parental acceptance and parental rejection, which in turn correlate with both internalizing and externalizing problems in children. Moreover, children may also experience feelings of rejection if marital conflict leads to greater tension or conflict between parents and children. Marital conflict also has been associated with parent's (emotionally) rejecting their children, which is related to children's problem behaviors (Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990; Tschannn, et al., 1989). Similarly, parental rejection is associated with children's passivity, noncompliance, low self-esteem, lack of self-control, and reduced social competence (Bell & Ainsworth, 1972; Hetherington, 1992). Therefore, marital

conflict may negatively affect the relationship between parent and child by decreasing emotional availability of parents, while simultaneously increasing the negativity of parent-child interactions.

Another route by which the parent-child relationship may be affected by marital conflict is by “negative spillover”. This spillover is when parents may infuse some of the negativity they experience with their spouses into their relationships with their children (Kerig, Cowan, & Cowan, 1993). This emotional negativity could take the form of emotional unavailability (Kitzmann, 2000) or parent-child aggression (Fauber et al., 1990, Jouriles, et al., 1987). Emotional negativity in parenting may contribute to children’s emotional insecurity, anger, reduced activity level, dysphoria, and social withdrawal, even in children as young as 3-months old (Cohn & Campbell, 1992). Thus, as seen in studies examining marital conflict alone, the functioning of children may not be solely the result of conflict between parents, but rather of a more general negative, unresponsive, or hostile family environment (David, Steele, Forehand, & Armistead, 1996).

Marital conflict may also change the nature of parent-child relationships by leading to an “increase in the use of psychological or emotional control as a way of securing and maintaining a strong emotional alliance and level of support from the child” (Fauber, Forehand, Thomas & Wierson, 1990; p. 1113). Such patterns of interaction have generally been termed triangulation (Minuchin, 1974). Grych (2002) stated that triangulation “refers to a process whereby conflict between parents is diverted or avoided by involving the child” (p. 206). Parents in families with high levels of triangulation reported higher marital conflict and dissatisfaction in their marriage than did cohesive families (Kerig, 1995). Triangulation may be seen in many forms. For example, as the marital relationship worsens, a parent may try to align himself or herself with the child against the other parent and/or siblings, often called cross-generational coalitions (Cox, Paley, & Harter, 2001). Conversely, detouring dynamics may occur whereby a child becomes the identified problem rather than the marital couple. One type of detouring is “scapegoating”, a situation in which the child’s adjustment problems are used as a preoccupation for the parents, to keep their minds off of their marital difficulties. Unfortunately, such patterns place children under increased pressure to keep the family together. Yahav and Sharlin (2000) found that children who were the identified problem in their family perceived themselves as more responsible for and more involved in their parent’s marriage than their non-symptomatic siblings. Such pressure would seem to make it less likely that problematic behaviors would be extinguished, as it is these behaviors that the family depends on for its cohesion. Overall, marital conflict may result in

inappropriate alliances between parents and children, possibly to the exclusion of the other parent and siblings in the household, leading to increasingly strained family relationships and child maladjustment.

*Changes in Child's Perceptions.*

Cognitive and perceptual changes may occur in children due to exposure to interparental conflict, which may, in turn, affect the parent-child relationship. Cummings and Davies (1994) propose that the internalized representations of parental relations that develop over time have implications for children's long-term adjustment. Interparental conflict has been significantly associated with children's perceptions of more negative parent-child relationships (Osborne & Fincham, 1996). It has been suggested that "high levels of previous exposure to marital conflict leave children primed for higher, and even more negative emotional responses in later conflict contexts" (Davies & Cummings, 1994; p. 388). For example, it has been reported that parental conflict has been associated with lower rates of prosocial behavior among siblings and peers (Brody, Stoneman & Burke, 1987). In a study by Davies, Myers, Cummings, and Heindel (1999) results indicated that children who witnessed destructive adult conflict reacted more negatively across multiple domains than those who witnessed constructive conflict when they were faced with a standard conflict between the same adults. Taken together, such findings confirm that children's history of exposure to conflict between parents may strongly influence the child's emotional reactions and coping strategies when faced with anger between others.

How children interpret interparental conflict is also likely to influence their responses to the conflict itself (Cummings & Cummings, 1988; Hetherington, 1984). Several theorists have suggested that the effect of a potentially stressful event may be better understood by considering the child's interpretation of the event (Compas, 1987; Kagan, 1983; Rutter, 1983). It has been suggested that both the context of conflict and children's interpretations of conflict are likely to change developmentally. As children mature, they become better able to understand and cope with stressful events and are more adept at regulating their emotions and behavior. Parents also treat children differently as they get older, and it is possible that the degree of conflict to which children are exposed and parents' responses to their children's attempts at intervention change with age. Although no age group has been shown to be especially vulnerable to the effects of interparental discord, children's affective and behavioral responses to conflict do change with age (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985).

Here again, though there is a significant amount of work and theory on the potential mechanisms of interparental conflict for individual children, theory expanding this to sibling relationships is still catching up. As the marital and sibling relationships occur in the same family environment, it would be logical to expect that just as marital conflict has effects on individual children, that it would also have effects on individual children, that it would also have repercussions for the relationships between the children in these families.

### *The Importance of Siblings*

Siblings have been shown to provide some benefits to one another such as enhancing cognitive development, improving learning, influence affective development and impact the development of personal identity (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Bowerman & Dobash, 1974; Cicirelli, 1982). Supportive sibling relationships are associated with less anxiety and more maturity in young adolescents (East & Rook, 1992). Thus, as these studies suggest, siblings can be a major source of physical and emotional support for one other (Cicirelli, 1977), which could be of particular benefit in a stressful environment, such as when parents are in conflict.

### *The Effects of Parent-Child Relationships on Sibling Relationships*

Some theorists believe that in order to thoroughly examine the sibling relationship, one also must look at the family environment. Brody, Stoneman, and McCoy (1994) state: “sibling relationships rarely function independently from the events that transpire within the larger family context” and that “the affective quality of each parent’s relationship with each child sets the stage for the affective quality of the sibling relationship” (p. 771). They go on to explain that the affective quality of the sibling relationship and positive parent-child relationships are believed to contribute to the development of closeness and positivity among siblings (Brody, et al., 1994). Attachment and social learning theories have hypothesized that positive parent-child relationships contribute to the development of prosocial behaviors amongst siblings (Sroufe & Fleeson, 1986; Parke, MacDonald, Beitel & Bhavnagri, 1988). Attachment theory proposes that children develop internal representations of relations with primary caregivers, which they subsequently use in maintaining other relationships (Brody, Stoneman & McCoy, 1994). Social learning theorists have found that patterns of behavioral interactions between parent and child are generalized to sibling relationships (Patterson, 1984). In fact, greater positivity in parent-child relationships has been linked to greater positivity and prosocial behavior in sibling relationships, whereas

negativity in parent-child relationships is associated with aggressive behaviors in sibling relationships (Stocker, Dunn & Plomin, 1989; Brody, Stoneman, & MacKinnon, 1986). Thus, one potential pathway by which marital conflict has an effect on sibling relationships is through the quality of parent-child interactions.

### *Mechanisms of Marital Conflict on Sibling Relationships*

As discussed above, marital conflict may have an effect on sibling relationship through changes in the parent-child relationship. Other mechanisms by which parental conflict may have an influence on sibling relationships include differential treatment and differential alliances with parents, as well as, through decreased access to parental resources.

### *Differential Treatment of Siblings and Alliances*

Reiss, Plomin, Hetherington, Howe, Rovine, Tyron, & Hagan (1994) theorized that marital conflict contributes to sibling conflict in two ways: (1) differential treatment of siblings and (2) differential alliances with parents. Marital conflict may create emotional demands on parents by compromising their ability to foster positive relationships with each of their children individually, thereby increasing the likelihood that children will experience differential parental relationship quality. For example, scapegoating of one child, where the child is identified as the cause of the family's problems, is sometimes used during marital conflict to divert tension away from the marriage. In the family's attempts to deal with the identified "troubled" child, this child may receive more attention from the parents than the other children, providing the siblings with a catalyst for conflict. In an effort to manage the child, parents and siblings may ally together against the targeted child, thereby justifying overt conflict between siblings. Additionally, the identified child is impacted directly by this treatment. Reiss, Hetherington, Plomin, Howe, Simmens, Henderson, O'Connor, Bussell, Anderson, & Law (1995) found that higher levels of parental negativity directed specifically at one sibling predicted higher levels of depressive symptoms and antisocial behavior in the targeted adolescent, which, in turn, are likely to have further deleterious effects on sibling relationships.

Rather than scapegoating, children may be brought into the conflict between parents via an alliance with one parent against the other parent. When one child is brought into the conflict between parents, the attention that the allied child receives may create feelings of inequity among the children and set the child apart from their siblings leading to rivalry and anger, which in turn

create negativity in the sibling relationship. (Brody, et al., 1994; Hetherington, 1988; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981; Stocker, Dunn, & Plomin, 1989). The study findings of Brody and his colleagues (1994) also maintain:

“Put in concrete terms, siblings in middle childhood whose relationships with their fathers were characterized by positive affect, whose fathers displayed little differentially negative treatment during interactions with them, whose parents perceived family relationships to be generally close, whose temperaments were less difficult were more likely than siblings in other families to develop more positive and less conflicted relationships in early adolescence” (p. 283).

Thus, when mothers and fathers are not engaged in overt conflict with one another, parent-child relationships are less differentially negative, and these less negative parent-child relationships, in turn, forecast less negative sibling relationships four years later (Stroufe & Fleeson, 1986). Such results support the hypothesis that sibling relationships may be linked with the quality of the parental relationship, and specifically with the presence of marital conflict (Brody, Stoneman, & McCoy, 1994).

#### *Access to Parental Resources*

It has been theorized that one potential consequence of children's exposure to marital conflict is a reduction in their access to parental resources. Some evidence for negative consequences of decreased parental resources comes from the literature on family size. It has been found that on various measures of intellectual skills and intellectual achievement that individuals with the fewest siblings perform best (Alwin, 1991; Downey, 1995). It is believed that this is likely due to a phenomenon called parental resource dilution. This theory presupposes that parental resources are finite and that they are divided by the number of children in a family. Parental resources are thought to include: necessities of life, attention to children, finances for schooling, and educational/cultural opportunities; which are believed to affect intellectual development. It has been shown that as the number of children a family increases, the years of education attained by the children in the family decreased (Blake, 1989). Thus, as the amount of parental resources available to a child decreases, the less likely they are to achieve intellectually. Conversely, having access to parental resources has been shown to buffer the transition to junior high school

(Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hevey, 2000). Specifically, cognitive and personal involvement of mothers was shown to buffer children against declines in reading, decreases in perceived competence, learning problems and acting-out. Thus, having fewer parental resources have been shown to have a detrimental affect on development, and having more parental resources has proved to be helpful in young adolescents' transitioning to junior high school.

In the case of marital conflict, parental resources are thought to be divided not only by the number of children in the family, but also by the conflict itself. Parents' time and attention may be diverted by dealing with spousal conflict, and being preoccupied with their own feelings (Wasserstein & LaGreca, 1996). In such cases, children in the family may become rivalrous with one another for the parental resources that are available. Thus, the available parental resources may be lessened by marital conflict, possibly to the detriment of the sibling relationship.

Conversely, current research suggests that having the support of another helpful adult in a child's environment, may act as a buffer against the negative effects of parental conflict (Sandler, Wolchik, & Braver, 1985). Such relationships may act to compensate for parental support that is unavailable due to parents' preoccupation with the conflict. In addition to relationships with other adults, sibling relationships also have good potential as compensatory resources, as siblings are likely to have higher levels of access to one another than persons outside of the family, and therefore, more opportunities for supporting one another. Milevsky (2002) examined how support from siblings relates to psychological and academic well-being in preadolescence and adolescence. Support for a compensatory effect of sibling relationships was found. Students under low mother support conditions receiving greater support from brothers, and students under low friend support conditions receiving greater support from brothers demonstrated higher school achievement. Such results demonstrate that sibling relationships may be strengthened when parental resources are unavailable. Taken together, it is unclear whether decreased access to parental resources is a detriment or benefit to sibling relationships.

#### *Sibling Behavior as a Consequence of Marital Conflict*

An extensive body of research on social support has shown that a supportive relationship can prevent, moderate, or counteract the negative effects of an array of stressful events on individual adjustment (Sandler, Miller, Short, & Wolchik, 1989). Specific to the current research, there is available evidence suggesting that the presence of a sibling appears to have a buffering effect against marital conflict (Kempton, Armistead, Wierson, & Forehand, 1991). Wallerstein (1985)

hypothesized that as the relationship between the parents begins to deteriorate, siblings turned to one another for protection and stability. Similarly, Bank and Kahn (1982) maintain that the strongest sibling bonds occur when there is close physical proximity between siblings, the need for personal identity, and insufficient parental nurturance. Studies of siblings report a number of related findings. For example, seeking contact with a sibling has been a commonly described strategy for coping with marital conflict among children ages 9-12 (Jenkins, Smith, & Graham, 1989). Kempton, Armistead, Wierson, and Forehand (1991) found that adolescents from divorced families without siblings exhibited more externalizing problems than adolescents from intact and divorced families who had siblings. Eno (1985) states that “the sibling relationship is distinct from any other family relationship and, during the process of marital separation, may be a place away from entanglement in spousal affairs” (p. 142). Furthermore, the sibling relationship may provide some of the same protective functions that a positive parent-child relationship provides in the face of family disruption and conflict. Goldsmith (1982) has argued that siblings are a source of mutual support following their parents’ divorce because they confirm one another’s perceptions of reality, defend one another, and create an atmosphere of fun in an otherwise stressful environment. Taken together, some evidence has been found to support the assertion that having a sibling can be beneficial to children during marital conflict.

However, contrary findings have been found. Caya and Liem (1998) studied the sibling relationships of a sample of university students between the ages of 16 and 55. They found that students who grew up in high conflict homes without siblings were better adjusted than those in high conflict homes with low sibling support. Therefore, the mere presence of a sibling does not explain the complete picture. It is likely that the quality of the support from the sibling plays a role in sibling adjustment. If a sibling is present, but unsupportive, it may be another indicator to the child, in addition to the high levels of conflict present in the home, that the family has significant problems. It may also feel like a rejection to the child, thus doing more harm than good.

Another hypothesis is that both heightened conflict and heightened closeness between siblings characterize sibships in the context of marital strife. Hetherington (1988) has found that sibling caretaking increases as parental availability decreases in the divorced household, and that more frequent contact may be associated with an increase in both positive and negative interactions. It may be that all of the previously described conditions are occurring between the siblings at the same time. For instance, siblings may well be comforting and supportive of one

another at times when marital conflict is high, but in competition with one another for parental attention at other times. The relationships between the children may vary depending on the coping mechanisms of the parents and whether alliances or triangulation occur. Having a sibling may mitigate some of the behavior problems associated with such stressful events, but it is likely that this is only if the siblings are actually supportive of one another. Current data give conflicting accounts as of the quality of the relationships between siblings in homes with conflict. The variety of feelings of the siblings due to the marital conflict may explain the significance of the different findings. Siblings may be simultaneously emotionally vulnerable and resilient in the face of marital conflict.

### *Investigational Objectives*

Given the conflicting findings described previously on the effects of marital conflict on children the current study aims to provide evidence to help clarify the current information available on the effects of marital conflict and sibling relationships. In an effort to examine the marital conflict perceived by older children, one study goal was to develop a measure of marital conflict to be used with a late adolescent population, as none were available at the time of data collection. The other goal of the current study is to determine whether perceptions of marital conflict between parents are associated with enhanced or poorer quality of sibling relationships.

## CHAPTER II

### Study 1: Development of the Parental Marital Questionnaire

The goal of the first investigation was to develop a questionnaire to assess college students' perceptions of their parents' marital conflict. Though there is agreement in the literature that marital conflict is important in the study of child functioning, the development of scales that capture and explain the phenomenon of marital conflict, with respect to the point of view of children, is limited. There are reliable scales of global marital satisfaction, such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976), but there are few that specifically focus on conflict. Those that do only assess primarily overt conflict that occurs (e.g., Conflict Tactics Scale; Strauss, 1979). However, these may not reflect the type of marital conflict experienced by the child, but perhaps, instead, the amount of conflict of which the parent believes the child might be aware. Measures that obtain information directly from the child about the marital conflict to which they are exposed are needed. One scale that does address this issue is the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992). However, this scale was validated on samples of fourth and fifth grade children and may not fully express the experiences of marital conflict in a population of college-age youths. Thus, an important objective for the current study is the development of an original marital conflict scale, the Parental Marital Questionnaire (PMQ), for use with young adults that addresses some conceptual aspects of marital conflict including overt conflict (i.e., obvious anger and arguments) and covert conflict (i.e., withdrawal and ignoring one another), extreme marital conflict (i.e., marital violence) and to a lesser extent, buffers to marital conflict (i.e., conflict resolution, communication, and support).

#### *Methods*

##### *Participants*

A sample of 331 students attending a large, southeastern state university, enrolled in both introductory and upper-level psychology courses was recruited to assess the internal reliability and validity of the PMQ, an original measure developed for the study. This sample included 110 males and 221 females, with an average age of 18.9 years, and a standard deviation of 1.5 years. This participant group was also primarily Caucasian (87%), with 6% African-American, 2% Asian-American, 2% Hispanic, and 3% that listed their ethnicity as "Other." Additionally, a very

high proportion of the participants' biological parents were married to each other at the time the questionnaires were completed (74% married, 26% divorced).

### *Procedures*

Participants were recruited via written announcements posted on a bulletin board in the Psychology Department and through in-class announcements made on a voluntary basis by instructors of undergraduate courses. All participation occurred on a voluntary basis in exchange for nominal course credit. Documentation of participation was provided, upon request, to participants who were enrolled in courses for which they could receive extra credit for participation as a research participant in this study. A 60-minute session was needed for participation in the study. The instruments were administered by trained undergraduate student research assistants who were supervised by the author.

The objective in selecting measures to compare with the PMQ was to develop a spectrum of relatedness between the PMQ and the established measures. Choices were based on the established scales' conceptual relatedness to marital conflict, which is what the PMQ is attempting to assess. Correlating the proven measures with the PMQ should clarify the boundaries of the PMQ measure and establish what the PMQ is measuring, as well as what it does not reliably measure. Thus, an established measure was predicted to be differentially related to the PMQ depending on the degree to which the established scale assesses concepts that are theoretically similar to those measured by the PMQ. For example, measures that evaluate marital conflict, general conflict, and marital satisfaction are predicted to be more highly correlated with the PMQ than measures that look at youth coping efficacy and attachment.

The Marital Need Satisfaction Scale (MNS; Stinnett, Collins & Montgomery, 1970), Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS, Spanier, 1976), Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Strauss, 1979), Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992), and Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DOCI; Adams & Jones, 1997) are all predicted to be closely related to the PMQ. These were chosen because they measure either marital conflict or some aspect of the marital relationship which could affect levels of conflict in the marriage.

The Family Satisfaction Scale (FSS; Jones & Carver, 1992) was selected because it was likely to be moderately related to the PMQ as it is a measure of the emotional connectedness of family members with one another. This author believes that it is unlikely that persons perceiving high levels of family satisfaction would also endorse high levels of marital conflict between their

parents. Thus the FSS will be related to the PMQ, but not as closely related as the measures of marital conflict and marital relationships.

The Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES; McCubbin, Olson & Larsen, 1981), Young Adult Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (YA-COPE; Patterson, McCubbin & Grochowski, 1984), and Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), which measure family coping, youth coping, parent-adolescent and adolescent-peer relationships, are predicted to be related to the PMQ measure, but less strongly than the CPIC, MNS, DAS, CTS, DOCI, and the FSS. These have been chosen because of their lower likelihood of being related to the PMQ as compared to the aforementioned measures. It was expected that F-COPES and YA-COPE would be somewhat related to the PMQ as perceptions of marital conflict between parents may serve as a model for coping and problem solving within the family as a whole and may generalize to circumstances outside of the family. However, as F-COPES and YA-COPE do not directly measure aspects of the marital relationship between parents or conflict, but rather adolescent coping, it is expected that these measures will be only moderately related to the PMQ. The IPPA, a measure of parent-adolescent and adolescent-peer relationships, was chosen due to the literature demonstrating that marital conflict can have a negative effect on the parent-child relationship (Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wiersen, 1990). When marital conflict, as measured by the PMQ, is higher, this author believes there is an increased possibility that IPPA responses will be negative. Thus, the PMQ measure of marital conflict may be moderately associated with the IPPA. Taken together, the correlations between these established measures and the PMQ should help determine whether the PMQ is accurately and reliably measuring perceptions of marital conflict between parents.

### *Measures*

#### *Conflict.*

The Parental Marital Questionnaire (PMQ) is a 40-item scale that was developed for the current study to measure late adolescent college students' perceptions of their parents' marital conflict. The development of the PMQ required several steps. First, a list of 40 items was generated to represent various aspects of marital conflict that were of interest. Items were developed to tap into extreme marital conflict, emotional withdrawal, and anger, as well as

characteristics that buffer the escalation of conflict, such as conflict resolution, communication, and support. The items were checked by knowledgeable reviewers for face validity. Examples of items are the following: “How often did your parents argue?,” “How often did your parents ignore one another?,” “How often did your parents physically fight?,” and “How often did your parents help one another through difficult times?” Respondents answer each question on the PMQ on a 5-point response scale (1 = “never,” 2 = “sometimes,” 3 = “as often as not,” 4 = “pretty often,” 5 = “very often”). Higher scores on the PMQ reflect perceptions of higher levels of marital conflict between the parents. Cronbach’s coefficient alphas for the scale factors were: Intensity, .96; Negative Affect, .94; and Support, .96, and for the full-scale, .90.

#### *Family Coping.*

The Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES; McCubbin, Olson & Larsen, 1981) was designed to measure perceptions of how families manage crises. The 30 items represent family problem-solving behaviors and strategies. The respondents rate the degree to which their family uses the strategy in response to problems on a 5-point response scale (1 = “strongly disagree,” to 5 = “strongly agree”). High scores reflect perceptions of higher levels of effective family coping. Examples of items on this scale are: “Asking neighbors for favors and assistance,” “Watching television,” and “Seeking advice from a minister/priest/rabbi.” In its original validation study on a random sample of 2,582 adults the scale achieved a total full scale alpha of .86, and subscale alphas as follows: .83 for Acquiring Social Support, .82 for Reframing, .81 for Seeking Spiritual Support, .70 for Mobilizing Family to Acquire and Accept Help, and .62 for Passive Appraisal. When administered to the current sample of participants, F-COPES showed a satisfactory full scale alpha of .80; while subscale alphas were as follows: .69 for Acquiring Social Support, .57 for Reframing, .87 for Seeking Spiritual Support, .67 for Mobilizing Family to Acquire and Accept Help, and .00 for Passive Appraisal. Due to the relatively low alphas (suggesting low reliabilities) for the Acquiring Social Support, Reframing, Mobilizing Family to Acquire and Accept Help, and Passive Appraisal and subscales, these subscales were not be used in determining the validity of the PMQ. Thus, only one F-COPES subscale will be used for validating the validity of the PMQ, the Seeking Spiritual Support subscale.

### *Personal Coping Efficacy.*

The Young Adult Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (YA-COPE; Patterson, McCubbin & Grochowski, 1984) was used to determine the effectiveness of coping strategies employed by study participants to solve problems. The 56-item questionnaire records behaviors used by college students to manage problems. Respondents rate how often they do certain behaviors as a means of dealing with problems on a 5-point response scale (1 = "never," to 5 = "most of the time"). Higher scores on all but two subscales indicate utilization of more effective coping methods. For the Ventilation and Avoidance subscales, higher scores indicate less effective coping methods that include substance use and yelling at others. Some examples of scale items are "Say nice things to others," "Be with boyfriend or girlfriend," "Cry," and "Daydream about how you would like things to be." In its original validation study the scale achieved a full scale coefficient alpha of .82 on a group of 104 college freshmen, and a test-retest reliability of .83. Subscale alpha reliabilities for the original sample were as follows: .58 for Family Problem Solving, .71 for Ventilation, .72 for Self-reliance and Positive Appraisal, .69 for High Activity Level, .77 for Humor, .66 for Emotional Connection, .61 for Spiritual, .58 for Low Activity Level, and .51 for Avoidance. In the current sample, the scale showed a full scale alpha of .84; with subscale alpha values being as follows: .75 for Family Problem Solving, .15 for Ventilation, .57 for Self-reliance and Positive Appraisal, .67 for High Activity Level, .63 for Humor, .60 for Emotional Connection, .67 for Spiritual, .55 for Low Activity Level, and .63 for Avoidance. With the alpha values for Ventilation, Self-reliance and Positive Appraisal, High Activity Level, Humor, Emotional Connection, Spiritual, Low Activity Level, and Avoidance subscales suggesting low reliability with the current population, these subscales were not used in determining the validity of the PMQ. Only one YA-COPE subscale will be used in to validate the PMQ, the Family Problem Solving subscale.

### *Home Life Satisfaction.*

The Family Satisfaction Scale (FSS; Jones & Carver, 1992) was employed to measure the perceived level of satisfaction with the home environment of the study participants. The 20 items reflect perceptions of satisfaction with family experiences and relationships within the family (e.g., siblings, parent-child, etc.). It may be that home-life satisfaction may be associated with levels of marital conflict experienced in the home. Respondents rate the degree to which they agree with statements on a 5-point Likert format scale in which 1 = "strongly disagree," and 5 =

“strongly agree.” Higher scores indicate a higher level of satisfaction with one’s family relationships. Examples of scale items include: “I would do anything for a member of my family,” “I often found myself feeling dissatisfied with my family,” and “I always knew that my parents supported me.” In its original validation study, the scale achieved a full scale alpha of .95 on a population of 120 college students, and an alpha of .95 on a population of 168 adults. With the current population of students, the FSS achieved a full scale alpha of .79.

#### *Marital Satisfaction.*

The Marital Need Satisfaction Scale (MNS; Stinnett, Collins & Montgomery, 1970) was utilized in the current investigation to measure perceived levels of marital satisfaction between parents. The 24-item scale was developed to measure the marital satisfaction of older husbands and wives (ages 60-89 years). The scale items represent six basic needs in the marital relationship: love, personality fulfillment, respect, communication, finding meanings in life, and integration of past life experiences. In its validation study of 227 husbands and wives, a split-half reliability coefficient, computed with the Spearman-Brown Correction Formula, of 0.99 was obtained to determine an index of the reliability of the scale items of the MNS. A 5-point response scale is used, ranging from 1 = “very unsatisfactory” to 5 = “very satisfactory”. Sample items are: “Helping each other become interesting people,” “Being good listeners to one another,” and “Helping one another feel needed.” In the current investigation, the participants were asked to rate the degree to which they believe their parents would agree or disagree with scale items. The MNS achieved a full-scale alpha of .95 with the current population of college-age students.

#### *Marital Quality.*

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976) was utilized in the current study to measure the perceived marital quality of the parents of the study participants. The DAS was designed to assess marital adjustment of married couples and other similar dyads, such as unmarried cohabitating couples. The 32 scale items represent aspects of the dynamic process of becoming a couple including: “Matters of recreation,” “How often do you and your mate ‘get on each other’s nerves?’,” and “Laugh together.” Wording of items was changed to reflect the parental relationship, such as “How often do your parents ‘get on each other’s nerves?’.” In the validation study, the DAS was administered to 218 married persons and 94 divorced persons. From that investigation, four subscales were defined: Dyadic Consensus ( $\alpha = .90$ ), Dyadic

Satisfaction ( $\alpha = .94$ ), Dyadic Cohesion ( $\alpha = .86$ ), and Affectional Expression ( $\alpha = .73$ ). Higher scores reflect better quality of the marriage. With the college-age population of the current study, the full DAS achieved an alpha of .95, with subscale reliabilities as follows: Dyadic Consensus ( $\alpha = .95$ ), Dyadic Satisfaction ( $\alpha = .91$ ), Dyadic Cohesion ( $\alpha = .65$ ), and Affectional Expression ( $\alpha = .64$ ). The Dyadic Cohesion and Affectional Expression subscales of the DAS did not achieve satisfactory reliability with the current participant pool, and so were not used in the determination of the validity of the PMQ.

#### *Peer and Parent Relationships.*

The Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), a scale developed to measure adolescent attachment, was employed in this study to explore the perceived relationship quality of study participants. The scale is divided into two sections; a 28-item section relating to parent-adolescent relationships, and a 25-item section designed to measure the quality of adolescents' relationships with friends. Twenty of the 25 friendship quality items were used in the current study for brevity of the scale. Items were rated on a 5-point response scale (1 = "almost never or never true" to 5 = "almost always or always true"). Lower scores demonstrate perceptions of better relationships with friends and parents. Sample parent related items include: "My parents respect my feelings," "My parents expect too much of me," and "I don't get much attention at home." Peer-related items include: "My friends listen to what I have to say," "I feel angry with my friends," and "I can count on my friends when I need to get something off my chest." In its original validation study, the scale achieved alphas on statistically significant Parent and Peer scales ranging from .72 to .91 on a sample of 93 college students. In the current investigation, the IPPA Parent subscale achieved a full-scale alpha value of .92, while the Peer subscale also achieved a full-scale alpha of .92.

#### *Marital Aggression and Violence.*

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Strauss, 1979) was used to directly measure extreme levels of marital conflict. The scale was developed to assess the use of reasoning, verbal aggression, and violence in marital relationships. In an effort to reduce the item redundancy of using two forms of the CTS, the 14-item Form A of the CTS was combined with 4 items from Form N resulting in an 18-item scale. Items include: "Parents tried to discuss issues relatively calmly," "Stomped out of the room," and "One beat up the other." Responses were rated on a 5-point response scale (1 =

“never” to 5 = “very often”), with higher scores reflecting higher levels of perceived conflict. The scale is internally consistent, with alphas for couple’s scores of .76 for Reasoning, .88 for Verbal Aggression, and .88 for Violence in its validation study with a sample of 2,143 couples. With the current sample of college students, alphas were as follows: .34 for Reasoning, .61 for Verbal Aggression, and .91 for Violence. As the results of the reliability analysis for the Reasoning and Verbal Aggression subscales with this sample of college suggest low reliability, these subscales of the CTS were not used further in determining the validity of the PMQ.

#### *Children’s Perception of Marital Conflict.*

The Children’s Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992) was employed as a direct measure of children’s views of conflict between parents. This measure assesses multiple aspects of marital conflict from the child’s perspective including frequency, intensity, resolution, content, stability, perceived threat, and triangulation of the child, as well as exploring the child’s coping efficacy and level of self-blame. Participants responded to test items on a 3-point scale (1 = “false,” 2 = “sort of true,” 3 = “true”). Higher scores on questionnaire items reflect higher levels of perceived conflict. Scale items include: “They may not think I know it, but my parents argue or disagree a lot,” “It’s usually my fault when my parents argue,” and “My mom wants me to be on her side when she and my dad argue.” The CPIC was originally tested on a sample of 222 fourth and fifth graders (Time 1), and then on a second sample of 114 fifth grade children (Time 2). The three subscales that were assessed obtained good reliabilities via computation of internal consistencies and test-retest values. In its original validation study, the alphas for the seven subscales at Time 1 and Time 2, respectively, were as follows: Frequency (.70 and .68), Intensity (.82 and .80), Resolution (.83 and .82), Content (.74 and .82), Stability (.65 and .64), Perceived Threat (.82 and .83), Triangulation (.71 and .62), Coping Efficacy (.69 and .65), and Self Blame (.61 and .69). In the current sample of college students, the alpha for the full-scale is .94, while subscale alphas were as follows: Frequency .86, Intensity .88, Resolution .89, Content .79, Stability .44, Perceived Threat .80, Triangulation .79, Coping Efficacy .58, and Self Blame .70. The reliability analysis for the Stability and Coping Efficacy subscales with this sample suggests low reliability, neither subscale was used to determine the validity of the PMQ.

### *Commitment in Marriage.*

The Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DOCI; Adams & Jones, 1997) was used to provide convergent validity for the PMQ by exploring the perceived marital commitment of the study participants' parents. The DOCI is a 45-item scale that measures levels of commitment to spouse, commitment to marriage, and feelings of entrapment in married couples. Study participants rated the degree to which they felt their parents would agree with the items on a 5-point response scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). In the current study, higher scores reflect higher levels of perceived commitment between parents. Some scale items are: "A divorce would ruin my reputation," "Under no circumstances should the marriage bond be broken," and "My future plans do not include my spouse." In its validation study, three dimensions of marital commitment are specified by Adams and Jones (1997): Commitment to Spouse ( $\alpha = .91$ ), Commitment to Marriage ( $\alpha = .89$ ) and Feelings of Entrapment ( $\alpha = .86$ ) on a sample of 1,417 married individuals and 370 unmarried persons. With the current study population, a full-scale alpha coefficient of .91 was obtained on the DOCI, with subscale alphas for Commitment to Spouse, Commitment to Marriage, and Feelings of Entrapment being .83, .87, and .87, respectively.

### *Results for Study 1*

#### *PMQ Characteristics*

Exploratory factor analyses of the PMQ items were conducted to determine the number of factors. No hypotheses were advanced concerning the number of factors that might underlie the scale. However, in developing the PMQ, some items were created with the intention of looking at some specific aspects of parental marital conflict that had not been extensively researched in a college-age population previously, such as communication, support, emotional withdrawal, and conflict resolution. Though items related to these concepts were included in the PMQ measure, predictions as to the number of factors were not made.

Decisions regarding the number of factors and what aspects of marital conflict the factors represent were guided by both statistical and theoretical considerations. Initial analyses were conducted using principal axis factoring and Oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization using the SPSS statistical analysis program (version 11.0.1). Results of this analysis suggested the presence of three factors (Table A.1)<sup>2</sup>. Upon review of the content of the test items that comprise the three

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<sup>2</sup> All tables can be found in Appendix A.

factors, they were labeled by this author as Negative Affect, Support, and Intensity. The Intensity subscale taps into elements of physical violence, destruction of property, and cruelty in the marital relationship. The Negative Affect subscale assesses the level of arguments and disagreements, subtle displays of anger, and emotional withdrawal. The Support subscale looks at elements of the relationship that may counteract conflict, such as affection, communication, helping, displays of kindness, and resolution of disagreements. Looking at the factor analysis of the PMQ, some of the items that were expected to load on different factors, loaded on the same factor. For example, items that were intended to explore covert conflict behaviors (e.g., “How often did your parents withhold feelings from one another?”) surprisingly loaded with items intended to explore overt behaviors (e.g., “How often did your parents resort to name-calling?”) on the factor that was labeled Negative Affect. As there were significant negative feelings expressed throughout these items, it is understandable that they loaded on the same factor, but was quite unexpected as the behaviors they describe were thought by the author to be opposite. Conflict resolution, communication and support items also loaded together on the factor labeled Support, as the overarching link between the items appeared to be actions that support the marriage. Lastly, extreme marital conflict items (e.g., “How often did your parents hit one another?”) all loaded together on a factor that was labeled Intensity, and these items seem to express highly intense, angry interactions. Internal reliability of the subscales was found to be adequate for research use according to Nunnally (1978). Cronbach’s coefficient alphas for the full-scale was .90, while scale factor alphas were as follows: Intensity, .96; Negative Affect, .94; and Support, .96.

For further verification of scale structure, the factors were again extracted using the robust maximum likelihood estimation with Bonferroni correction ( $p < .01$ ) using the EQS statistical analysis program (version 6.0). Chi square goodness-of-fit tests also provided a basis for deciding how many factors to retain. Given the results of the initial factor analysis using SPSS, a three-factor solution model and a second-order solution model were tested using the Sattora-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$ . The factor pattern matrix from the analysis using robust maximum likelihood with Bonferroni correction is shown in Table A.2. The second order solution [ $\chi^2(737, N=328) = 1460.31, p < .01$ , Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .89, Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation = .07] provided an improvement in fit over the three-factor solution, [ $\chi^2(737, N = 328) = 1476.25, p < .01$ , Comparative Fit Index = .89, Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation = .07]. However, this improvement is slight, and neither model surpasses the desired CFI standard of

0.95. However, all correlations between the three factors were significant at the 90% confidence interval (Negative Affect and Support  $mle = -.53$ ; Intensity and Support  $mle = -.24$ ; Intensity and Negative Affect  $mle = .69$ ). In addition, the CFI scores obtained by the data are sufficient to suggest both models are acceptable. Since the statistical difference between the two models is not great, it was decided to retain the three-factor solution given that it fits with the prior factor analyses with SPSS.

#### *Associations Between the PMQ and Established Measures*

Next, the validity of the PMQ subscales was investigated by testing their relationship with the nine established measures of conflict, family relationships, coping methods, commitment and satisfaction. These scales were: Family Crisis Oriented Personal Evaluation Scales (F-COPES; McCubbin, Olson & Larsen, 1981), Young Adult Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (YA-COPE; Patterson, McCubbin & Grochowski, 1984), Family Satisfaction Scale (FSS; Jones & Carver, 1992), Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976), Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987), Marital Need Satisfaction Scale (MNS; Stinnett, Collins & Montgomery, 1970), Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Strauss, 1979), Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DOCI; Adams & Jones, 1997), and the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992).

Due to the CPIC's direct emphasis on the child's perspective of marital conflict, which is the same theoretical approach this author has taken with the PMQ, it is expected that CPIC subscales will be significantly positively correlated with the PMQ Negative Affect and Intensity subscales and negatively correlated with the PMQ Support subscale. Because of its focus on conflict between spouses, the CTS is also predicted to be strongly, positively, associated with the PMQ Negative Affect and Intensity subscales and negatively correlated with the PMQ Support factor. The DOCI subscales are likely to be significantly correlated with the PMQ subscales as the DOCI, like the PMQ, directly examines the marital relationship. The MNS and DAS examine positive feelings between marital partners, and are also expected to be strongly negatively associated with the PMQ Negative Affect and Intensity factors and positively associated with the Support scale of the PMQ.

The FSS, a measure of general family satisfaction, on the other hand, is expected to be moderately negatively associated with the PMQ Negative Affect and Intensity subscales and moderately positively correlated with the PMQ Support factor. It would seem that a child

reporting high family satisfaction would be less likely to do so in an environment of negative feelings, anger, and low support between parents, even if the child is coping well with such stresses. The IPPA, a measure of parent-adolescent and adolescent-peer attachment is also predicted to be moderately related to the PMQ. It would seem that parent-adolescent relationships would be associated with marital conflict as it has been theorized to affect parent-child relationships. However, the degree to which marital conflict may be related to the relationship between adolescents and their peers is unclear. So, it is hypothesized by this author that the IPPA measure will be moderately correlated with the PMQ due to the uncertainty of the relationship between marital conflict and other relationships outside of the family.

The YA-COPE and F-COPES were predicted to be less well correlated with the PMQ than all of the aforementioned scales as neither are direct measures of marital conflict, aspects of the marital relationship, or family relationships. Thus, the predicted directions of the correlations for YA-COPE and F-COPES are not clear. It is predicted that the F-COPES and YA-COPE subscales may be correlated with the PMQ as the coping methods displayed by the marital couple during conflict may be modeled by the children of the couple when they are managing conflict. Overall, the results of these analyses will lend evidence to help clarify what the PMQ is capable of accurately assessing.

Table A.3 shows the correlations between the PMQ and the established scales. As predicted, the three PMQ subscales are significantly correlated in the predicted directions with the CPIC, MNS, CTS, DAS, and DOCI. Of the correlations for which strong associations were predicted (CPIC, MNS, CTS, DOCI, DAS, the PMQ Intensity subscale correlated significantly and in the expected directions on 11 of the 14 possible correlations with subscales or composite scales from these instruments. For the possible correlations with each of the other PMQ subscales, the findings were similar. There were 12 of 14 significant correlations (in the predicted directions) for the PMQ Support scale, and 12 of 14 significant correlations for the PMQ Negative Affect scale. In general, the predictions for the correlations with the strongest relationships to the PMQ were verified.

The FSS was predicted to be moderately correlated with the PMQ (less well correlated with the PMQ than the CPIC, MNS, CTS, DOCI, DAS, but more strongly correlated than the F-COPES, YA-COPE, and IPPA). The results (three of three significant correlations) demonstrate that the FSS was more strongly associated with the PMQ Intensity ( $r(329) = -.38$ , Bonferroni corrected  $p < .01$ ), Negative Affect ( $r(329) = -.37$ , Bonferroni corrected  $p < .01$ ), and Support

( $r(330) = .50$ , Bonferroni corrected  $p < .01$ ) subscales than expected. IPPA was also predicted to be moderately correlated with the PMQ. This was found to be the case overall as four of six correlations between the PMQ and IPPA subscales were significant. However, closer examination shows that three of three IPPA Parent subscale correlations were significantly associated with the PMQ, while only one of three IPPA Peer subscale correlations was significantly associated with the PMQ (Support  $r(329) = -.25$ , Bonferroni corrected  $p < .01$ ) Taken together, the IPPA Parent subscale was strongly correlated with the PMQ while the IPPA Peer subscale was only moderately correlated with the PMQ.

As predicted, the YA-COPE and F-COPES measures were less well correlated with the PMQ than the MNS, DAS, CTS, CPIC, DOCI, IPPA, and FSS. Of the correlations for the YA-COPE, and F-COPES, the PMQ Intensity subscale was not significantly with either of the two possible correlations. For the possible correlations with the PMQ Negative Affect scale one of two significant correlations was found; F-COPES Seeking Social Support Scale,  $r(329) = -.21$ , Bonferroni corrected  $p < 0.01$ . There was one of two significant correlations found between the PMQ Support subscale and the F-COPES measure; F-COPES Seeking Social Support  $r(329) = -.21$ , Bonferroni corrected  $p < 0.01$ . As hypothesized, the fewest number of significant correlations were those between the PMQ and the YA-COPE and F-COPES measures.

### *Summary*

No gender or ethnic differences were found in the response patterns of the PMQ. Exploratory analyses on the PMQ demonstrated that the measure has three internally consistent factors, which were labeled Negative Affect, Support, and Intensity. These factors were validated by comparing them to nine established measures. The relationships between the PMQ and the established scales that were predicted have been supported by the data. Generally, the PMQ Support factor was associated (positively) with perceptions of positive aspects of family and peer relationships and with effective coping. The PMQ Intensity and Negative Affect subscales were associated (positively) with negative aspects of the marital and family relationships. Taken together, these results provide good convergent and divergent validity for the PMQ.

## CHAPTER III

### Study 2: Marital Conflict and Sibling Relationships

The purpose of the second study is to explore the relationship between perceived parental conflict and sibling relationships. More specifically, this study will attempt to determine whether levels of conflict between parents are associated with closeness in the sibling relationships of college-age students and their siblings. Due to the conflicting data in this literature, no predictions as to the outcome of the analyses have been generated.

#### *Methods*

##### *Participants*

The sample for this study was independent of that for Study 1. Participants were 207 undergraduate students (66 male, 141 female) with at least one sibling. The ethnicity of the participant group was as follows: 83% Caucasian, 7% African-American, 3% Asian-American, 1% Hispanic-American, 3% “Other”, and 3% did not list an ethnic preference. A large percentage of this group come from homes in which their biological parents are still married (93%). The mean age of participants was 19.6 years with a standard deviation of 4.1 years. Participants in this sample were recruited in a similar manner as in Study 1.

##### *Procedures*

To address the study objectives, the participants were administered the Parental Marital Questionnaire (PMQ), an original measure developed for this investigation (that was validated in Study 1), a demographic questionnaire, a sibling type questionnaire, selected items from the Brother-Sister Questionnaire (BSQ; Graham-Bermann & Cutler, 1994; described below), and a scale developed by Cicirelli (1980; described below) to assess feelings toward family members and perceived marital conflict between parents. Participants were asked to complete rating measures for up to three of their siblings, beginning with those closest in age to them.

There are two points that should be mentioned about the completion of the BSQ and Cicirelli measures. First, for this study, participants were asked to complete BSQ and Cicirelli measures for as many as three of their siblings. As some of the participants have only one or two siblings, the number of BSQ and Cicirelli measures completed is different for each of the sibling types.

Specifically, the number of participants completing BSQ and Cicirelli scales decreased to 109 for those respondents with two or more siblings, and to 59 for those with three or more siblings.

The second point is a clarification about the ages of the siblings being reported in the study. All of the 207 participants had at least one sibling and completed a BSQ and Cicirelli questionnaire on each of their siblings to a maximum of three siblings: the sibling closest in age (labeled SIB1), the sibling next closest in age (labeled SIB2), and then the sibling who is next closest in age after SIB2 (labeled SIB3). Therefore, there could be as many as three BSQ and Cicirelli measures completed by each participant, representing each of these sibling relationships. For all Study 2 participants, SIB1 differed in age from the respondent by a mean of 4.79 years ( $SD = 3.80$  years). For the 109 participants who also completed the questionnaire for SIB2, this sibling differed in age from the respondent by a mean of 5.05 years ( $SD = 3.72$  years). Finally, for the 59 participants who also completed questionnaires for SIB3, this sibling differed in age from the participant by a mean of 5.19 years ( $SD = 4.22$  years). Although the mean age differential between respondents and siblings increases from closest in age (SIB1) to third closest in age (SIB3), the standard deviations show that there is considerable overlap of age differentials between sibling types for the sample as a whole. Thus, the age differences reported reflect the relative age differences between sibling pair groups rather than actual age differences.

Participants were instructed to simply complete questionnaires on up to three siblings who were closest to them in age, this could be either younger or older. Thus, a participant with a sibling one year older, a sibling two years younger, and a sibling four years older, would label these siblings SIB1, SIB2, and SIB3, respectively because their ages relative to the age of the respondent are increasingly different, but not necessarily all in the same direction (e.g., younger only or older only). So, if there were two siblings equally distant in age from the participant (e.g., one 2 years older and one 2 years younger), the participant was instructed to label the sibling of the same gender as themselves SIB1, and the sibling of the other gender SIB2. If two of the respondents' siblings were equally distant from them in age and were the same gender, they were asked to label the one they felt closest to as SIB1, and the other sibling as SIB2. It can be seen that in such cases, the participant was allowed to make the decision as to whom to call SIB1 or SIB2. The rationale was to maximize the likelihood of sibling interactions, which would be more probable in sibling relationships of siblings who are closer in age, of the same gender, and who feel closer to one another (most likely spending more time in one another's company). Therefore,

the means and standard deviations in sibling ages in this study are indicative of the absolute age differences between the participants and their siblings.

### *Measures*

#### *Marital Conflict.*

The Parental Marital Questionnaire (PMQ) is a 40-item scale that was developed for the current study to measure late adolescents' perceptions of their parents' marital conflict. Its validation is the basis of Study 1. The PMQ consists of 40 items that represent three aspects of marital conflict: intensity of conflict, negative affect, and support between parents (which decreases the likelihood of marital conflict). The items were checked by knowledgeable reviewers for face validity. Examples of items are the following: "How often did your parents argue?," "How often did your parents ignore one another?," "How often did your parents physically fight?," and "How often did your parents help one another through difficult times?." Respondents answer each question on the PMQ on a 5-point response scale (1="never," 2="sometimes," 3="as often as not," 4="pretty often," 5="very often"). Higher scores on the PMQ reflect perceptions of higher levels of marital conflict between the parents. Cronbach's coefficient alphas for the scale factors in the validation study were: Intensity, .96; Negative Affect, .94; and Support, .96, and for the full-scale, .90. When administered to the current participants, alphas for the scale factors were: Intensity, .97; Negative Affect, .95; and Support, .96, and for the full-scale, .89.

Confirmatory factor analyses were conducted on the data from the current participant sample in an attempt to cross-validate the solution obtained from the first data analysis (refer to Table A2). The three-factor solution and the second-order solution were tested with confirmatory factor analysis on the this independent sample, and the fit of the model was compared to the three-factor solution model and the second-order solution model using the Sattora-Bentler scaled  $\chi^2$ . The second order solution [ $\chi^2(737, N = 207) = 1308.68, p < .01$ , Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .86, Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation = .06] provided no significant difference in fit over the three-factor solution, [ $\chi^2(737, N = 207) = 1308.71, p < .01$ , Comparative Fit Index = .86, Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation = -.06] in this sample. Since the fit of both models is below the desired CFI of .95, no significant difference in fit has been found between the two models, and all correlations between the factors have been shown to be significant with 90% confidence

(Negative Affect and Support  $mle = -.61$ ; Intensity and Support  $mle = -.47$ ; Intensity and Negative Affect  $mle = .59$ ). Here, as in Study 1, the most parsimonious model is chosen, which is the three-factor solution. Also, the pattern of the results for the factor analyses for the two independent samples were identical; the variable loadings on each factor were the same across the two samples. Taken together, the results provide further evidence that the 3-factor solution for the PMQ is the best model fit.

#### *Sibling Conflict.*

A modified version of the Brother-Sister Questionnaire (BSQ; Graham-Bermann & Cutler, 1994) was employed to assess the level of conflict in the sibling relationships of the participants in this study. The original self-report measure contains 35-items and was devised to measure perceptions of high conflict, violence, and abuse in childhood sibling relationships. In its validation study of 202 selected participants, the four qualities defined by factor analyses were: Empathy ( $\alpha = .92$ ), Boundary Maintenance ( $\alpha = .85$ ), Similarity ( $\alpha = .73$ ), and Coercion ( $\alpha = .69$ ). The total scale alpha was .91 in the validation study. To adapt the BSQ for use in the current lives of the study participants (rather than their childhood reflections of what their sibling relationships were like in the past), 15 items inappropriate for this age group were omitted. The resulting 17-item scale (presented in Appendix B) asks respondents to rate statements as to the extent that they describe their relationship with one of their siblings on a 5-point response scale ranging from 1 = “not very descriptive” to 5 = “very much describes”. Sample items used include: “We are very good friends,” “We do a lot of arguing and fighting,” and “I feel rejected by him/her.” Participants completed a maximum of three of these, one for each of up to three siblings. High scores reflect perceptions of less conflict between siblings. BSQs for all sibling pairings showed satisfactory internal reliability. They were: for the sibling closest in age (SIB1)  $\alpha = .88$ , for the next closest in age sibling (SIB2)  $\alpha = .91$ , and for the third closest in age sibling (SIB3)  $\alpha = .91$ .

#### *Feelings Toward Siblings.*

A scale by Cicirelli (1980) that was developed to measure college women’s feelings about their family members was used in the current study specifically to measure study participants’ feelings about their sibling relationships. The 10 scale items measure 10 different aspects interpersonal relationships: feelings of affective closeness, friendliness, similarity of values, understanding, support and guidance, respect, authority and power, serving as a confidante,

protection, and a source of inspiration. In its validation study, the 10 items were administered for reporting relationships with both parents and siblings. In the current investigation, the 10 scale items were utilized only in regard to sibling relationships. The participants were asked to complete one questionnaire for each of up to three of their siblings. Items in the original study were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = “not at all” to 7 = “very, very much”). High scores reflect a higher degree of positive attributes within the relationship. The current study utilized a 5-point scale from 1 = “not very descriptive” to 5 = “very much describes”. Scale items (presented in Appendix B) include: “I feel friendly and relaxed when I am around my brother/sister,” “I can turn to my brother/sister when I am in need of help or guidance,” and “I am told what to do by my brother/sister.”

Cicirelli developed this measure of feelings toward siblings and parents for use with college women and obtained a full scale alpha of .80 on a sample of 100. In the current study the sample included men and women, and the questionnaire was completed for up to three siblings. Comparisons were made on how the two genders responded on this instrument for each of the sibling relationships they reported. The means, standard deviations, and alphas on each of the three Cicirelli scales completed by participants are shown in Table A4. The t-tests done to compare means and standard deviations for men and women on each of the Cicirelli scale scores showed no gender differences. Alpha values for the current sample showed good reliabilities. Thus, the sibling measure developed by Cicirelli (1980) appears to be reliable for use with male, as well as female, college students.

### *Results for Study 2*

To test whether perceptions of marital conflict between parents are associated with the closeness of sibling relationships, Pearson correlations between the PMQ subscales and the quality of sibling relationship measures (BSQ and Cicirelli scale) were employed. These correlations were determined for three sibling relationship pairings: that with the sibling closest in age (SIB1), that with the sibling next closest in age (SIB2), and that with the sibling third closest in age to the respondent (SIB3). The correlation between the two sibling relationship quality measures (BSQ and Cicirelli measure) were found to be  $r(207) = .68, p < .01$  for SIB1;  $r(109) = .85, p < .01$  for SIB2; and  $r(59) = .81, p < .01$  for SIB3.

Correlational analyses (results shown in Table A5) indicate that perceptions of higher levels of conflict between parents were associated with reports of worse sibling relationship quality for

the closest-in-age sibling. For the sibling closest in age (SIB1), all three factors (Intensity, Negative Affect, and Support) were shown to be significantly related to the sibling ratings. The Intensity and Negative Affect subscales of the PMQ were negatively correlated to the BSQ sibling measure ( $r(207) = -.34, p < .01$ ; and  $r(207) = -.25, p < .01$ , respectively), but were not related to the Cicirelli measure. The PMQ Support subscale was found to be positively related to both sibling measures (BSQ  $r(207) = .28, p < .01$ ; Cicirelli  $r(207) = .26, p < .01$ ).

For SIB2, all three of the PMQ factors were found to be significantly related to sibling relationship quality. Perceptions of higher levels of conflict between parents (as measured by the Intensity and Negative Affect subscales of the PMQ) were negatively associated with reports of better sibling relationship quality as measured by the BSQ and Cicirelli scale for SIB2 (PMQ Intensity: BSQ  $r(109) = -.36, p < .01$ ; PMQ Negative Affect: BSQ  $r(109) = -.32, p < .01$ ). Neither the PMQ Intensity nor Negative affect subscales were related to the Cicirelli measure for SIB2. Conversely, perceptions of higher levels of support between parents as measured by the PMQ were positively related to sibling relationship quality for SIB2 as measured by both the BSQ and Cicirelli measures (PMQ Support: BSQ  $r(109) = .24, p < .05$ , Cicirelli  $r(109) = .26, p < .01$ ).

Perceptions of higher levels of conflict between parents were also not associated with reports of better quality of sibling relationships for SIB3. Only one PMQ subscale was found to be correlated to the sibling measures, Intensity (BSQ  $r(59) = -.31, p < .05$ ) for SIB3. Here perceptions of more intense parental conflict were associated with poorer quality of the relationship with the sibling and higher sibling conflict.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Discussion**

In Study 1, the PMQ, an original measure of perceptions of marital conflict that was created for this investigation, was developed and validated. The aim in the development of the PMQ was to provide reliable measurement of perceptions of marital conflict between parents with late adolescent children.

Three factors were extracted from the PMQ and were labeled Support, Negative Affect, and Intensity. The internal consistency of the three factors is solid. The alphas are consistently high for all three subscales. These factors were confirmed using an independent sample, and achieved identical factor loadings, thereby supporting the factor model-fit. Use of the robust maximum likelihood estimation with Bonferroni correction also suggested that this 3-factor solution is a sufficiently good model.

The results of PMQ factor analyses were validated by comparison with nine established measures. As expected the PMQ had a high proportion of correlations, in the expected directions, with the CPIC, MNS, CTS, DOCI, and DAS. Unexpectedly, the PMQ was also well correlated with the FSS (three of three correlations are significant) and IPPA Parent subscale (three of three correlations are significant) when it had been predicted that the number of significant correlations between the PMQ and these measures would be only moderate. These unexpectedly high associations suggest that the PMQ is also tapping into general feelings about the family environment. This seems to be an appropriate assumption given that the informants in this study are the children of the marital couple reporting on their perceptions of the marital conflict rather than a member of the couple themselves. Thus, the child's perspective on marital conflict is likely to be heavily influenced by their experiences of being a member of the family, yet not as much as a member of the marital couple. Also, given the significant influence the marital couple is theorized to have on the children in the family (Grych, Fincham, & Osborne, 1994) it is possible that the high number of significant correlations between the PMQ and the IPPA Parent and FSS subscales are merely a reflection of this. As intense, negative marital conflict or supportive behaviors between parents occur (as measured by the PMQ), it affects the level of family satisfaction children experience and affects the attachment bond to their parents. Taken together, these results suggest that the PMQ is accurately measuring perceptions of interparental conflict, marital contentment, and marital violence, as well as, perceptions of family satisfaction. As

explained previously, the IPPA Parent subscale had a high correlation with the PMQ, while the IPPA Peer subscale had a low number of correlations with the PMQ (one of three correlations was significant). The discrepancy between the number of significant correlations between the PMQ and IPPA Parent subscale compared to the IPPA Peer subscale may suggest that interactions between parents are more likely to generalize to the parent-adolescent relationship (staying within the family environment) than to the adolescent-peer relationship (affecting outside of the family environment). Overall, the IPPA measure as a whole had a moderate association with the PMQ.

A low proportion of significant correlations were expected between the PMQ and the YA-COPE and F-COPES. A low number of correlations were found to be significant between the YA-COPE subscales (zero of three were significant) and F-COPES subscale (two of three were significant) and the PMQ subscales, as per the author's hypothesis. Overall, the PMQ factors were correlated with a low number of F-COPES, and YA-COPE subscales, as expected.

Generally, the PMQ factors were shown to be associated with the established measures as predicted. However, some noteworthy points about the comparisons between the PMQ and the established scales should also be mentioned. An interesting finding is that the PMQ subscales were not significantly correlated with the CPIC Self-Blame scale. This may be due to the nature of the population we are studying. College students, being adults, with more maturity in interpersonal relationships may recognize the separation between themselves and their parents. They may have a better understanding than a younger child would that they are not to blame for their parents' conflict. Finally, the DOCI Feelings of Entrapment scale was also not related to the PMQ. This may be due to the skewed nature of the population of this study. At least 75% of the participants in the study have biological parents who are still married to one another. Further, of those who are still married, the average length of marriage is 21.5 years. Thus most parents who are being described in the study may not have strong feelings of entrapment, or if they do, their children are unaware of them. With such long lengths of marriage for this group of parents, the participants in the study may assume, correctly or incorrectly, that their parents do not hold such views.

The results of Study 1 show that the PMQ Support scale is positively related to positive aspects of the nine established measures such as support, emotional connection, and reasoning, and negatively related to negative aspects of the established such as threat and triangulation. The PMQ Intensity and Negative Affect scales were positively related to negative aspects of the nine

established scales such as intensity, frequency, and violence, while being negatively related to the positive aspects of the established scales, such as marital satisfaction and parent-child attachment. Overall, the current data suggest that the PMQ is effectively measuring late adolescents' perceptions of marital conflict between their parents. The PMQ contributes to the current marital conflict literature by expanding reliable measurement of perceptions of parental marital conflict for college-age late adolescents.

Study 2 of this research investigation explored the association between sibling relationships and parental marital conflict as measured by the PMQ. Analyses conducted in Study 2 found that siblings who are closest in age (SIB1) and are living in homes in which they perceive more intense and highly negative parental relations are less likely to perceive closeness within the sibling relationship, while in families with higher levels of perceived support between parents, sibling perceive better relationships with each other. This pattern followed for the next closest in age sibling, SIB2. Perceptions of strong sibling relationships for SIB2 were also shown to be negatively affected by perceptions of intense and negative parental relationships, and positively related to supportive parental relations in this study. This pattern was also consistent for sibling furthest apart in age in this study (SIB3); the impression of more intense marital relations between parents is negatively correlated with perceptions of sibling relationship quality, while perceptions of levels of support and negative affect between parents were not shown to be related to the quality of sibling relationships for SIB3. Overall, the analyses demonstrate that perceptions of marital conflict between parents are negatively related to reports of sibling relationship quality. Participants reporting better relations with their siblings were found to describe their homes as having less negative affect and less intense marital conflict between parents. Such participants were also more likely to perceive higher levels of support between their parents. Regardless of sibling age differences, perceptions of higher intensity marital conflict were found to negatively affect reports of sibling relationship quality. Thus, evidence from the current investigation demonstrates that perceptions of higher levels of conflict between parents may have a deleterious effect on how late adolescents view their relationships with their siblings, no matter how close in age the siblings are. These results run contrary to the observations of Wallerstein (1985), Bank and Kahn (1982), and others, that sibling relationships may be more closely bonded in an atmosphere of intense marital conflict and that siblings draw closer to each other for security and stability in the midst of their parent's fighting or neglect. However, these results are consistent

with a significant literature that reports negative effects of marital conflict on sibling relationships (Cummings & Cummings, 1988; MacKinnon, 1989; Stocker & Youngblade, 1999).

Interestingly, Intensity was the only PMQ scale factor that was found to be related to sibling relationship quality across all sibling age differences. Work in the field of conflict has long suggested that higher levels of anger and strife in the family environment have consistently negative effects on children. Data obtained in this investigation lends further support to this assertion. Intense marital conflict, as described by the PMQ, was found to be associated with reports of less close sibling relations across sibling age difference groupings.

The Negative Affect subscale of the PMQ was found to be negatively correlated with participants' perceptions of their relationships (as measured by the BSQ and Cicirelli measure) with their two closest in age siblings, SIB1 and SIB2. It could be speculated that there are several ways in which Negative Affect could damage sibling bonds. Children could be modeling the negative behaviors of their parents in their relationships with their siblings, thereby leading to difficult sibling interactions. Moreover, negative affect between parents also could affect sibling relationships through alliances between parents and children. Such alliances could serve to separate siblings from one another due to the differential treatment of the siblings by parents. Further investigation is required to determine the probability of these pathways.

The PMQ Support subscale was positively correlated with perceptions of sibling relationships for the two closest in age siblings (SIB1 and SIB2) across both the BSQ and Cicirelli sibling relationship quality measures. These results may signify that viewing supportive interactions between parents helps to foster positive attributes between siblings. Such positive attributes could be transmitted in many ways, such as via the genetics, modeling, and changes in children's perceptions in regard to dealing with conflict. However, it is surprising to this author that reporting supportive relationships between parents during conflict did not have an influence on sibling relationships across all age groupings. It seems logical that support would help to counteract the influence of the negativity of marital conflict, and thus improve the quality of sibling relationships for all siblings. However, this was not found to be the case for the siblings with the greatest age differences (SIB3). These results may suggest that siblings closest in age may be most able to benefit from perceiving support between their parents. This may be due to greater opportunities for interaction and modeling of support for siblings closer in age (as they may be in the family home together for longer) than for siblings further apart in age.

Nevertheless, these results generally suggest that reports of positive feelings and support between parents contributes to enhanced perceptions of relationships between siblings.

In sum, these results provide evidence in favor of the perception that negative aspects of marital conflict in the home has a negative effect on perceptions of sibling relationships. More specifically, negative correlations between the PMQ Intensity subscale and the BSQ sibling conflict measure across all sibling age differences may indicate that late adolescents' perceptions of higher levels of intense and angry marital conflict between parents may have a particularly damaging effect on their view of their relationships with their siblings. Perceiving negative feelings between parents may provide an environment for sibling conflict and/or role models for conflict behaviors. This finding coincides with prior research that demonstrates that high levels of intense conflict and marital violence have particularly damaging effects on individual children (Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992; Jouriles, Barling, & O'Leary, 1987; McNeal & Amato, 1998; Morrison & Coiro, 1999). Current findings extend this observation to siblings as well. Overall, participant views of their sibling relationships are negatively affected by perceptions of intense, negative marital conflict between parents, but are positively affected by perceptions of support between parents.

Social learning theories provide relevant concepts for understanding the study findings. Social learning theory posits the idea that observing social relationships, especially those of the parents, influence how individuals, particularly children, behave in other social contexts. Accordingly, Patterson (1984) found that patterns of behavioral interactions between parent and child are generalized to sibling relationships. More specifically, greater positivity in parent-child relationships has been linked to greater positivity and prosocial behavior in sibling relationships, while negativity in parent-child relationships has been correlated with aggressive behaviors in sibling relationships (Stocker, Dunn, & Plomin, 1989; Brody, Stoneman, & MacKinnon, 1986). With regard to this theory, participants in the current study who report perceptions of marital conflict may be less likely to display prosocial behaviors with siblings than those perceiving less conflict. This may explain the current finding that participants who reported perceiving higher levels of conflict between their parents were less likely to perceive positive relationships with their sibling. The results of the current data provide additional support for current social learning theories of marital conflict and sibling relationships.

These data also lend evidence to suggest that siblings further apart in age may have less connectedness with one another as there are fewer significant correlations between respondents

and their siblings as age differences increased. One rationale is that siblings further apart in age may be less likely to have similar kinds of relationships with their parents (i.e., parental behavior with a first child may be different compared to the behavior of a more experienced parent with a second or third child), or may be exposed to somewhat different family living situations (i.e., the possible different financial statuses of a family with one child compared to a family with three children). For example, comparing the different perspectives of the oldest child to the youngest child, the older child may be more sensitive to subtle marital conflict due to a greater level of cognitive development that comes with maturity, and/or greater understanding that comes with more experience in close interpersonal relationships, and may view the family as more functional/dysfunctional than the youngest child. As a consequence of the eldest and youngest siblings potentially viewing the family differently, it may be more difficult for them to agree on family matters, to cooperate, or form emotional bonds. In any case, the PMQ subscales were not as well correlated with reports of sibling relationship quality for siblings further apart in age. Overall, the results of this investigation on the PMQ suggest that sibling relationship quality is negatively affected by perceptions of intense, negative marital conflict between parents and are positively affected by perceptions of support between parents.

### *Limitations*

There are some limitations to the current study. First, a test-retest procedure of administering the PMQ to the same group of participants at two different points in time was not done. However, it is very encouraging that the measure obtained a similar factor structure with an independent population of participants. Thus, it is likely that it would have achieved the same factors if retested with the same participant group. However, one should still note that this factor structure did not perfectly fit the data and therefore additional studies should investigate means by which this measure could be improved to be a more accurate fit with participants' reports.

A second limitation is that all of the data are self-reported from one individual. Buehler and her colleagues (1998) state that "although youth may be the best informants for both interparental conflict styles and their own problem behaviors, the use of the same informant to assess the independent and dependent variables increases the chance that the associational estimates may be inflated due to shared method variance" (p. 27). Thus, it may be that participants' response bias may result in a tendency for participants to answer questions in the same (positive or negative) manner. In the future, it would be informative to address this issue by obtaining corroborating

information from participants' siblings to help eliminate response bias due to the individual participant perspective.

Another issue is that the data are retrospective. The participants in the study may be recalling incidents from their childhood especially if their biological parents have been divorced for a significant amount of time. Current life events may change one's perspective on childhood events. It has been stated that:

“sole reliance on retrospective data introduces other problematic factors, most notably, response bias. Subjects' differential willingness to discuss painful personal events from the past and their tendency to reconstruct the past so that it makes current sense can result in inaccurate and misleading information” (Block, Block, & Gjerde, 1988; p. 207).

However, the use of a college-age population in this study may have helped compensate for such biases. The average age of the college students in this study was 18-20 years. They have likely only been out of the parental home for 1-2 years. On one hand they have some separation from the parental marriage and may be able to view it more objectively, but they are not likely to have so quickly forgotten the quality of their parents' marriage. In fact, some participants in the study indicated that they were still living with their parents. Therefore, this author believes that it is unlikely that the data from these participants are significantly distorted.

Another limitation of the study is that the participants are demographically homogeneous; primarily young, female, and Caucasian. However, this is consistent with student populations used in many empirical investigations in the social sciences, so comparison of the current data with data in other studies should not be difficult.

One other limitation to the current study is that it is an investigation based on correlational analyses of participant perceptions of marital relations between parents. There are likely many aspects of parental marital relationships of which children are not privy and do not have knowledge. Thus, the results that have been obtained only indicate a relationship between perceptions (of sibling relationships) and other perceptions (of marital conflict) held by a given individual. Therefore, the relationships between concepts can not be seen as causal. Whether marital conflict causes poor sibling relationships or whether marital conflict and poor sibling relationships just tend to occur together is yet to be determined.

A further limitation of this study was that information regarding marital conflict and family relationships was not gathered directly from parents. As parents will have the most knowledge of the marital relationship and interparental conflict, having their input would be an important step in validating the PMQ and its ability to both detect and assess marital conflict..

### *Future Directions*

There are several areas that should be further explored given the results of the current investigation. A longitudinal view of sibling relationships would provide conclusive evidence as to whether there are causal relationships between marital conflict and sibling relationship quality. As the current study is capturing data at only one point in time, having multiple assessments would allow for viewing relationship changes between siblings with respect to changes in family structure, such as divorce, or siblings leaving the childhood home. Interpretations of the data taking into account specific family changes would be more likely to be accurate as the data would not be retrospective. Also, having parents and other family members, such as siblings, report about the family atmosphere would provide a more complete picture of the family.

In terms of the relatedness of intensity of perceived conflict and other aspects of marital conflict, such as frequency of perceived conflict, it would be useful to compare the effects of each by co-varying them. For instance, comparing siblings in high conflict-low frequency marital conflict homes to those in high-conflict-high frequency homes would address the relative effects of each. Such investigation would help expand the relevance of prior research investigations to inform us about sibling relationships.

A final area for future research could be looking more at the quality of the sibling support being received, as opposed to looking only at the emotions experienced by a particular child. Does a particular child find their sibling to be supportive, comforting, and helpful during marital conflict? Does the child's sibling actively attempt to help them remain calm and solve problems? Does the child feel better when their sibling is present? The answers to these questions would provide a wealth of new understanding into the processes involved in sibling support in environments of marital conflict.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Conclusions**

The first study in this investigation demonstrated that the Parental Marital Questionnaire (PMQ) is a valid and reliable measure of perceptions of marital conflict and support between parents. The development of the PMQ helps fill a void in the current literature, by providing a valid instrument for assessing marital conflict between parents for use with young adults who are college-age. Such persons are too mature for the current interparental conflict scales that are available (like the CPIC), and are not a member of the marital couple (whose perceptions can be measure by scales like the CTS and DAS).

The results of Study 2 showed that perceptions of sibling relationships are negatively affected by perceptions of more intense and highly negative marital conflict between parents and positively affected by perceptions of higher support between parents as measured by the PMQ. This reinforces the view that negative parental relationships affect the family as a whole. This author agrees with Grych, Fincham, and Osborne (1994), who maintain that “marital and parent-child relationships are so tightly interwoven that one cannot draw valid inferences about the effects of marital conflict without simultaneously considering the nature of parent-child relations” (p. 132). Of particular importance for working with children is the finding that perceptions of intense marital conflict is most damaging to perceptions of relationships of siblings, regardless of how far apart in age they are, or how many siblings are in the family. This is in concordance with other literature showing that extreme marital conflict is damaging to individual children. The current research extends this perspective to include siblings. Overall, the most obvious point to be made from the current study is that perceptions of high conflict and lack of support between parents have negative emotional and behavioral effects on children, and affects the quality of their sibling relationships. No matter the closeness of siblings in age, the protective qualities of a sibling relationship will struggle to withstand the burden of a family perceived to be in turmoil due to parental conflict.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: TABLES

Table A1. Item Loadings on Factors Derived With an Exploratory Factor Analysis on the PMQ

| PMQ Item Number | Factor          |         |           |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------|-----------|
|                 | Negative Affect | Support | Intensity |
| 28              |                 |         | .98       |
| 29              |                 |         | .99       |
| 30              |                 |         | .95       |
| 31              |                 |         | .62       |
| 36              |                 |         | .60       |
| 38              |                 |         | .58       |
| 39              |                 |         | .93       |
| 01              |                 | .67     |           |
| 03              |                 | .81     |           |
| 04              |                 | .80     |           |
| 08              |                 | .86     |           |
| 11              |                 | .77     |           |
| 12              |                 | .81     |           |
| 18              |                 | .79     |           |
| 20              |                 | .82     |           |
| 22              |                 | .66     |           |
| 27              |                 | .55     |           |
| 32              |                 | .78     |           |
| 33              |                 | .87     |           |
| 34              |                 | .74     |           |
| 35              |                 | .56     |           |
| 37              |                 | .32     |           |
| 40              |                 | .89     |           |
| 02              | .85             |         |           |
| 05              | .34             |         |           |
| 06              | .49             |         |           |
| 07              | .91             |         |           |
| 09              | .69             |         |           |
| 10              | .51             |         |           |
| 13              | .43             |         |           |
| 14              | .58             |         |           |
| 15              | .49             |         |           |
| 16              | .63             |         |           |
| 17              | .58             |         |           |
| 19              | .74             |         |           |
| 21              | .82             |         |           |
| 23              | .77             |         |           |
| 24              | .73             |         |           |
| 25              | .55             |         |           |
| 26              | .58             |         |           |

Table A2. Item Loads for Two Samples in a Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the PMQ

| PMQ Item Number | Sample I |                 |           | Sample II |                 |           |
|-----------------|----------|-----------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
|                 | Support  | Negative Affect | Intensity | Support   | Negative Affect | Intensity |
| 28              |          |                 | .99       |           |                 | .76       |
| 29              |          |                 | .99       |           |                 | .88       |
| 30              |          |                 | .95       |           |                 | .89       |
| 31              |          |                 | .86       |           |                 | .74       |
| 36              |          |                 | .87       |           |                 | .66       |
| 38              |          |                 | .72       |           |                 | .67       |
| 39              |          |                 | .90       |           |                 | .86       |
| 01              | .49      |                 |           | .75       |                 |           |
| 03              | .69      |                 |           | .70       |                 |           |
| 04              | .71      |                 |           | .74       |                 |           |
| 08              | .88      |                 |           | .85       |                 |           |
| 11              | .79      |                 |           | .76       |                 |           |
| 12              | .83      |                 |           | .79       |                 |           |
| 18              | .80      |                 |           | .83       |                 |           |
| 20              | .86      |                 |           | .83       |                 |           |
| 22              | .79      |                 |           | .71       |                 |           |
| 27              | .63      |                 |           | .53       |                 |           |
| 32              | .88      |                 |           | .79       |                 |           |
| 33              | .87      |                 |           | .80       |                 |           |
| 34              | .79      |                 |           | .80       |                 |           |
| 35              | .61      |                 |           | .82       |                 |           |
| 37              | .81      |                 |           | .78       |                 |           |
| 40              | .90      |                 |           | .86       |                 |           |
| 02              |          | .78             |           |           | .77             |           |
| 05              |          | .50             |           |           | .51             |           |
| 06              |          | .54             |           |           | .44             |           |
| 07              |          | .77             |           |           | .80             |           |
| 09              |          | .83             |           |           | .79             |           |
| 10              |          | .71             |           |           | .56             |           |
| 13              |          | .35             |           |           | .38             |           |
| 14              |          | .83             |           |           | .79             |           |
| 15              |          | .80             |           |           | .76             |           |
| 16              |          | .85             |           |           | .75             |           |
| 17              |          | .82             |           |           | .71             |           |
| 19              |          | .83             |           |           | .76             |           |
| 21              |          | .68             |           |           | .74             |           |
| 23              |          | .86             |           |           | .78             |           |
| 24              |          | .90             |           |           | .82             |           |
| 25              |          | .54             |           |           | .60             |           |
| 26              |          | .71             |           |           | .65             |           |

Table A3. Correlations Between the PMQ Factors and Nine Established Measures

| Established Measures                                              | PMQ Intensity | PMQ Support | PMQ Negative Affect |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC):     |               |             |                     |
| CPIC Frequency                                                    | .38**         | -.67**      | .69**               |
| CPIC Intensity                                                    | .50**         | -.57**      | .68**               |
| CPIC Resolution (lacking)                                         | .46**         | -.73**      | .72**               |
| CPIC Content                                                      | .10           | -.23**      | .28**               |
| CPIC Perceived Threat                                             | .36**         | -.47**      | .50**               |
| CPIC Self-Blame                                                   | .09           | -.19        | .20                 |
| CPIC Triangulation                                                | .43**         | -.48**      | .55**               |
| Marital Need Satisfaction Scale Sum                               | -.51**        | .79**       | -.65**              |
| Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS):                                     |               |             |                     |
| CTS Violence                                                      | .71**         | -.46**      | .62**               |
| Family Satisfaction Scale Sum                                     | -.38**        | .50**       | -.37**              |
| Dyadic Adjustment Scale(DAS):                                     |               |             |                     |
| DAS Dyadic Consensus                                              | -.47**        | .58**       | -.59**              |
| DAS Dyadic Satisfaction                                           | -.62**        | .77**       | -.67**              |
| Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA):                   |               |             |                     |
| IPPA Parent Subscale                                              | -.32**        | .49**       | -.41**              |
| IPPA Peer Subscale                                                | -.17          | .25**       | -.14                |
| Young Adult-Coping Orientation for Problem Experiences (YA-COPE): |               |             |                     |
| YACOPE Family Problem Solving                                     | -.24          | .47         | -.26                |
| Family Crisis Oriented Personal Scales (F-COPES):                 |               |             |                     |
| F-COPES Seeking Social Support                                    | -.15          | .21**       | -.21**              |
| Dimensions of Commitment Inventory (DOCI):                        |               |             |                     |
| DOCI Commitment to Spouse                                         | -.21**        | .27**       | -.19**              |
| DOCI Commitment to Marriage                                       | -.52**        | .72**       | -.55**              |
| DOCI Feelings Of Entrapment                                       | .08           | -.05        | .09                 |

\*\*Bonferroni corrected significance  $p < .01$

Table A4. Cicirelli Scale Means, Standard Deviations, and Alphas for Men and Women by Sibling Age Pairings

| <b>Sibling Age<br/>Pairing</b> | <b>Men</b> |       |           |       | <b>Women</b> |       |           |       |
|--------------------------------|------------|-------|-----------|-------|--------------|-------|-----------|-------|
|                                | <i>n</i>   | Mean  | <i>SD</i> | Alpha | <i>n</i>     | Mean  | <i>SD</i> | Alpha |
| SIB1                           | 53         | 35.53 | 6.40      | .77   | 133          | 34.95 | 10.64     | .73   |
| SIB2                           | 32         | 34.94 | 9.75      | .91   | 71           | 34.87 | 10.15     | .88   |
| SIB3                           | 15         | 31.20 | 7.77      | .83   | 41           | 33.10 | 10.17     | .88   |

Table A5. Correlations Between the PMQ Factors and Sibling Relationship Measures by Sibling Age Pairings

| Sibling Age Pairing               | Sibling Conflict Measure | Parental Marital Questionnaire Factors |         |                 |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------------|---------|-----------------|
|                                   |                          | Intensity                              | Support | Negative Affect |
| Nearest In Age <sup>a</sup>       | BSQ                      | -.34**                                 | .28**   | -.25**          |
|                                   | Cicirelli                | -.06                                   | .26**   | -.04            |
| Next Nearest In Age <sup>b</sup>  | BSQ                      | -.36**                                 | .24*    | -.32**          |
|                                   | Cicirelli                | -.12                                   | .26**   | -.17            |
| Third Nearest In Age <sup>c</sup> | BSQ                      | -.31*                                  | -.01    | -.06            |
|                                   | Cicirelli                | -.08                                   | -.04    | .02             |

<sup>a</sup>N = 331. <sup>b</sup>n = 109. <sup>c</sup>n = 59.

\*p < .05 \*\*p < .01

## APPENDIX B: MEASURES

### Demographic Questionnaire

Please fill in the information requested or check the appropriate blank.

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female

3. Your Primary Ethnic Identity:

\_\_\_\_\_ African-American \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic-American

\_\_\_\_\_ Asian American \_\_\_\_\_ Native American (American Indian)

\_\_\_\_\_ Euro-American (White) \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Your Current Marital Status:

\_\_\_\_\_ Single/Never Married \_\_\_\_\_ Married

\_\_\_\_\_ Divorced/Single \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced/Remarried

\_\_\_\_\_ Widowed/Single \_\_\_\_\_ Widowed/Remarried

5. Are you a parent? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No  
(If you are not a parent, please skip to number 6)

5a. Please list the ages of children (including step children and/or foster children) currently living in your household: \_\_\_\_\_

5b. Please list the ages of any of your children for whom you are not the custodial parent: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Were your biological parents legally married to each other?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

7. Are your biological parents currently legally married to each other?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

8. Did your parents' marriage end in divorce before you reached age 16?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

9. Did your parents' marriage end in divorce after you reached age 16?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

10. Did your parent's marriage end before you reached age 16 due to:  
Sustained separation \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No  
The death of a parent \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

11. If your biological parents were/are legally married, how long was their marriage?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Years
12. If your biological parents were divorced or permanently separated, how old were you when this occurred? \_\_\_\_\_ Years
13. Who was your custodial parent (parent with whom you lived) after your parents separated?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father  
\_\_\_\_\_ Joint Custody \_\_\_\_\_ Custodial Change(s) Occurred  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other Relative \_\_\_\_\_ Non-Relative
14. If one parent died, how old were you when that parent died? \_\_\_\_\_ Years
15. With whom did you live after the death of one parent?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_ Other Relative \_\_\_\_\_ Non-Relative
16. If you had a stepparent in the home in which you lived, how old were you when that stepparent joined the household? \_\_\_\_\_ Years
17. Who was your primary caregiver?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_ Step-Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Step-Father
18. If your biological parents were not legally married to each other, are they currently still together?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
19. If your biological parents were not legally married, how long were they together?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Years
20. If your biological parents were not legally married and are no longer together, how old were you when they separated? \_\_\_\_\_ Years
21. If your biological parents were not legally married and are no longer together, with who did you live after your parents separated?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father
22. Were you adopted? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
23. If you were adopted, how old were you when the adoption occurred?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Years

### Sibling Type Questionnaire

1. How many whole-biological siblings do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many half siblings do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How many step-siblings do you have? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How many adoptive siblings do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill out the chart below listing all of your siblings; whole, half, step, and adoptive, in order of age from the oldest to the youngest.

Under “Sibling Type”: W=Whole sibling, H=Half sibling, S=Step sibling, and A=Adoptive sibling.

“Years” refers to the number of years a particular sibling and yourself lived in the same home.

“Siblings You Live With” refers to whether you reside with that particular sibling now, while you are currently in school. **Circle “Yes” to this question only if you live with that sibling all the time, everyday. Circle “No” if you only live with that sibling on holidays and vacations from school, or do not live with them at all.**

| #  | Sibling's 1 <sup>st</sup> Name | Sibling Type |   |   |   | Age | Gender |   | Years | Siblings You Live With |    |
|----|--------------------------------|--------------|---|---|---|-----|--------|---|-------|------------------------|----|
| 1  |                                | W            | H | S | A |     | M      | F |       | Yes                    | No |
| 2  |                                | W            | H | S | A |     | M      | F |       | Yes                    | No |
| 3  |                                | W            | H | S | A |     | M      | F |       | Yes                    | No |
| 4  |                                | W            | H | S | A |     | M      | F |       | Yes                    | No |
| 5  |                                | W            | H | S | A |     | M      | F |       | Yes                    | No |
| 6  |                                | W            | H | S | A |     | M      | F |       | Yes                    | No |
| 7  |                                | W            | H | S | A |     | M      | F |       | Yes                    | No |
| 8  |                                | W            | H | S | A |     | M      | F |       | Yes                    | No |
| 9  |                                | W            | H | S | A |     | M      | F |       | Yes                    | No |
| 10 |                                | W            | H | S | A |     | M      | F |       | Yes                    | No |

Referring to the preceding chart:

5. Provide the line number of the sibling to whom you feel the closest. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Provide the line number of the sibling to whom you feel the most distant. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you currently live with your parents? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No
8. If so who? (Check all who apply)

\_\_\_\_ Mother    \_\_\_\_ Father    \_\_\_\_ Step-mother    \_\_\_\_ Stepfather    \_\_\_\_ Guardian  
\_\_\_\_ Adoptive Mother    \_\_\_\_ Adoptive Father    \_\_\_\_ Grandparents  
\_\_\_\_ Other Family Members

### **Parental-Marital Questionnaire (Caban-Holt, 2004)**

Please answer the following questions to the extent to which you saw them occur in your parents' relationship.

1=Never  
2=Sometimes  
3=As often as not  
4=Pretty often  
5=Very often

|                                                                                        | Never | Sometimes | As Often As<br>Not | Pretty Often | Very Often |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| 1. How often did your parents show affection?                                          | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 2. How often did your parents argue?                                                   | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 3. How often did your parents attempt to communicate their feeling to one another?     | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 4. How often did your parents successfully communicate their feelings to one another?  | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 5. How often did your parents withhold their feeling from one another?                 | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 6. How often did you or your siblings intervene in disagreements between your parents? | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 7. How often did your parents raise their voices at one another?                       | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 8. How often did your parents make each other happy?                                   | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 9. How often did your parents make each other sad?                                     | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 10. How often did your parents stop one another from doing things they wanted to do?   | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 11. How often did your parents help one another do things that they wanted to do?      | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 12. How often did your parents listen to each other?                                   | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 13. How often did your parents use sarcasm with one another?                           | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 14. How often did your parents resort to name-calling?                                 | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 15. How often did your parents withdraw emotionally from one another?                  | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 16. How often did your parents ignore one another?                                     | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 17. How often did you parents go against each other's wishes?                          | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 18. How often did your parents support one another?                                    | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 19. How often did your parents hurt each other's feelings?                             | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 20. How often did your parents make each other feel better?                            | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 21. How often did your parents disagree?                                               | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 22. How often were your parents able to resolve their disagreements?                   | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 23. How often were your parents mad at each other?                                     | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 24. How often did your parents say mean things to one another?                         | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 25. How often did your parents disagree about financial matters?                       | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 26. How often did your parents disagree about family issues?                           | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
|                                                                                        | Never | Sometimes | As Often As<br>Not | Pretty Often | Very Often |
| 27. How often did your parents agree about family issues?                              | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 28. How often did your parents hit one another?                                        | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 29. How often did your parents physically fight?                                       | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 30. How often did your parents destroy or take each others' property?                  | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |
| 31. How often were your parents cruel to each other?                                   | 1     | 2         | 3                  | 4            | 5          |

|                                                                                      |   |   |   |   |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| 32. How often were your parents kind to each other?                                  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. How often did your parents say nice things to each other?                        | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34. How often did your parents go out of their way to do nice things for each other? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35. How often did your parents go out of their way to be nice to each other?         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 36. How often did your parents go out of their way to be mean to each other?         | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 37. How often did your parents help one another through difficult time?              | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38. How often did your parents leave one another during difficult times?             | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39. How often did your parents throw things at one another?                          | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 40. How often did your parents show that they cared for one another?                 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

### **Vita**

Allison Mercedes Caban was born in Bronx, NY on March 13, 1973. She was raised in Bronx, NY and went to grade school at C.S.102, and then to C.S. 61 where she was enrolled in the Gifted and Talented program. She attended the Walden-Lincoln School in New York, NY for both middle school and high school. She graduated from there in 1991. After high school, she went to Yale University in New Haven, CT and received a B.A. in psychology in 1995. Allison began graduate studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1996, and graduated with a Ph.D. in psychology in 2004.

Allison is currently a postdoctoral fellow of neuropsychology at the University of Kentucky's Sanders-Brown Center on Aging, in Lexington, KY.