

CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL SUPPORT FOR THE MEASUREMENT
OF CO-PARENTING

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of “co-parenting” has evolved from the unique parenting style that divorced parents must practice. Although these parents have divorced their role as romantic partner, they have had to maintain their role as parenting partners (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999). Lack of physical presence of both parents in a divorced family system requires that parents make an exceptional effort to coordinate childrearing. Divorced parents functioning as a cohesive unit is a relatively new concept; the term co-parenting does not appear in the literature until 1980 (Rosenthal & Hansen, 1980).

Identification of specific co-parenting dimensions has been adapted from developmental psychology research. Traditional parenting literature suggests important parenting dimensions are warmth, monitoring, discipline, communication, and encouraging age-appropriate autonomy (Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). These individual parenting attributes remain essential for divorced parents and account for much of the variance in child adjustment (Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999; Macie, 2002). A separate cluster of parenting dimensions has also been associated with co-parenting in divorced families. Negative co-parenting aspects, such as interparental conflict and triangulation, have been linked to child maladjustment (Stolberg, Camplair, Currier, & Wells, 1987; Shaw, Emery, and Tuer, 1993; Richardson & McCabe, 2001), while positive co-parenting dimensions like respect, involvement, communication, and cooperation are demonstrated protective factors within divorced families (Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001; Macie, 2002).

CO-PARENTING IN DIVORCED FAMILIES

Co-parenting was coined to describe what researchers hypothesized to be the ideal parenting relationship after divorce. This model parent-parent relationship was characterized by mutual involvement of both parents in all decisions regarding their children (Rosenthal and Hansen, 1980). Co-parents maintain a cooperative and constructive relationship with their former partner and opt to prioritize their children’s welfare over their own discord.

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Although they may no longer wish to be a part of each other's lives, they understand that the child's family must remain intact and allow each other to actively participate in childrearing. Over time, the definition of co-parenting has extended beyond that of shared parenting to include the concept that co-parents work together to support each other's parenting decisions, while maintaining healthy, yet flexible, boundaries (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990). Therefore, healthy co-parents strive to include each other in parenting decisions and work to compromise on these decisions. Investigators have identified three subtypes of co-parenting: cooperative, conflicted, and disengaged (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990). Cooperative co-parents communicate about their children regularly, have minimal levels of conflict, and praise rather than undermine their co-parent's childrearing decisions. These parents practice the ideal, healthiest subtype of co-parenting, comprising approximately 25% of all divorcing parents (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990; Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, & Dornbusch, 1993). The second, and most detrimental (Richardson & McCabe, 2001), subtype of co-parenting has been described as conflicted co-parenting. These co-parents communicate about their children, but high levels of conflict, disrespect, and criticism mark this communication. Unfortunately the distribution of conflicted co-parenting matches that of cooperative co-parenting (Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990). Most co-parents fall into the third and final category: disengaged co-parenting. These co-parents are involved in their children's lives but practice parallel parenting whereby they do not communicate, positively or negatively, about their children; they merely stay out of each other's way. Although this co-parenting subtype describes most families, research has not examined disengaged co-parenting's link to child adjustment.

When the concept of co-parenting first entered the literature, Rosenthal and Hansen (1980) concluded that, "One of the main goals of counseling single-parent families (was) to maintain or establish a positive co-parenting relationship between the parents." Their claim was without empirical support; however, two decades of research have confirmed this hypothesis. Co-parenting, along with general parenting competence, has been identified as one of the most important contributors to post-divorce young adult adjustment. Young adults who report that their parents demonstrated healthy co-parenting (low conflict, low triangulation, high respect, and high communication) are better adjusted than their peers who experienced unhealthy co-parenting (Macie, 2002).

These findings are also supported within the child adjustment literature. In one notable study conducted by Camara and Resnick (1989), co-parenting cooperation and conflict style were found to be more predictive of children's adjustment than conflict regarding the spousal relationship. Thus, it is not the overall amount of conflict present that predicts children's psychological adjustment but the way in which spouses can resolve this conflict towards a cooperative co-parenting relationship. Clearly, co-parenting is a vital contributor to children's post-divorce adjustment. The question remains

whether co-parenting is an equally important determinant of all children's development.

CO-PARENTING IS UNIVERSAL

Extending the discussion of co-parenting to intact families is a logical, yet unexplored, direction for inquiry. Surely, co-parenting is vital in intact families just as it is in divorced families—all parents must parent together. The absence of the term co-parenting in the general parenting literature implies a promotional relationship that may not be there. A recent paper by Feinberg (2003) notes this disconnection in the literature and calls for co-parenting to be conceptualized within the parenting framework.

While the great majority of co-parenting research has focused on post-divorce parental relationships, co-parenting is beginning to be examined within intact families (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001; Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001; McConnell & Kerig, 2002). However, the study of co-parenting in married families has developed as a separate literature focused mainly on the co-parenting of toddlers and pre-school children (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001) and the changes in the marital relationship as partners become parents (Deal, Stanley-Hagan, Bass, Hetherington, and Clingempeel, 1999). The rationale for the separation of these literatures is unclear. Further, this new group of research makes the same mistake of divorce-related co-parenting research and limits its sample to intact families only (Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001; McConnell & Kerig, 2002). Clearly, studies are needed that examine the import of co-parenting in both divorced and intact families.

A first step toward incorporating co-parenting into the general parenting literature might be the examination of co-parenting's potential moderating role on the link between certain risk contexts and child adjustment (Feinberg, 2003). The model that we propose here attempts to integrate co-parenting behaviors into our understanding of general parenting practices. Charles E. Spearman's two-factor theory of intelligence purports that intelligence is encompassed by a general intelligence factor, *g* or general ability, as well as specific factors, *s*. This general factor plus one or more specific factors account for performance on intelligence tests (Sattler, 2001). Along these same lines, we might consider the existence of a general parenting factor, *p*, and situational factors, *s*, that describe extraordinary events that may alter the nature of parenting. Within this model, the frequently studied situational factor of divorce might be construed as an extraordinary situational context that puts children at risk to experience diminished parenting and co-parenting. It is proposed that co-parenting is not a separate entity but rather a universal piece of general parenting that is altered by the *s* of situation-specific demands on parenting, such as those required by divorce.

Co-parenting within intact families appears to differ as a function of parent gender and child age. In general, mothers are reported to be more cooperative co-parents than fathers (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001;

McConnell & Kerig, 2002). This cooperation appears to diminish as the child ages. Married parents of preschoolers report more spousal cooperation than intact parents of older children (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). These findings are ripe with implications for clinical interventions; however, the generalizability of these findings to divorced families remains unclear.

Co-parenting has been found to have a greater impact on the later emotional development of young adults than did the marital status of their parents (Macie, 2002). Thus, co-parenting, as it is conceptualized within the divorce literature, is vital to intact families as well as divorced families. Previously, co-parenting was not considered to be independent of marital status. Yet just as divorced parents are still parents, married parents are still co-parents. Living situation changes make more explicit an act that is implicit in intact families—collaboration in parenting. It is not the act of cooperation or co-parenting that differentiates divorced from married families, but the extra energy that must be applied to co-parenting within a divorced parenting team.

In other words, closely coordinated co-parenting relationships may moderate the relationship between marital status and young adult adjustment in all families (Feinberg, 2003). The moderating role of co-parenting is hypothesized by many researchers but has not been established as an empirical truth (Feinberg, 2003). This across-family structure conceptualization of co-parenting nicely links the study of co-parenting in divorced and intact families.

Further, co-parenting's place within the general parenting literature is not clear. Is co-parenting just another dimension of parenting, much like discipline, monitoring, warmth, parent-child communication, and encouraging age-appropriate autonomy? A model loosely inspired by Charles E. Spearman's two-factor theory of intelligence attempts to find co-parenting's place within general parenting behavior. Spearman proposed that intelligence is encompassed by a general intelligence factor, *g*, in addition to specific factors, *s*. The combined effect of *g* and one or more specific factors determine intelligence test performance (Sattler, 2001). Similarly, perhaps there is a general parenting factor, *p*, and situational factors, *s*, which connote risk events that may alter the expression of parenting. Co-parenting by our definition is considered an essential component of parenting.

ASSESSMENT OF CO-PARENTING

The goal of this body of research has been to develop and validate an objective measure of parenting and co-parenting. At the foundation of the instrument is the belief that co-parenting behaviors are an essential subset of the larger domain of parenting behaviors. Further, parenting and co-parenting are construed to be a set of universal skills (*g*) and an additional set of unique skills that are required of high-risk, developmental environments and situations (*s*) which connote risk events that may alter the expression of parenting. Three methodological and conceptual tasks were central to the development of this instrument. Selecting essential dimensions of parenting and co-parenting that

will be measured. Determining the strategy by which parenting will be measured (i.e., self-report, other report, observation, or child rated) Constructing dimensions of behavior that measure both parenting and co-parenting, thus practically and conceptually linking the two skill sets.

SELECTING DIMENSIONS OF PARENTING

Monitoring and warmth appear to represent the most frequently studied parenting dimensions within developmental psychopathology research. Lack of parental warmth is a strong predictor of the development of depression (Sroufe, Duggal, Weinfield, & Carlson, 2000) while poor monitoring has been linked to externalizing problems in children and adolescents (Dishion, Patterson, Stoolmiller, & Skinner, 1991; Forehand, Miller, Dutra, & Chance, 1997). Parenting and its specified dimensions clearly have a significant role in the development of both internalizing and externalizing disorders.

Parenting encompasses five interrelated, but distinct, dimensions and parents can vary greatly along the continuum of each dimension. Four distinctive parenting subtypes, or styles, that are combinations of these five dimensions have been identified: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and indifferent (Baumrind, 1991). These styles are based mainly on parent's demonstrated levels of warmth and control. Within parenting styles, warmth illustrates the amount of support, affection, and encouragement parents provide as opposed to hostility, shame, and rejection (Baumrind, 1991). Control describes the degree to which the child is monitored, disciplined, and regulated rather than being left largely unsupervised (Baumrind, 1991; Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Authoritative parenting, including high levels of both warmth and control, has long been the gold standard parenting style (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). Authoritarian parenting combines low levels of warmth with high levels of control and has been noted as the style to avoid (Santrock, 1998). Permissive parents offer their children much warmth but little control. Finally, indifferent parents essentially ignore their children via low levels of warmth and control.

The literature examining the link between parenting and child adjustment frequently utilizes Baumrind's four parenting styles to classify parents into groups. These groups are then compared on a variety of child outcome measures. For example, Laurence Steinberg has consistently linked authoritative parenting to positive adjustment: increased adolescent school performance, stronger school engagement, general child competence, and decreased deviance (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Steinberg, Nancy, Fletcher, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1995; Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999). Authoritarian parenting, on the other hand, predicts poor outcomes such as low self confidence, increased psychological distress, poor school performance, and increased substance use and deviance (Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999). Permissive parenting is linked to a mixture of positive and negative outcomes. These children appear to be psychologically

adjusted but they have poor school performance and increased deviance (Steinberg, Nancy, Fletcher, Brown, & Dornbusch, 1995). Indifferent parenting results in a similar picture to authoritarian parenting: psychological distress, substance use, and deviance along with low self esteem and school performance (Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999). Reliance on primarily White, middle class populations in research on parenting styles and adjustment has been a source of criticism. Critics suggest that the demonized group of authoritarian parents may better serve children in rough neighborhoods or in African American families (Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999). Current research suggests this criticism is correct; parenting practices and styles do vary across family structures, SES, and ethnicities (Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999). Intact families are more authoritative and less indifferent than single parents but both groups show the same frequency of permissive and authoritarian parenting (Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999). However, it is important to note that although the distribution of parenting styles differs by family structure, the relationship between authoritative parenting and adjustment does not differ as suggested (Avenevoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999).

DIMENSIONS OF CO-PARENTING

Decades of research on general parenting dimensions and styles have informed our conceptualization of co-parenting dimensions. Like authoritative parents who convey acceptance and behavioral control while encouraging psychological autonomy, successful co-parents express respect for one another while maintaining appropriate boundaries. Co-parenting dimensions are clearly correlated with general parenting dimensions, but they focus on the interactions between parents about their children rather than the parent-child relationship (Macie, 2002). Thus, a distinct set of co-parenting dimensions has been noted in the literature, including conflict, cooperation and respect, communication, and triangulation (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999; McConnell & Kerig, 2002).

Conflict. Interparental conflict is, by far, the most frequently studied co-parenting dimension. Interparental conflict disrupts general parenting competence; couple negativity leads to family negativity. For example, fathers have been found to give less support and encouragement to sons as a result of interparental conflict (Kitzmann, 2000). High interparental conflict predicts poor young adult adjustment as well as low intimacy with parents (Richardson & McCabe, 2001). These findings are consistent across child gender (Shaw, Emery, & Tuer, 1993) and marital status (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). Post-divorce interparental conflict decreases children's well-being (Amato & Keith, 1991) so much that the conflict is actually worse on children than the divorce process itself (Morrison, 1999).

While conflict impacts adjustment across family structures and marital status, the impact may be greater for those in intact families. Children in single-parent homes are generally better adjusted than children within high conflict intact families (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 1999). In fact,

high conflict intact families look the same or worse than divorced families (Amato & Keith, 1991). Here, divorce is seen as a protective process as it removes the child from the line of fire and improves child adjustment (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Booth & Amato, 2001).

COOPERATION/RESPECT

Interparental cooperation and respect, goals for healthy co-parenting, serve as positive models for children of divorce. The co-parents who can manage to put aside their relationship differences and cooperate on childrearing matters present a united front to their children. Positive family interactions, marked by support and respect, have been linked to decreased child externalizing behavior problems (Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001). More broadly, high respect between parents predicts healthy psychological outcomes in young adults (Macie, 2002) and children (McConnell & Kerig, 2002).

Communication. Inter-parent communication, another key dimension of co-parenting, describes the frequency and way in which parents talk to each other about their children and childrearing issues. Its inclusion within the dimensions of post-divorce co-parenting is vital since the amount of communication between parents concerning their children clearly diminishes with time (Amato & Keith, 1991). In one study of parents whose children were going back and forth between households, reports of weekly communication dropped from 67% to 40% over the three years of the study (Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, & Dornbusch, 1993). Other studies concur with these findings, estimating that 61% of divorced parents demonstrate low communication (Macie, 2002). This poor communication has been linked to poor child outcomes (Macie, 2002; Feinberg, 2003).

Triangulation. The least empirically examined dimension of co-parenting is that of triangulation. Triangulation occurs when intergenerational boundaries become blurred, transforming children into allies or pawns in interparental conflict (Feinberg, 2003). Research suggests that this behavior occurs most frequently in mother-son dyads (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). In this situation, mothers might inappropriately confide in their sons as if they are the “man of the house”. High levels of triangulation, a behavior exhibited by approximately 56% of divorced couples in one study (Macie, 2002), lead to poor psychological adjustment in children and young adults (Macie, 2002; Feinberg, 2003).

To date, researchers have kept the study of these four dimensions separate. This is particularly true for interparental conflict whose literature is much larger than the entire co-parenting literature. Thus, it is important for future studies to use a broad definition of co-parenting in research examining the link between co-parenting and child adjustment. We must better understand the cumulative effect of these co-parenting dimensions upon child and young adult adjustment before isolating these variables. Determining the strategy to assess a parent’s behavior: Whose perspective gives the most valid and reliable

information? A crucial question in the development of parenting and co-parenting instruments has been identification of the best reporter of co-parenting behaviors. Previous assessment of parenting has relied almost solely on parent's reports of family dynamics (Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). This is extremely problematic since we know that parents are not the best reporters of their behavior, especially their negative behavior (Ahrons, 1981). Parents' reports can be biased by social desirability as well as lack of insight. Parents' perceptions of their own and their former partners' co-parenting behaviors do not correspond (Ahrons, 1981). Finally, the stressor of divorce and the hurt resulting from marital dissatisfaction can influence the objectivity of parents' perceptions of co-parenting.

Other research, mainly with intact families, has utilized observational methods, such as the Coparenting and Family Rating System, to code co-parenting interactions (Deal, Hagan, Bass, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1999; McConnell & Kerig, 2002). The procedure of these observations is such that one child from a family, along with his or her parents, interact in a laboratory setting. These family interactions are difficult to code as parents decrease their levels of expressed hostility, warmth, assertiveness, coercion, communication, self-disclosure, and power assertion when their children are present (Deal, Hagan, Bass, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1999). Since people clearly behave differently when they are being observed, observational assessments of co-parenting are significantly limited. These methods are further limited by their inclusion of only one child within the family. While this procedure is utilized toward experimental parsimony, it is not likely to be the best measure of a family system. Also, these methods have generally only been employed to study co-parenting interactions of parents with very young children (McConnell & Kerig, 2002).

While all current measures of co-parenting have certain limitations, Perhap & Stolberg, 1999). Children, of course, do not witness all of their parents' interactions but they are the most direct observer of co-parental interactions aside from the parents themselves. Their perceptions of their parents' co-parenting abilities may even be more important in determining child and young adult adjustment than parents' actual co-parenting behavior (Macie, 2002).

STEPS IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND VALIDATION OF THE CO-PARENTING BEHAVIOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Sub-scale and item development: Development of the Co-parenting Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) The Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire, a child-report measure of parenting and co-parenting behaviors specific to the post-divorce environment has been in development over the past several years in order to meet the needs of both researchers and clinicians working with divorcing parents. The CBQ (Stolberg, 1999) is intended to quantify parenting behaviors and co-parenting interactions as experienced by the child.

The Co-parenting Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ). (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999; Schum, 2003). The CBQ is an 86-item instrument designed to assess the co-parenting interactions and parenting behaviors of divorced parents from the viewpoint of the child. This measure targets children between the ages of 10 and 17 and asks them to reflect the behavior of their parents in the past three months. The CBQ contains 12 subscales, indicating Parental Conflict, Co-parental Communication, Triangulation, Co-parental Cooperation, and each of the following parenting skills for both the mother and the father: Warmth, Parent-Child Communication, Monitoring, and Discipline. The 12 scales have good internal consistency, with alpha coefficients reported between .82 and .93. These scales also were demonstrated to have good predictive validity when correlated with measures of child behavior problems and self esteem. See Table 1 for scale loadings and item descriptions.

Development of the CBQ began with the compilation of items from existing measures of parenting and family function, as well as the generation of new items based on interviews with professionals in the field of child psychology and divorce adjustment (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999). These items were modified in wording and content to suit the comprehension of children and adolescents ranging in age from 10 to 18 years. The initial 139-item version of the CBQ was administered to a convenience sample of undergraduates (n=214) to provide preliminary psychometric data and to allow for refinement of items. Preliminary analyses of the CBQ demonstrated adequate internal consistency across scales and revealed a factor structure representing 3 higher-order scales composed of 11 subscales. Further refinement of the measure was necessary, particularly since the sampling method used in this stage of development used subjects outside of the intended age-range of the CBQ.

Table 1

Communalities and Factor Loadings for exploratory Factor Solutions of CBQ Subscales

Subscale and Item	Communality	Factor Loading
Parental Respect/Cooperation ^a		
	.40	.63
13. Mom wants child to be close to dad		
14. Dad helps when mom needs to change schedule	.40	.64
27. Mom asks dad for help	.45	.67
29. Mom says good things about dad	.56	.75
31. Dad asks mom for help	.58	.76
33. Dad says good things about mom	.47	.68
34. Dad wants child to be close to mom	.36	.60
37. Mom helps when dad needs to change schedule	.48	.69

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Subscale and Item	Communality	Factor Loading
Parental Communication ^a		
	.44	.66
9. Parents discuss what is best for child		
18. Parents talk about child's problems	.69	.83
20. Parents talk about child's feelings about divorce	.28	—
21. Parents talk about child's school and health	.78	.88
24. Parents talk about big choices in child's life	.63	.80
25. Parents talk once a week	.37	.61
30. Parents talk about good things child does	.78	.88
Parental Conflict ^a		
	.55	.74
1. Parents complain about each other ^b		
3. Parents argue about money ^b	.42	.65
5. Parents accuse each other of bad things ^b	.58	.76
6. Parents talk nicely to each other	.47	.68
15. Parents argue with each other ^b	.66	.81
22. Dad gets angry at mom ^b	.56	.75
23. Parents get angry when they talk ^b	.76	.87
32. Mom gets angry at dad ^b	.62	.79
35. Parents get along well	.46	.67
36. Parents yell at each other ^b	.68	.82
Triangulation ^a		
	.28	—
2. Dad says bad things about mom ^b		
4. Child feels forced to choose sides ^b	.47	.69
7. Mom asks questions about dad ^b	.44	.66
8. Child feels caught between parents ^b	.70	.84
10. Dad asks child to carry messages to mom ^b	.27	—
11. Parents fight about living arrangements ^b	.26	—
12. Dad asks questions about mom ^b	.31	.55
16. Mom tells child to ask dad about child support ^b	.19	—
Triangulation ^a (continued)		
	.04	—
17. Okay to talk about mom in front of dad		
19. Okay to talk about dad in front of mom	.07	—
26. Mom says bad things about dad ^b	.33	.57

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28. Mom asks child to carry messages to dad ^b	.26	—
Mother's Warmth ^a	.53	.73
42. Mom cares about child	.58	.76
45. Mom spends time doing fun things	.73	.85
48. Mom likes being with child	.62	.79
49. Child talks to mom	.69	.83
67. Mom says nice things about child	.61	.78
85. Mom praises when child does good	.72	.85
87. Mom says she loves child and gives hugs		
Mother's Monitoring ^a		
46. Mom knows child's friends	.56	.75
47. Mom knows child's after school activities	.71	.85
60. Mom knows where and with whom child goes	.62	.79
62. Mom knows about school problems	.49	.70
79. Mom knows teachers and grades	.53	.73
Subscale and Item	Communality	Factor Loading
Mother-Child Communication ^a	.62	.79
39. Mom and child have friendly talks	.49	.70
40. Mom asks about school day	.70	.84
61. Mom talks to child about big choices	.61	.78
65. Child talks to mom about problems	.50	.71
82. Mom talks to child about friends	.67	.82
84. Child talks to mom about things done well	.21	—
86. Child talks to mom about divorce		
Mother's Discipline ^a	.24	—
41. Mom talks about things child does wrong	.68	.83
54. Mom punishes if child breaks rule	.48	.69
58. Mom's house has chores	.17	—
59. Child talks mom out of punishment ^b	.63	.80
66. Mom punishes if child gets in trouble at school	.65	.81
75. Mom's house has rules	.29	—
85. Mom praises when child does good	.12	—
90. Mom is patient	.61	.78
92. Mom follows through on punishment		

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Subscale and Item	Communality	Factor Loading
Father's Warmth ^a		
	.629	.79
38. Dad likes being with child		
44. Dad cares about child	.723	.85
51. Dad says he loves child and gives hugs	.652	.81
64. Dad praises when child does good	.645	.80
68. Dad spends time doing fun things	.632	.80
71. Child talks to dad	.658	.81
74. Dad says nice things about child	.778	.88
52. Dad knows where and with whom child goes	.64	.80
53. Dad knows about school problems	.72	.85
56. Dad knows child's friends	.76	.87
57. Dad knows child's after school activities	.78	.88
69. Dad knows teachers and grades	.69	.83
Father-Child Communication ^a		
	.60	.77
43. Dad talks to child about big choices		
55. Dad asks about school day	.67	.82
72. Child talks to dad about problems	.70	.84
76. Dad and child have friendly talks	.73	.86
81. Dad talks to child about friends	.64	.80
Subscale and Item	Communality	Factor Loading
Father-Child Communicationa (continued)		
	.29	—
89. Child talks to dad about divorce		
91. Child talks to dad about things done well	.75	.87
Father's Discipline ^a		
	.52	.72
50. Dad's house has chores		
63. Dad talks about things child does wrong	.54	.74
64. Dad praises when child does good	.31	.56
70. Dad's house has rules	.67	.82
77. Dad follows through on punishment	.66	.81
78. Child talks dad out of punishmentb	.15	—
80. Dad punishes if child breaks rule	.71	.84
83. Dad is patient	.21	—
88. Dad punishes if child gets in trouble at school	.67	.82

Note. Principal axis factoring and Promax rotation were used in the estimation of communalities and factor loadings. Items with communalities $< .30$ were deleted, and no factor loadings were computed for those items.

aN = 237. bItems required reverse scoring.

The second stage in development of the CBQ employed a more representative sample, assessing children ages 10 to 18 years (Macie et al., 2003). These secondary analyses were used to further refine the instrument, leading to an 86-item version of the measure. Item revision resulted in reorganization of scales and subscales and in the addition of a 12th subscale. The updated version of the CBQ scales yielded adequate internal consistency and demonstrated strong concurrent validity when compared with measures of child behavior and psychology. When considered together, problematic parenting practices and uncooperative co-parenting behaviors were related to a range of adjustment problems in children, including: overall behavior problems, acting out, poor self-esteem, antisocial behavior, headstrong behavior, anxiety, and depression.

While these preliminary stages of instrument construction suggested that the CBQ was evolving into a reliable and valid measure for quantifying parenting and co-parenting behaviors, important issues remained that limited the usefulness of the measure. First, the initial factor structure of the CBQ was determined using an unrepresentative sample. Since factor structure is intrinsically linked to the sampling method, this issue needed revisiting when a large, diverse, age-appropriate sample could be employed. Secondly, there was limited information available to lend to the interpretability of CBQ scores. Without the availability of normative data, understanding a specific CBQ score was limited to associations between lower CBQ scores with poorer child outcomes.

FACTOR STRUCTURE AND SUB-SCALE VALIDATION: CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYTIC STUDIES

The third stage of development of the Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire involved collecting two separate samples of respondents, 10-18 year old children of divorced parents and college-aged students from intact and divorce families. The first study by Lisa Schum (Schum, Stolberg & Williams, in review) employed a large, representative sample of children aged 10-18 in order to confirm the factor structure and advance the score interpretability of the CBQ. First, exploratory factor analyses were conducted with a random half of the sample. Results from these analyses were used for further refinement of the instrument. Second, confirmatory factor analyses were used with the other half of the sample, and two alternative models of measurement structure were compared. Finally, the entire sample was used for the exploration of group differences.

Data were collected from 517 children ages 10-18 whose biological parents had divorced. The sample was diverse in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender. The proportion of participants falling into the three physical custody arrangements (maternal, paternal, or joint custody) closely resembled the distribution of custody arrangements in the general population.

A cross validation procedure was used, implementing confirmatory and exploratory factor analyses on random halves of the sample. After data screening and deleting 47 cases identified as multivariate outliers, the remaining 470 cases were randomly split into two samples. One sample (n=237) was used in exploratory factor analyses. The other sample (n=233) was used in confirmatory factor analysis in order to cross-validate the factor structure found in exploratory factor analysis. Analyses were based on a proposed factor structure of the CBQ, 12 first-order factors (co-parenting subscales) and the 4 higher-order factors (co-parenting scales), previously identified (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999).

Principal axis factoring with promax rotation was used in analyzing the factor structure of 12 proposed subscales. All but one of the subscales demonstrated simple structure, with all items loading highly on a single factor. A subsequent factor analysis was conducted using summative scores for each of the 12 subscales. Forcing a 4-factor solution revealed simple structure, with each of the 12 subscales loading highly on only one of the four proposed factors.

Confirmatory factor analyses were conducted with the second half of the sample. Maximum likelihood estimation was used in two phases using LISREL 8.53 software: 1) assessing the fit of the proposed first-order measurement model and 2) assessing the fit of the proposed higher-order factor model.

The 12 proposed subscales represented the a priori factor structure of the measurement model. In the higher-order model, four higher-order factors were proposed to explain the correlations among the first-order factors from the previous model. Both models resulted in reasonable fit to the data based on recommended goodness-of-fit standards. The first-order factor model was found preferable to the higher-order model according to a statistically significant χ^2 -difference test of the two models, $\chi^2_{diff}(46)=137.12$, $p < .05$. Utility remains in looking at the higher-order groupings because of their conceptual basis.

Results of multiple regression analyses indicated that neither children's age nor their gender accounted for a significant proportion of variance in CBQ scores. These results have implications for decisions in computing normative means to be used in CBQ score interpretation. Because of these modest relationships among age and gender with CBQ scales, and because the proportions of custody arrangements in this sample appeared to be very similar to the general population, subgroups were not considered necessary or beneficial in deriving means for normative comparison at this stage in standardizing the CBQ. Instead, the entire sample (n=470) was used in

computing the statistics needed for z-score transformations. Scoring procedures were developed whereby future obtained CBQ scores (summative scores and scale scores) can be converted to T-scores and compared to this normative sample.

Confirmation of the factor structure of this instrument strongly suggests that the CBQ reliably reflects the theoretical constructs on which its design was based. Not only did the factor structure replicate findings from an initial factor analytic study (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999), but the factor structure was also supported within the present study through cross-validation procedures.

Representative stratification across variables of interest (i.e. gender, age, custody) is important in normative sampling. Although this sample seems representative in composition, data were collected via convenience sampling, limiting the generalizability of results and the usefulness of norms established on this sample. However, comparing scores to means from this sample could add to interpretability of the CBQ, particularly when used for research purposes.

In a separate analysis of the data collected by Macie (2002), Jill Ferrante investigated both the factor structure of the Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire and ability of the instrument to predict the psychological adjustment of the respondents. Data were collected from 389 undergraduate students, between the ages of 18 and 30 years, who were attending Virginia Commonwealth University, a large state university in the South-Atlantic region. As this study focused solely on the contexts of divorce and intact marriage, subjects were excluded from analyses if they reported that their parents had never been married ($n=31$). The sample was diverse in terms of ethnicity, age, and gender.

Questionnaire packets were distributed to students enrolled in undergraduate introductory psychology courses. Data were obtained via questionnaires that tapped a broad range of adjustment factors along with a variety of parenting behaviors from the young adult's perspective. All co-parenting and parenting behaviors were measured by the retrospective report of young adult participants; subjects were asked to think back to their childhood to respond to these items.

The factor structure of the Co-parenting Behavior Questionnaire (CBQ) was examined through the calculation of confirmatory factor analyses. In lieu of parcels or specific items, CBQ subscales were used as indicators for four latent variables: Parental Hostility, Parental Cooperation, Mothering, and Fathering. High scores for each of these variables (including Parental Hostility) indicate more positive co-parenting and parenting practices. See Figure 1 for a graphical representation of the factor structure of the Co-Parenting Questionnaire and for the relationships between first and second order factors.

Overall, the CBQ measurement model fit the data well, $CFI = .95$, $\chi^2(48, N = 340) = 294.3$, and supported the hypothesis that the CBQ measures four distinct co-parenting and parenting practices. All factor loadings were significant at the $p < .001$ level. The factor loadings for the two Parental

Hostility subscales (Triangulation and Parental Conflict) were .74 and .86. For the Parental Cooperation variable, factor loadings were .92 and .87. Both Mothering and Fathering latent variables had four indicators: Warmth, Communication, Monitoring, and Discipline. Factor loadings for the four Mothering subscales ranged from .67 to .96. The Mother Communication subscale had the highest factor loading while the Mother Discipline subscale had the weakest loading. Findings were similar for Fathering subscales. Factor loadings ranged from .77 to .96, where Father Communication had the strongest loading and Father Discipline had the weakest loading.

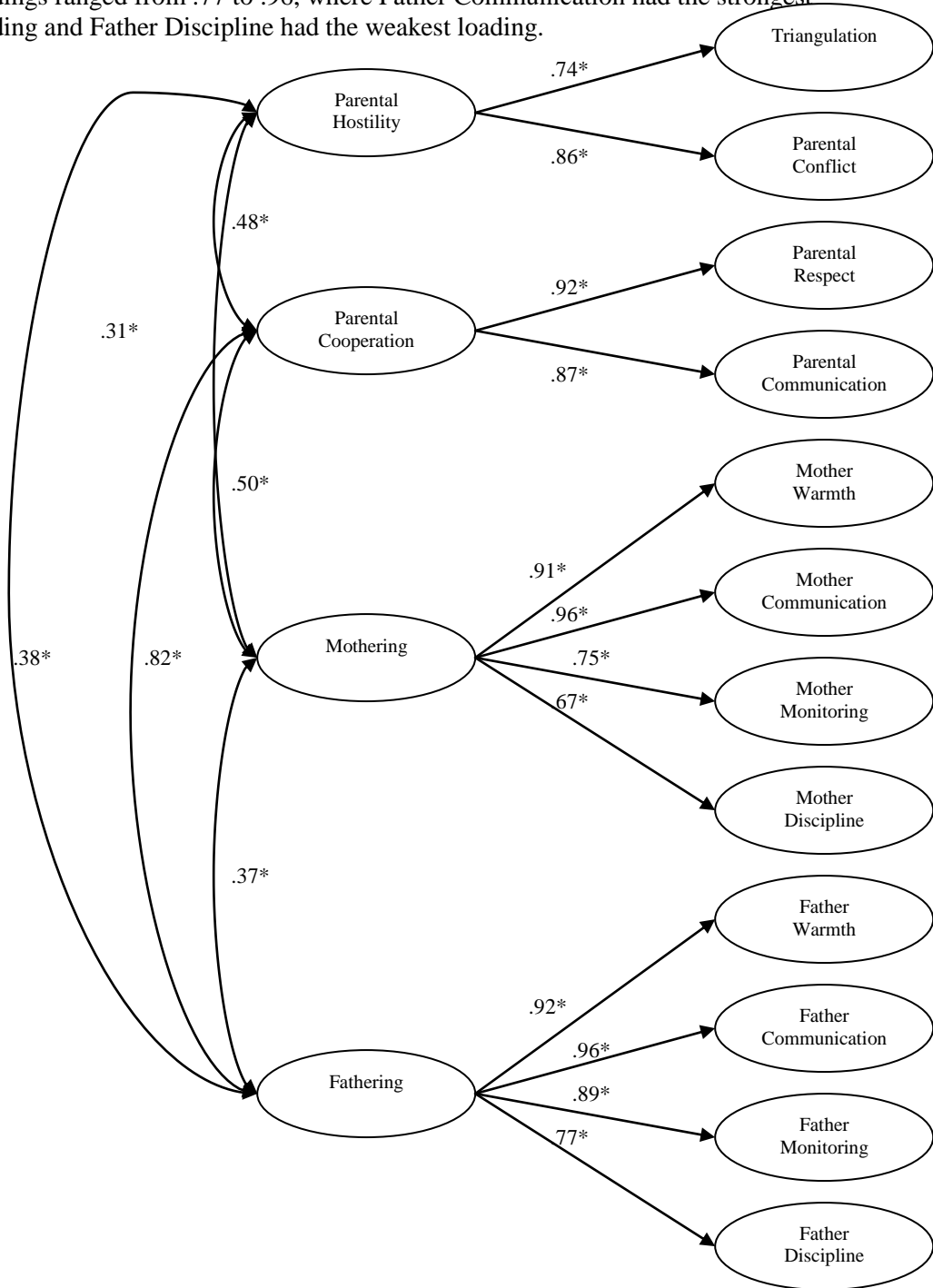


Figure 1: Graphical representation of the factor structure of the Co-Parenting Questionnaire and the relationships between first and second order factors.

It is also noteworthy that in separate studies of separate samples of respondents with some describing their parents' current behavior and others reporting on their recall of their parents' parenting and co-parenting, identical factor structures were yielded. It is also notable that the inter-correlations among the four scales of the CBQ were high. All inter-correlations were significant at the $p < .001$ level, suggesting that the constructs of Parental Hostility, Parental Cooperation, Mothering, and Fathering are highly related. The correlation between Parental Cooperation and Fathering was especially high (.82).

PREDICTIVE VALIDITY OF THE CO-PARENTING BEHAVIOR QUESTIONNAIRE: PREDICTING YOUNG ADULTS PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENT

The predictive validity of the Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire was tested through Jill Ferrante's analyses of Kate Macie's data set. Her analyses attest to the strength of the measure at predicting the later emotional adjustment of the respondents. As mentioned earlier, the data set included measures that tapped a broad range of adjustment factors along with a variety of parenting behaviors from the young adult's perspective. See Table 2 for a description of the constructs, operational definitions of those constructs, and the survey methodology.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) using LISREL 8.54 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2003) was used to determine how well the co-parenting dimensions measured in the Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire predicted young adults' adjustment years after their parents' divorce.

Table 2: Constructs and operational definitions survey methodology

Construct	Scales Used in This Study	Scale Sources	Number Of Items	Alpha
Co-Parenting	Parental Hostility Parental Cooperation	Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999)	36	.91
Parenting	Mothering Fathering	Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire (Mullett & Stolberg, 1999)	52	.96
Overall Mental Health	Positive Symptom Total	Brief Symptom Inventory (Derogatis & Spencer, 1983)	53	.96
Problems with Intimacy	Fear of Intimacy	Fear of Intimacy Scale (Descutner & Thelen, 1991)	35	.92

Work Ethic	Initiative	Occupational Work Ethic	23	.94
	Dependable	Inventory (Hill & Petty, 1995)		
Self Esteem	Self Esteem	Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale	10	.87
		(Rosenberg, 1965)		
Delinquency	Delinquency	Young Adult Self Report	9	.73
		(Achenbach, 1997)		

Note. 1 Alpha reliabilities based on study sample.

A series of analyses was conducted to determine the extent to which the effects of marital status on young adult adjustment were mediated by co-parenting and parenting practices. Two models were tested. The first model tested a full mediation hypothesis, whereby the direct relationship between marital status and the five young adult adjustment domains would be eliminated when the effects of co-parenting and parenting practices were considered. The second model tested a partial mediation model which differed from the full mediation model by allowing direct paths linking marital status to young adult adjustment. Finally, a chi-square difference test was used to compare to the two mediation models to assess superior fit.

The full mediation model was tested first. This model explored the mediating role of four co-parenting and parenting practices upon the relationship between marital status and five domains of young adult adjustment. This model assumes that marital status has no direct effect on young adult adjustment when the impact of co-parenting and parenting practices is taken into account. The full mediation model (CFI = .92, χ^2 (411, N = 340) = 1479.81). See Figure 2 for standardized path coefficients. The paths from marital status to parental hostility, parental cooperation, and fathering were both all significant and positive, indicating that young adults whose parents were married reported that their parents demonstrated less parental hostility, more parental cooperation, and more fathering than young adults whose parents were divorced.

Table 3: Comparison of Mediation Models

Model	χ^2	df	CFI	RMSEA	χ^2 dif.	Df
Mediation Models (N=340)						
M-1 Full Mediation	1479.81	411	.92	.09		
M-2 Partial Mediation	1458.98	406	.9	.09		
χ^2 Difference Test (N=340)						
M-1 vs. M-2					20.83	5

Note. * $p < .05$.

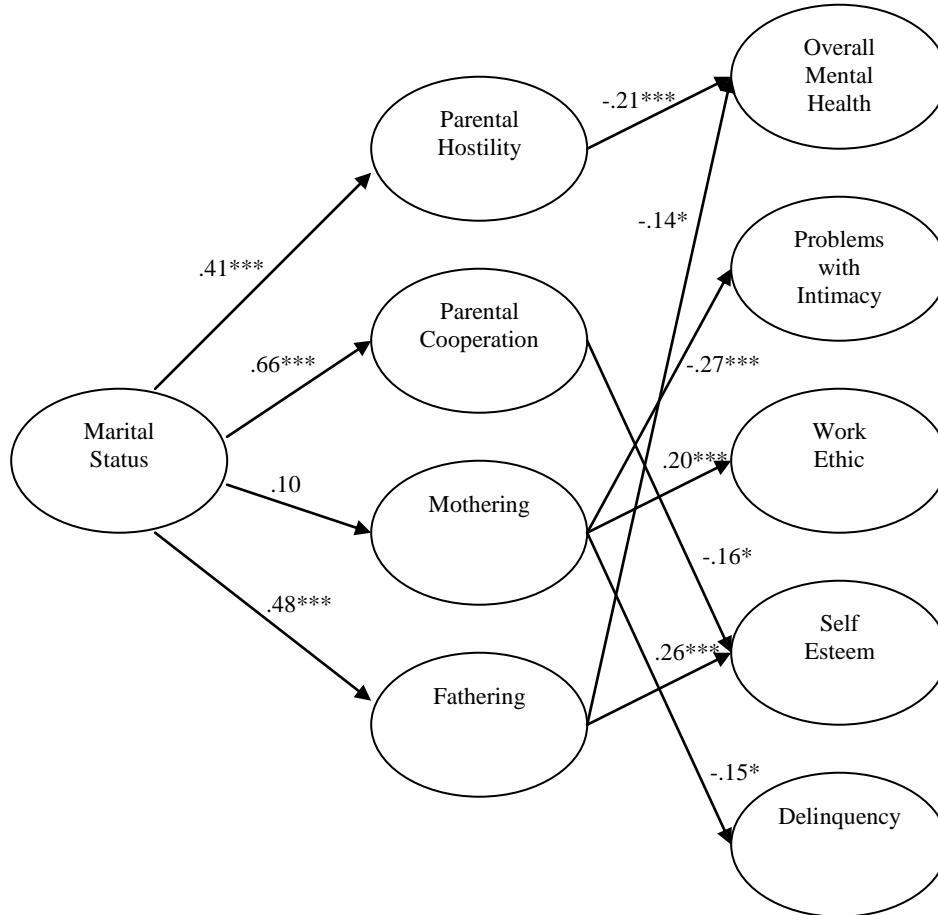


Figure 2. Full mediation model. Measurement parameters not included to simplify figure. Values represent standardized path coefficients. To further simplify figure, only significant paths from co-parenting and parenting variables to young adult adjustment variables are shown. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Paths from parental hostility and fathering to overall mental health were significant and negative, indicating that low parental hostility and high fathering are related to high overall mental health. Only mothering showed significant pathways to problems with intimacy and work ethic, whereby such that high mothering is related to few problems with intimacy in romantic relationships and high work ethic. Paths from parental cooperation and fathering to self esteem were significant, such that low parental cooperation and high fathering are related to high self esteem. Finally, the path from mothering to delinquency was significant and negative, suggesting that high mothering is related to low delinquency. All other paths were non-significant. This pattern

of results is consistent with a mediated model according to Baron and Kenny (1986).

Next, the partial mediation model was examined. This model differs from the full mediation model by allowing direct pathways from marital status to young adult adjustment variables, in addition to the indirect mediation pathways. The partial mediation model assumes that marital status does have a direct impact on young adult adjustment, although co-parenting and parenting practices are significant mediators of this relationship. The partial mediation model fit the data well, $CFI = .92$, $\chi^2(406, N = 340) = 1458.98$. See Figure 3 for standardized path coefficients. As in the full mediation model, the paths from marital status to parental hostility, parental cooperation, and fathering were both significant and positive, indicating that young adults whose parents were married reported that their parents demonstrated less parental hostility, more parental cooperation, and more fathering than young adults whose parents were divorced.

Parental hostility was significantly related to overall mental health, such that low parental hostility is related to high overall mental health. Both parental cooperation and mothering demonstrated significant pathways to problems with intimacy and work ethic, whereby high parental cooperation and high mothering is related to few problems with intimacy in romantic relationships and high work ethic. Next, paths from parental hostility and fathering to self esteem were significant and positive, such that low parental hostility and high fathering are related to high self esteem. Finally, the path from mothering to delinquency was significant and negative, suggesting that high mothering is related to low delinquency. Notably, even with mediated pathways accounted for within the model, marital status was significantly related to self esteem; divorce was related to high self esteem. All other paths were non-significant. This pattern of results is consistent with a mediated model according to Baron and Kenny (1986).

Finally, the two mediation models were compared to each other to assess determine the superior fit. A chi-square difference test indicated that the partial mediation model fit the data significantly better, $\chi^2(5, N = 340) = 20.83$, $p < .05$. Thus, we should reject the null hypothesis suggesting that all paths from marital status to the five domains of young adult adjustment are equal to 0. More important, however, is the conclusion that parenting and co-parenting, as measured by the Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire can effectively predict the broadly measured emotional, social, interpersonal, academic, and employment/work competence of young adults whose parents have divorced years before. The CBQ accounted for more than 55% of the variance of the combined adjustment scores of these young adults (Macie, 2002).

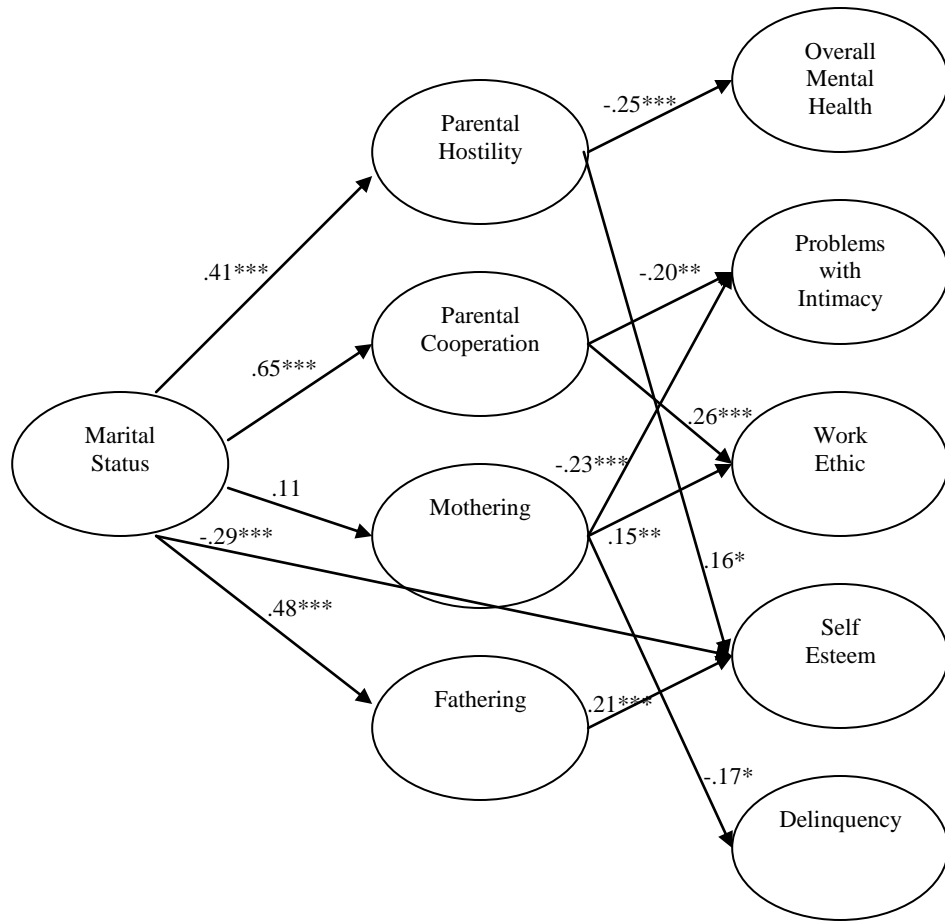


Figure 3. Partial mediation model. Measurement parameters not included to simplify figure. Values represent standardized path coefficients. To further simplify figure, only significant paths from co-parenting and parenting variables to young adult adjustment variables are shown. * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$.

CONTINUED DEVELOPMENT OF THE CO-PARENTING BEHAVIOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Several projects are underway or are planned in the development of the Co-Parenting Behavior Questionnaire. These projects involve testing the theoretical constructs underlying the structure of the CBQ, expanding the populations for whom the measure is appropriate, increasing the clinical utility of the CBQ, and expanding the data set with which broader and more representative empirical investigations of the CBQ can be conducted.

Testing the theoretical underpinnings of the CBQ and expansion of the populations covered the measure: The concept is being tested that parenting is made up of a first order, general parenting factor, *g*, that is common to all families and a second order factor, *s*, that reflects situation specific configurations of parenting and co-parenting skills is being tested through additional structural equation modeling analyses. These analyses will be used as empirical support for the development of *s* scales that are relevant for families with a child with a chronic illness, for families living in high violence and low resource environments, among others.

Computerized scoring of the CBQ: A scoring program that will yield converted t-scores and printed output for the 12 scales is in its final stages of testing. Sample output will be available at the time of the presentation. The program and output is being designed to compile all raw and scored scale data. It will also provide normed scores that are referenced to normal, clinical and healthy child populations. These data should be especially helpful in the conduct of child custody evaluations, in identifying behaviors in need of change in child, family and co-parenting therapy,

Building the data set that can be used for validating the CBQ: Four sites nationally are currently using the CBQ and are exporting their accumulated and anonymous data to us. These data will be used to expand the breadth of the studies that can be undertaken on the CBQ. To further this effort, a web-based administration and data collection will be established. This procedure has been used in other studies in our lab and has yielded very large data sets from representative and targeted populations across the United States of America.

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