

THE LINK BETWEEN MARITAL CONFLICT
AND CHILD BEHAVIOR
OUTCOMES

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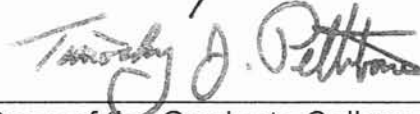
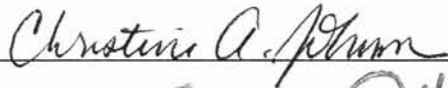
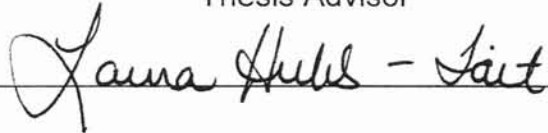
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Introduction

There is a substantial amount of evidence to support the association between marital conflict and poor child outcomes (Coiro, 1995; Davies & Cummings, 1998;). Marital conflict has been shown to be associated with various problems in children. Some of these include depression, withdrawal, poor problem solving skills, health problems, and poor academic performance (Gottman & Katz, 1989; Goodman et al., 1999). Some studies have shown evidence of a direct link between marital conflict and child outcomes through modeling of poor conflict resolution skills (Emery, Fincham & Cummings, 1992), while others have shown the link to be more indirect and mediated through parenting and discipline styles (Gonzales, Pitts, Hill & Roosa, 2000).

Since all marriages involve some amount of marital conflict, it is important to understand how and to what extent children are affected by the marital relationship. There is some evidence that the link between marital conflict and child outcomes is mediated through the quality of the parent-child relationship, such that the parent-child relationship is negatively affected when the marital relationship is characterized by conflict, and children, in turn, suffer (Gonzales et al, 2000). However, there also is evidence that if the quality of the parent-child relationship is able to remain positive in the face of marital conflict, then it is possible that the child will be buffered by the positive parenting (Katz & Gottman, 1997). It is important for researchers to continue to explore the link between marital conflict and the parent-child relationship. The current study will focus on how harsh discipline practices and various parenting styles may be affected by

marital conflict and how these different parenting variables may buffer or exacerbate the negative effects of marital conflict on children.

Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks

Children in homes with high levels of marital conflict have been shown to be at risk in various ways (Coiro, 1995; Davies & Cummings, 1998; Katz & Gottman, 1993). One of the theoretical frameworks that explains this link from a “direct effects” perspective is modeling. Parents who have frequent and intense conflicts may be demonstrating undesirable behaviors to their children. According to Bandura (1975), individuals are able to learn new patterns of behavior simply by observing others. Children who are exposed to parental conflict may notice their aggressive tactics and include them in their own repertoire of behavior. Children learn aggressive behavior by observing aggression in others (Bandura, 1978). Children who are exposed to aggressive tactics frequently may be more likely to use aggressive tactics, which, in turn, will lead to more externalizing problems for these children. Another theory that attempts to explain the direct effects of marital conflict on children is referred to as flooding (Ekman, 1994). This is the idea that children who are exposed to frequent conflict are flooded by feelings of fear and anger. Children in families that are characterized by high levels of marital conflict may have more internalizing behavior problems due to their frequent feelings of fear and anger.

Other theorists and researchers have proposed that marital conflict not only affects children directly, but it can also influence children through an indirect pathway (Erel & Burman, 1993; 1995; Gottman & Katz, 1989; Gonzales et al., 2000). Within the indirect effects view, the literature discusses a theoretical base

known as the spillover effect (Engfer, 1988). This hypothesis suggests that the parent-child relationship is either positively or negatively affected by the marital relationship, depending on marital quality; when the marital relationship is supportive, the parent-child relationship is also and when the marital relationship is troubled so is the parent-child relationship (Engfer, 1988). Details about the theoretical models and supporting empirical studies follow.

Direct Effects Model of the Link between Marital Conflict and Child Adjustment

Although every marriage is characterized by some level of conflict, the extent of conflict each couple experiences varies greatly. Marital conflict has been shown to affect children differently depending on the frequency, tactics, and outcomes of the conflict (Coiro, 1995; Davies & Cummings, 1998; Katz & Gottman, 1993).

The results of one study showed that higher frequencies of marital conflict were associated with higher levels of behavior problems (Coiro, 1995). However, another study showed that frequency of marital conflict itself was not negatively associated with child outcomes. It was found that only frequent marital conflict characterized by aggression and escalation had negative effects on children (Goodman et al, 1999).

The tactics used by couples within their conflicts also appear to have an effect on children. Not all marital conflict is negative. Some conflicts are calmer and less intense than others are and these types of conflict do not seem to have as large an impact on children as other types of conflict have. However, there is

also marital conflict that includes aggressive tactics, contempt, negative language and poor resolution. Davies and Cummings (1998) found that destructive marital conflict was associated with internalizing and externalizing behavior problems in six- to nine-year-old children. Their results also showed that children who were exposed to marital conflict consisting of hostility, escalation and child rearing disagreements had greater insecurity. The children's level of insecurity was, in turn, positively associated with child maladjustment (Davies & Cummings, 1998).

When parents frequently engage in conflicts that are aggressive, angry, and hostile, they are creating a negative model for the children to learn (Grych & Fincham, 1990). It has been suggested that the parents' frequent, aggressive and unresolved conflict models poor social problem solving skills for children which, in turn, leads to the development of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Goodman et al., 1999). Goodman et al. (1999) found that ten- to thirteen-year-old children were more likely to model their mothers' use of reasoning tactics in marital conflict if the frequency of marital conflict was either low or moderate. This study demonstrated that although negative conflict resolutions can be detrimental to child outcomes, positive marital conflict resolution can set a good example for children and may also work to increase their coping skills in the face of marital conflict. It was shown that mothers' use of reasoning tactics in low or moderate frequency of conflict and fathers' increased intimacy following marital conflict was associated with children more effectively solving peer conflict.

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An alternative mechanism directly linking marital conflict to child outcomes is Ekman's (1994) proposed concept of flooding. Flooding refers to the idea that for some people, when any negative event occurs a particular negative affect is invoked. Gottman and Katz (1989) expanded on this concept and related it to the negative experiences children have when exposed to frequent marital conflict. They explained that when children live in homes characterized by unhappy marriages, they might become flooded by fear, anger, and disgust. These feelings lead them to avoid future situations that could potentially be negative. Therefore, according to Gottman and Katz (1989), these children play at a lower level with their peers, which deprives them of learning complex interaction skills. Because of this deprivation of certain social skills, these children may have trouble with peers later.

A study conducted by El-Sheikh (1994) relates to the concept of flooding in children exposed to marital conflict. In this study, children's emotional and physiological responses to adult conflicts were examined. It was shown that kindergarten aged children from high conflict homes became more distressed than children from low conflict homes when exposed to interadult conflict. This study also showed that girls from high conflict homes experienced more anxiety when exposed to interadult conflicts than girls from low conflict homes. This study supports the idea that children in high conflict homes are more emotionally affected by interadult conflicts than children in low conflict homes and therefore may be more likely to develop internalizing behavior problems.

In summary, models of direct linkages between marital conflict and child outcomes suggest paths to both externalizing and internalizing type problems for children. Another pathway in the association between marital conflict and child outcomes that should be considered is the indirect path. It is likely that children are affected directly by parental conflict, but there is also a chance that marital conflict affects children indirectly through the parent-child relationship.

Indirect Effects Model of the Link between Marital Conflict and Child Adjustment

Previous research suggests that marital conflict not only affects children through direct means, such as modeling, but it can also be mediated indirectly through parenting practices (Erel & Burman, 1993;1995; Gonzales et al., 2000; Gottman & Katz, 1989). Marital conflict can affect the parent-child relationship in various ways. The presence of intense marital conflict in families can lead to ineffective discipline strategies, such as inconsistency and harshness, and poor parenting styles, such as authoritarianism and permissiveness (Baumrind, 1967; Criss, Pettit, Meece, Dodge & Bates, 1998; Gottman & Katz, 1989; Kitzman, 2000; Stoneman, Brody & Burke, 1989).

There have been a few theories proposed that attempt to explain how the effects of marital conflict are mediated through parenting. One theory that is discussed in the literature is the spillover effect (Engfer, 1988). The idea behind the spillover effect is that, on the one hand, the negativity associated with marital conflict spills over into the parent-child relationship. If the parents are often engaged in conflict or are unsatisfied with their marriage the stress and

unhappiness from the marital relationship leaks into their parenting abilities. Parents in conflictual marriages may be less able to focus on their child and be effective parents. They may also take out the anger and frustration they feel towards their spouse on their children. Parents in conflictual marriages may also become emotionally unavailable for their children. On the other hand, according to the spillover effect theory, less conflictual marital relationships are conducive to positive parenting quality. In these marriages, the parents are under less stress because of their satisfying marriage. Consequently, they are able to put more energy into parenting and they can work together as a couple to be effective parents. These parents are, in theory, more emotionally available and responsive to their children.

In a meta-analysis done by Erel and Burman (1995), the authors discuss some mechanisms by which the marital relationship may spillover into the parent-child relationship. One of the mechanisms that is discussed is based on family systems theory. Based on previous literature, Erel and Burman (1995) refer to this mechanism as "scapegoating." They describe scapegoating as a situation in which the parents focus on the child's problems in order to distract themselves and other family members from their marital conflicts. The scapegoating mechanism is used so that the parents and family can ignore the real problem, however the child may begin to act out more often and more intensely as a way of keeping the parents' focus off their own conflicts. Although Erel and Burman only focus on acting out, or externalizing behavior problems, it may also be that some children exhibit internalizing type problems in response to scapegoating.

Another mechanism the authors discuss is a socialization hypothesis. The discussion of this hypothesis suggests that when parents often engage in conflict, they are less likely to be consistent in their discipline and may use less desirable parenting styles. The inconsistent and undesirable parenting that results from frequent marital conflict leads to more problems in the parent-child relationship (Erel & Burman, 1995).

The results of this meta-analysis showed that previous studies indicate a significant correlation between marital quality and quality of the parent-child relationship (Erel & Burman, 1995). Previous literature supports the idea of a spillover effect between the marital relationship and parent-child relationship. When the marital relationship affects the quality of the parent-child relationship, through the spillover effect, the child is indirectly affected. The process by which the quality of the parent-child relationship is affected by the quality of the marriage is unclear. It is clear, however that the quality of the parent-child relationship is related to child outcomes.

It has been proposed in previous literature that one way effects of marital conflict on children are mediated is through discipline styles (Criss et al., 1998; Dadds, Sheffield & Holbeck, 1990; Erel & Burman, 1995; Gonzales et al, 2000; Stoneman et al., 1989). For example, harsh discipline techniques, such as spanking and critical verbal reprimands have been associated with depression in children as well as with violent, and delinquent behavior (Giles-Sims, Straus & Sugarman, 1995). One study examined toddlers' behavior in relation to their mothers' overreactive discipline and found that when mothers used techniques

that involved harsh yelling or spanking, the children were more likely to act out (O'Leary, Smith & Reid 1999). Another study found that corporal punishment is a potential source of stress among youth, ages ten to sixteen, and the more often the corporal punishment takes place, the more likely the child is to be depressed or distressed (Turner & Finkelhor, 1996). Although marital conflict is not looked at in these studies, it is important to note that harsh discipline does have undesirable effects on children.

Other research also supports a link between marital conflict, harsh discipline, and child maladjustment. In one study, (Holden & Ritchie, 1991), it was shown that in marital relationships characterized by high levels of violence and conflict, the children more frequently received harsh discipline from their fathers than did the comparison group. The fathers in the more conflictual homes were also reported to use less inductive measures when dealing with their child's misbehaviors. This could be due to the negative aspects of marital conflict, such as aggression and anger, spilling over into parent-child interaction. When the parents are often engaged in conflict, they may be more likely to turn their anger at their spouse toward the child. The children in the conflictual families were reported to be more aggressive and had more internalizing behavior problems than the comparison group. However, this study looked at families with extreme marital violence and conflict, so it may not be appropriate to generalize the finding to other populations. Still, another study (Criss et al., 1998), which used a non-extreme sample, showed that aggressive and violent forms of marital conflict were associated with mothers' harsh parenting among a

sample of kindergarten aged children. The mothers' early harsh parenting was significantly associated with the children's externalizing problems in sixth grade.

Other studies have explored links between parenting style, such as support and involvement, and child outcomes. A longitudinal study which was conducted in order to explore the impact of parental involvement on children who were subjected to corporal punishment suggested that the level of parental support and involvement was associated with adolescent aggressiveness, delinquency, and well being rather than the use of corporal punishment (Simons, Johnson, & Conger, 1994). While this study did not examine the effects of marital conflict on children, it does suggest the possibility that it is the parents' styles of parenting rather than their harsh discipline techniques that mediates the link between marital conflict and child maladjustment.

Baumrind (1996) posited three styles of parenting which she labeled authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Authoritative parents want their children to demonstrate prosocial behavior, however they also encourage autonomous reasoning in their children (Baumrind, 1996). In a sample of parents and their four-year-old children, Baumrind (1967) found that authoritative parents were characterized by a balance of high levels of control and demandingness along with high levels of support and nurturance. The children of authoritative parents were found to be more independent, self-controlled, competent, self-reliant, self-assertive, and content in comparison to children of authoritarian and permissive parents. Parents who were categorized as authoritarian tend to be high in use of control and demandingness and low in levels of support and

nurturance. The children of these parents were found to be insecure, apprehensive, less content, and more hostile than children of authoritative parents. Permissive parents were characterized as being less controlling and demanding than authoritative or authoritarian parents. They were also more insecure about their abilities to influence their children than authoritative parents. In comparison to authoritative parents, permissive parents were less involved with their children and used love manipulatively. The children of permissive parents tended to have less self-control and were less self-reliant than other children (Baumrind, 1967).

The literature that explores the mediating and moderating effects of these three parenting styles on the link between marital conflict and child maladjustment is lacking. However, there is some evidence that certain characteristics of these styles do have some mediating and moderating effects on this link. For instance, in one study, which looked at four- to seven-year-old children, it was found that the effects of marital conflict were mediated through fathers' critical parenting and both fathers' and mothers' lack of emotional responsivity (Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1999). Another study (Gottman & Katz, 1989) looked at how marital distress was related to parenting styles. They found that couples who were under marital distress displayed parenting styles that were low in limit setting and structuring, which fits the profile of permissive parents. This could be explained by the spillover effect, since the parents were under stress due to the marital relationship, their effectiveness as parents appears to have suffered. The parents in this study might have been too

distracted by their marital problems that they let their parenting efforts go. They might have also taken out some of the anger and resentment that they felt towards their spouse on their children. The authors speculated that this parenting style led to anger and noncompliance in the children.

The literature not only discusses negative aspects of parenting that may mediate the link between marital conflict and child maladjustment, but there is also some speculation about positive aspects of parenting that may buffer children from experiencing detrimental effects due to marital conflict. One study found that the quality of parenting (defined in terms of parental warmth, scaffolding, rejection, and emotion coaching) was an important factor in moderating the negative effects of marital conflict on four- to five-year-old children (Katz & Gottman, 1997). These characteristics are common in authoritative parenting styles. This study also found that in the presence of high levels of marital conflict there were no variables that could prevent children from displaying internalizing and externalizing behavior problems. In Erel and Burman's meta-analysis (1995) of the link between the spousal relationship and the quality of the parent-child relationship the authors speculated that although it is possible for positive parenting styles to protect children from poor outcomes associated with marital conflict, it is not very likely that a positive parent-child relationship is going to occur within the context of a poor marital relationship, thus that empirical relation is rarely found.

Summary

In summary, previous studies in this area of research have focused on how the child is affected directly by marital conflict and how the child is indirectly affected through the quality of the parent-child relationship. Although researchers have examined mediating and moderating variables that may predict or buffer the child from negative outcomes, this area has not been thoroughly investigated. Exactly how the link between marriage and parenting occurs needs to be explored further.

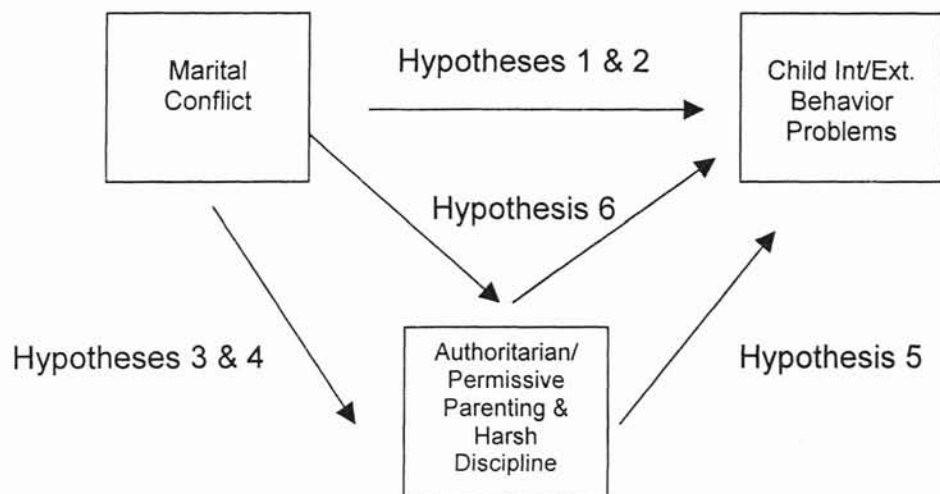
In previous studies that examined the link between marital quality and the quality of the parent-child relationship, global measures of marital satisfaction and parent-child relationship quality were most often used. Studies that focus on overt conflict in the marital relationship, parenting styles, and discipline have not been widely conducted (Erel & Burman, 1995). In the current study, the goal is to examine whether or not marital conflict is directly related to poor child outcomes or if the relation is mediated through or moderated by parenting characteristics, specifically parenting style and harsh discipline techniques. This study will focus on how parents' use of harsh discipline and non-optimal styles of parenting are related to the level of conflict in the marital relationship, and how, in turn, those parenting variables may be related to internalizing and externalizing behavior problems among their children.

Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses tested in this study will examine contrasting theories. Figure 1 is a model of the possible pathways in which children may be affected by marital conflict. The hypotheses examined in this study are based on this model.

Figure 1.

A Model of the Direct and Indirect Effects of Marital Conflict on Child Adjustment



The hypotheses are intended to be the same for both mothers and fathers. Each of the following hypothesis was formulated based on previous research and theoretical models.

1. Marital conflict will be positively related to child externalizing behavior problems. This hypothesis is based on the modeling concept.

2. Marital conflict will be positively related to child internalizing behavior problems. This is based on the concept of flooding.
3. Marital conflict will be positively related to parents' use of authoritarian and permissive styles of parenting.
4. Marital conflict will be positively related to parents' use of harsh discipline techniques. Hypotheses three and four are based on the spillover effect theory.
5. Parents' use of authoritarian and permissive styles of parenting as well as their use of harsh discipline techniques will be positively related to children internalizing and externalizing behavior problems. This hypothesis is based on previous literature.

Depending on the results of the test of Hypotheses 1-5, a final set of hypotheses will be tested. If marital conflict and child externalizing/internalizing are positively correlated (i.e., if Hypothesis 1 and/or 2 are supported), and if parenting practices (harsh discipline, authoritarian, and/or permissive parenting styles) are significantly correlated with marital conflict (Hypotheses 3 and 4) and child outcomes (Hypothesis 5), a mediation model will be tested. This hypothesis proposes that the link between marital conflict and child problems is mediated by the parenting variables. In other words, it tests whether marital conflict will still be related to child outcomes after accounting for the relation between parenting and child outcome variables. If, however, marital conflict and child externalizing/internalizing are not significantly correlated (i.e., Hypotheses 1 and 2 are not supported), a moderation or buffering model will be tested. In this case, the

question tested is whether marital conflict is related to negative child outcomes only in cases of poor parenting (i.e., high levels of harsh discipline, authoritarianism, or permissiveness), but unrelated when parenting practices are supportive (i.e., at low levels of harsh discipline, authoritarianism, or permissiveness).

Methodology

Sample

The sample used in the current study was part of a larger study conducted at the University of Texas at Austin. The researchers obtained addresses of parents from public school directories. The parents were sent letters regarding the study's goals and specific requirements of a participating family. The letter also let the recipients know that they would be contacted by telephone within a week. Eight participants were recruited using this method. The researchers dropped this method of recruiting families because its results were limited and the procedure was time consuming.

The researchers then gained sponsorship from the Austin Independent School District, which allowed them to go into schools when the parents were there for PTA meetings, talent shows, or holiday parties. When the researchers were at the schools, they met with interested families in order to describe the study and answer questions posed by the parents. This method of recruitment had a greater success rate than the mailing of letters and telephone calls. Seventeen more families were recruited by using the mailing list from the University of Texas at Austin's Child Research Laboratory.

The final sample consisted of forty-three, two-parent families with first grade children. The children ranged in age from 5.86 to 7.97 years ($M = 6.9$, $SD = .46$). There were almost an equal number of boys and girls (23 girls and 20 boys). There were 32 Euro-American children in the study, eight of the children

were Latino, two children were Asian-American and one child was Native American.

Procedures

The families went to a laboratory setting in order to participate in the study. While one parent was being observed participating in a dyadic interaction session with the child, the other parent completed several self-report questionnaires. For the purposes of this study, data was used from the mothers' and fathers' responses on three questionnaires. These included the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979), the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983), and the Parenting Practice Questionnaire (Robinson, Mandelco, Olsen & Hart, 1995). (See Appendices B, C, and D for copies of these measures) Approval was obtained from Oklahoma State University's Institutional Review Board to use this archival data in the current study.

Since the three measures used in this study contained data from the mothers' and the fathers' points of view, both separate and composite scores of all the variables were computed.

Measures

Conflict Tactics Scale

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) was designed to measure the extent to which partners in dating, cohabitational or marital relationships use psychological and physical attacks on each other and how much they use reasoning or negotiation in their conflict resolution. The CTS is also designed to measure

psychological and physical abuse that parents inflict on their children. The CTS is a widely used instrument, having been used in many studies since 1972. There have been approximately 400 papers that have used data gathered from the CTS and its reliability and validity have been repeatedly established (Straus et al, 1996).

The reliability of the CTS was initially established by Straus (1979). The internal consistency of the Reasoning scale had a mean of .74 for husbands and .70 for wives. The internal consistency for the Verbal Aggression scale was .73 for husbands and .70 for wives. For the Violence scale, the internal consistency was .87 for husbands and .88 for wives. Straus (1979) reports that the Violence scale items have a degree of content validity because all the items describe acts of physical force being used by one family member against another. It is also reported by Straus (1979) that there have been a number of analyses which used the CTS measure of violence that provide some evidence of construct validity.

The CTS consists of four sections, which measure three tactics used in intrafamilial conflicts. These include questions which assess the amount of rational discussion used. This subset of questions is termed Reasoning. The Verbal Aggression questions look at verbal or non-verbal acts that symbolically hurt the other. The subset of questions, termed Violence, looks at the use of physical aggression (Straus & Gelles, 1990). The four sections of the CTS consist of a section that asks for the participant to self-report about things they have done to the child. A second section asks the participant to report on things the spouse has done to the child. The third and fourth sections ask for a self-

report of things the participant has done to their spouse as well as a report of things the spouse has done to them.

The respondents answer twenty items on a seven point scale (0=never, 1=less than once a month, 2=once a month, 3=2-3 times a month, 4=once a week, 5=2-3 times a week, 6=almost every day) about how frequently the event has occurred in the past year and about how frequently the event occurred before a year ago. The items on the questionnaire are in order of increasing severity. The CTS begins with the item, "tried to discuss an issue calmly", and ends with the item, "beat up your child/spouse". Three items included in the parent to child sub-scale are left out of the spouse to spouse sub-scale. The items deleted deal with the use of spanking.

In the present study, the spouse to self and self to spouse items of the Violence and Verbal Aggression subscales were used to assess the level of marital conflict in each family. The mothers' and fathers' reports of events that have occurred in the past year only were used. The mothers' responses to the twenty items on the spouse to self subscale were summed as well as the mothers' responses on the self to spouse subscale. The fathers' responses were summed for the self to spouse and spouse to self subscales as well. The resulting variables include the following: *Mother to father directed marital conflict, reported by the mother* ($M = 5.77$, $SD = 4.37$), *Mother to father directed marital conflict, reported by the father* ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 3.59$), *Father to mother directed marital conflict, reported by the mother* ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 3.59$), *Father to mother marital conflict, reported by the father* ($M = 5.47$, $SD = 4.03$).

The items from the violence and verbal aggression scales were analyzed together to test for reliability of the measures. When the items were combined the coefficient alpha for the mothers was .82 and for the fathers was .83. The coefficient alpha for mothers and fathers combined was .89. These four variables were combined into one composite variable by calculating the mean of the four variables. This variable was labeled, *Marital Conflict* ($M = 5.37$, $SD = 3.38$). This values on this scale could theoretically range from 0 to 102. The sample in this study had a range of 1-15.25. There were 37 valid cases for this variable.

Items from the parent to child sub-scales were used to assess the amount of harsh discipline the parents use in dealing with their children. The items that were used to measure this variable include items 10-20 on the parent to child sub-scale. These items deal with the use of physical punishment including threats to spank, hit, throw something at or beat up the child, as well as the act of spanking, hitting, throwing something at or beating up the child.

The mothers' responses on items 10-20 on the self to child and spouse to child subscales were summed. The fathers' responses on the self to child and spouse to child subscales were also summed. The variables obtained from this process are as follows: *Mothers' report of her use of harsh discipline towards child* ($M = 4.94$, $SD = 6.40$), *Fathers' report of mothers' use of harsh discipline towards child* ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 5.42$), *Fathers' report of his use of harsh discipline towards child* ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 3.91$), *Mothers' report of fathers' use of harsh discipline towards child* ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 5.10$).

To determine the reliability of the items used to assess the amount of harsh discipline parents use, a Cronbach's alpha was calculated for items 10-20 on the parent to child sub-scale based on the mothers' and fathers' responses. The coefficient alpha for these combined items was .91 for mothers and .85 for fathers. The coefficient alpha for mothers and fathers combined was .87. The composite of these four variables was created by taking the mean of the four variables. The composite variable was labeled, *Harsh Discipline* ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 4.46$). The theoretical range of values of this scale is 0-120, but this sample had a range of 0-21.5. There were 37 valid cases for this variable.

Child Behavior Checklist

The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) is a well-known and widely used instrument in the assessment of problem behavior and social competencies in children (Lowe, 1998). In the present study, the children's level of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems was measured using the CBCL.

The CBCL is a paper and pencil, multiple choice inventory, which assesses child behavior and competencies from the parents' point of view. The version of the CBCL designed for 4 to 16 year olds consists of two sections. One section is designed to measure behavior problems, while another section is designed to assess social competence. The behavior problems component of the CBCL was used in the present study. It consists of 118 items that assess a variety of behavior problems. These items are rated by parents on a scale where 0=not true, 1=somewhat or sometimes true, and 2=very true (Lowe, 1998).

The test-retest reliabilities for the CBCL were found to have overall intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) of .95 for the behavior problems scale and .99 for the social competence items (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983 as cited in Lowe, 1998). The content validity of the CBCL was demonstrated by significantly higher scores in behavior problems received by referred children when compared with non-referred children. The construct validity of the CBCL was established by administering it with the Conners Parent Questionnaire and the Quay-Peterson Revised Behavior Problem Checklist. When the results were compared, the correlation between the CBCL and the Conners Parent Questionnaire was found to be .91 for total problems and the correlation was .92 for total problems with the Quay-Peterson Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1983 as cited in Lowe, 1998).

The present study used two of the global scales, which were labeled *Internalizing* and *Externalizing*. Since items on the internalizing and externalizing scales load differently for boys and girls, the means were calculated using only the items that pertained to the child's sex. On the internalizing scale there are 55 items for girls and 50 items for boys. On the externalizing scale there are 35 items for girls and 45 items for boys. From this process the following variables were created: *Mothers' report of child's externalizing behaviors* ($M = .24$, $SD = .19$), *Fathers' report of child's externalizing behaviors* ($M = .20$, $SD = .17$), *Mothers' report of child's internalizing behaviors* ($M = .24$, $SD = .18$), *Fathers' report of child's internalizing behaviors* ($M = .18$, $SD = .12$).

To determine inter-item reliability a Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each scale based on the mothers' and fathers' responses. On the externalizing scale the coefficient alpha for mothers reporting on daughters was .88 and for sons was .92. For fathers, the alpha was .91 for daughters and .88 for sons. The alpha for combined mother and father reports was .59. The alpha coefficient on the internalizing scale was .89 for daughters and .89 for sons on the mothers' reports and .83 for daughters and .82 for sons on the fathers' reports. The alpha coefficient for combined mother and father reports was .37. Composite variables were created using the means of the mothers' and fathers' reports. These new variables were labeled *Internalizing*, ($M = .21$, $SD = .13$), and *Externalizing*, ($M = .22$, $SD = .15$). The theoretical range of the CBCL is 0-2. The Internalizing scale ranged from .00-.53, while the Externalizing scale ranged from .01-.56. There were 39 valid cases for these variables.

Parenting Practices Questionnaire

The Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ) is an instrument designed to measure parenting behaviors that are consistent with Baumrind's authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles (Robinson, Hart, Nelson & Bancroft-Andrews, 1996). The PPQ is a 62-item questionnaire. The participant reports on their own parenting practices as well as their spouse's. The items are rated on a five point scale where 1=never, 2=once in awhile, 3=about half the time, 4=very often, and 5=always.

There are three scales included in the PPQ, which measure parents use authoritativeness, authoritarianism, and permissiveness. For the purposes of the

present study, the PPQ was used to assess parenting style used in each family, specifically levels of permissiveness and authoritarianism.

The authoritarian scale consists of 21 items, some of which are, “guides child more by punishment than reason”, “grabs child when disobedient” and “spanks child when disobedient”. The permissive items include fourteen statements. Some examples of these items are, “afraid that disciplining child for misbehavior will cause the child not to like his/her parents”, “threatens the child with punishment more often than actually gives it” and “ignores child’s misbehaviors”. Refer to Appendix C for a complete listing of items that make up each scale.

Reliability for this scale was previously tested and the Cronbach alpha for the authoritarian items was .86. The inter-item reliability for the permissive scale was found to have a Cronbach alpha of .75 (Robinson et al., 1996). The validity of this measure is supported since it has produced results that correlate with certain behaviors that are consistent with Baumrind’s typology research (Robinson et al., 1995).

In the current study, the mothers’ responses to the self to child subscale were summed and the mothers’ responses to the spouse to child subscale were summed for the authoritarian items as well as for the permissive items. The fathers’ responses to the self to child subscale were summed and the fathers’ responses to the spouse to child subscale were summed as well. This resulted in variables that represented the amount of authoritarian and permissive behaviors that the mother displays towards the child. These variables include

the following: *Mothers' report of her authoritarian behavior towards child* ($M = 41.80$, $SD = 6.97$), *Fathers' report of mothers' authoritarian behavior toward child* ($M = 43.26$, $SD = 7.72$) *Fathers' report of his authoritarian behavior towards child* ($M = 43.94$, $SD = 8.72$), *Mothers' report of fathers' authoritarian behavior toward child* ($M = 40.43$, $SD = 6.36$), *Mothers' report of her permissive behavior toward child* ($M = 29.89$, $SD = 4.54$), *Fathers' report of mothers' permissive behavior towards child* ($M = 31.44$, $SD = 5.78$), *Fathers' report of his permissive behavior towards child* ($M = 30.09$, $SD = 3.57$), *Mothers' report of fathers' permissive behavior towards child* ($M = 29.29$, $SD = 4.01$).

In the current study, the permissive and authoritarian scales were considered as two continuous variables. The items were summed within each scale and a Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each. The alpha coefficient for the authoritarian variables was .87 for mothers, .92 for fathers, and for mothers and fathers combined was .85. For the permissive variables, the alpha coefficient was .78 for mothers, .75 for fathers and .63 for mothers and fathers combined. To create the composite variable, the means of the four variables for authoritarian and permissive parenting were calculated and the resulting composite variables were labeled, *Authoritarian Parenting*, ($M = 42.12$, $SD = 6.50$), and *Permissive Parenting*, ($M = 30.24$, $SD = 3.03$). The authoritarian scale could theoretically range from 21 to 105. In this sample the range of values was 26-54. The permissive scale has a theoretical range of 14-70, while in this sample the range of values was 23.25-38. There were 36 valid cases for these variables.

Results

Overview of Analyses

The first step in analyzing the data was to compute bivariate correlations in order to test the first five hypotheses. These one-tailed bivariate correlations were computed using the separate mother and father report variables as well as the composite variables. After considering the results of all the correlations, it was decided that the composite variables would be used in further analyses. The percentage of the mother and father report variables that had correlations significant at the $p < .05$ level was 39% (25 out of 64 of the correlations). The percentage of these that were significant at the $p < .10$ level was 55% (35 out of 64 of the correlations). When using the composite variables in the correlations, 27% (3 out of 11 correlations) were significant at the $p < .05$ level and 64% (7 out of 11 correlations) were significant at the $p < .10$ level. Since the pattern of findings were similar using composites and separate mother/father variables, the choice to use the composites was made in order to reduce the complexity of the results. A complete summary of the correlations using the separate mother and father report variables is included in Appendix A.

Intra-Domain Correlations

Child Variables. There was a significant, positive correlation found between *Internalizing* and *Externalizing*, $r(39) = .59$, $p = .00$.

Parenting Variables. There was not a significant correlation found between *Harsh Discipline* and *Permissive Parenting*, $r(35) = .15$, $p = .38$. There

was a significant, positive correlation found between *Harsh Discipline* and *Authoritarian Parenting*, $r(35)=.67$, $p=.00$. There was also a significant correlation found between *Authoritarian Parenting* and *Permissive Parenting*, $r(36)=.39$, $p=.02$.

Inter-Domain Correlations

Child outcome variables and Marital Conflict. There were no significant correlations found among the child outcome variables and the marital conflict variable. Thus, the proposed mediation models involving Marital Conflict and child behavior were not able to be tested (See Table I).

Table I

Correlations between Child Outcomes Variables and Marital Conflict

	Child Externalizing Behavior	Child Internalizing Behavior
Marital Conflict	$r(35)=.11$ $p=.26$	$r(35)=.11$ $p=.27$

Parenting variables and Marital Conflict. There was a significant correlation between *Marital Conflict* and *Harsh Discipline*. There was a marginally significant correlation found between *Marital Conflict* and *Permissive Parenting*. There was not a significant correlation found between *Marital Conflict* and *Authoritarian Parenting* (See Table II).

Table II

Correlations between Marital Conflict and Parenting Variables.

	Parents' use of Harsh Discipline	Authoritarian Parenting	Permissive Parenting
Marital Conflict	$r(37)=.33$ $p=.02$	$r(35)=.21$ $p=.11$	$r(35)=.24$ $p=.09$

Parenting variables and Child outcome variables. Externalizing was significantly correlated with all three parenting variables. Internalizing was unrelated to Authoritarian Parenting. However, there was a significant correlation found between Harsh Discipline and Internalizing and a marginally significant correlation between Permissive Parenting and Internalizing (See Table III).

Table III

Correlations between Parenting Variables and Child Outcome Variables

	Parents' use of Harsh Discipline	Permissive Parenting	Authoritarian Parenting
Child Externalizing Behavior	$r(35)=.40$ $p=.01$	$r(35)=.30$ $p=.04$	$r(35)=.36$ $p=.02$
Child Internalizing Behavior	$r(35)=.30$ $p=.04$	$r(35)=.27$ $p=.06$	$r(35)=.21$ $p=.11$

Regression Analyses

The next step in the analysis was to test either the mediating or moderating hypothesis depending on the results of the bivariate correlations. The bivariate correlations were not found to be significant among marital conflict and the child outcome variables. Due to this, the moderating hypothesis was tested using a regression analysis. The regressions were performed by using a child variable (i.e., *Internalizing* or *Externalizing*) as the dependent variable and entering *Marital Conflict* and a parenting variable, as well as an interaction term created from *Marital Conflict* and the parenting variable used in each equation.

Regression analyses were performed for both internalizing and externalizing in equations with Marital Conflict and each of the parenting variables. First, interaction terms were created for Marital Conflict and Harsh Discipline, Marital Conflict and Authoritarian, and Marital Conflict and Permissive. In the first regression equation, Marital Conflict was entered along with Harsh Discipline and the Marital Conflict/Harsh Discipline interaction term. Internalizing was used as the dependent variable. The second regression equation was the same as the first, except Externalizing was used as the dependent variable. The third regression equation used Internalizing as the dependent variable. In this equation Marital Conflict was entered with Authoritarian and the Marital Conflict/Authoritarian interaction term. The fourth regression was the same as the third, except Externalizing was used as the dependent variable. In the fifth regression equation, Marital Conflict was entered with Permissive and the Marital Conflict/Permissive interaction term. Internalizing was used as the dependent

variable. The sixth regression equation was the same as the fifth, except Externalizing was used as the dependent variable. There was no support found for the moderating hypothesis in any of the regression equations.

Partial Correlations

After the six proposed hypotheses were tested, a post hoc hypothesis was formulated. This hypothesis tested whether or not the two types of parenting variables, specifically, parenting style (i.e., authoritarianism and permissiveness) and harsh discipline, made independent contributions to the prediction of child behavior problems. The post hoc hypothesis was tested by using partial correlations where the relationship between one parenting variable and one child outcome variable was correlated while a second parenting variable was partialled out.

The first partial correlation that was computed included the variables *Harsh Discipline*, *Authoritarian Parenting* and *Externalizing*. The first equation correlated *Harsh Discipline* with *Externalizing*, while *Authoritarian Parenting* was partialled out. The correlation was not significant, $r(34)=.23, p=.19$. The second equation correlated *Authoritarian Parenting* with *Externalizing*, while *Harsh Discipline* was controlled for. This correlation was not significant either, $r(34)=.12, p=.50$.

The next set of equations used the variables *Harsh Discipline*, *Permissive Parenting* and *Externalizing*. The first correlation computed the relation between *Harsh Discipline* and *Externalizing*, while *Permissive Parenting* was controlled for.

This correlation was significant, $r(34)=.36, p=.04$. The next correlation, which looked at the relationship among *Permissive Parenting* and *Externalizing*, while *Harsh Discipline* was controlled for was not significant, $r(34)=.24, p=.18$.

The third set of partial correlation equations used the variables *Harsh Discipline*, *Permissive Parenting* and *Internalizing*. There was no significant correlation when *Permissive Parenting* and *Internalizing* were correlated while *Harsh Discipline* was controlled for, $r(34)=.21, p=.23$, nor when *Harsh Discipline* and *Internalizing* were correlation while *Permissive Parenting* was controlled for, $r(34)=.27, p=.13$.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to determine the relationships among marital conflict, parenting practices, and child behavior outcomes. It was hypothesized that the amount of marital conflict that the parents reported would be positively related to child externalizing and internalizing behavior problems. These hypotheses were not supported by the data. This finding is contradictory to most previous literature on the relationship between marital conflict and child outcomes. Previous literature suggests that marital conflict is associated with negative child outcomes (e.g., Ingoldsby, Shaw, Owens & Winslow, 1999; Katz & Gottman, 1993; Kelly, 2000).

The discrepancy between the current study and previous findings could be due to several factors. One reason could be attributed to the small size of the current sample, which may not have produced an accurate representation of the population. Another reason for the unexpected finding could be due to certain characteristics of the sample. The families that participated in the current study were recruited at PTA meetings and other school functions. Parents who are involved in their children's activities may not be the type of parents to have frequent and intense marital conflicts in the presence of their children. The current sample had a mean score of 5.37 on the marital conflict scale. Considering that the range of values on this scale could go as high as 102, this sample reported a low incidence of marital conflict.

The next set of hypotheses suggested that the presence of marital conflict would be associated with parenting practices. It was thought that marital conflict

would be positively related to undesirable parenting practices, specifically authoritarianism, permissiveness, and the use of harsh discipline. These hypotheses were partially supported by the data. Marital Conflict was found to be related to parents' use of harsh discipline, marginally related to permissive parenting practices and unrelated to authoritarian parenting practices. These results are somewhat consistent with previous research, which indicates that parents who are preoccupied with their own marital conflict have impairments in most dimensions of their parenting practices (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). The meta-analytic study conducted by Krishnakumar and Buehler suggests the area of parenting most affected by inter-parental conflict is the use of harsh discipline. A study which looked at marital conflict and ineffective parenting reported that marital conflict is associated with increased use of harsh discipline as well as decreased levels of parental involvement (Buehler and Gerard, 2002).

In the current study, it was hypothesized that the parents' use of poor parenting practices would be linked to negative child outcomes, specifically, internalizing and externalizing behavior problems. The data support this hypothesis. It was found that parents' use of harsh discipline and permissive parenting practices are related to both child internalizing and externalizing behaviors. The data also showed that authoritarian parenting practices are associated with child externalizing behaviors. Previous literature supports the findings that harsh discipline is related to child behavior problems. A study conducted by Brenner and Fox (1998) concludes that parents who use frequent verbal and corporal punishment have children who exhibit more behavior

problems. The current study adds to the previous research by showing that there is a relationship not only between harsh discipline and both internalizing and externalizing behaviors in children, but also permissive parenting and internalizing and externalizing behaviors.

Due to the lack of a relationship between marital conflict and the child outcome variables, the mediation hypothesis was unable to be tested. Instead, a moderation hypothesis was tested by means of regression analysis. There was no support from the data analyses for the proposed moderating model. This suggests that, in this sample, marital conflict is not related to child behavior outcomes no matter if the parenting practices are negative or supportive.

The post hoc hypothesis, which questioned whether or not the two types of parenting variables make independent contributions to the child behavior outcomes, makes an interesting contribution to the findings. When externalizing child behavior was correlated with harsh discipline and permissive parenting was controlled there was a significant correlation. However, when permissive parenting was correlated with externalizing and harsh discipline was controlled for, permissive parenting was no longer correlated with externalizing. This shows that harsh discipline makes a significant, independent contribution to the prediction of externalizing even after the effect of permissive parenting has been accounted for. It also suggests that the original correlation between permissive parenting and externalizing was spurious and existed because harsh discipline was correlated with both externalizing and permissive parenting.

When a partial correlation was calculated using harsh discipline and authoritarian, there was nothing significant found. This could be explained because the items on the harsh discipline scale overlap with some of the items on the authoritarian scale. Due to this overlap, it makes sense that there were no partial correlations found because the two variables had too much shared variance.

Implications

Although the current study does not show a link between marital conflict and child behavior problems, it still makes important contributions to the study of children and their families. The finding that marital conflict is related to parents' use of harsh discipline could be useful to marriage and family therapists. Making professionals more aware of this relationship could lead to a greater awareness among the public.

All three parenting variables were related to child externalizing problems and two parenting variables were related to child internalizing problems. This information could be beneficial to professionals in family and child related fields. Being aware of the connection between parenting practices and child behavior problems could lead to more efficient diagnosis of a family's problem and it could help in the course of treatment for a troubled child.

Limitations

The current study was limited in several ways. First of all, the size of the sample used in the study could limit the applicability of the results. As mentioned earlier, the sample was smaller than normal and it may be inappropriate to assume that the results are representative of a larger population. Statistical power to detect relations among the variables was also limited. The current study also used group of mostly white, middle class participants. This also limits how the results can be interpreted.

Another limitation of the current study was that the only dimensions of marital conflict that were included were frequency of violence and verbal aggression. Since these families were intact and it was a non-clinical sample, using these dimensions of marital conflict may not have been the best option. Some other dimensions of marital conflict that may have been more appropriate for this sample could have been chronicity, duration of conflicts, intensity of conflicts, and how conflict is typically resolved. Looking at different dimensions of marital conflict might also have yielded different results in terms of how marital conflict affects child behaviors. It has been suggested in previous research that the ways in which marital conflict are resolved predict later internalizing and externalizing behavior in their children (Katz & Gottman, 1993).

Future Research

Different variations of the current study could be used in future research. One way to build on the current study would be to replicate it with a larger, more diverse sample in order to determine if the results would be different. Another variation would be to use parents with children of different ages than those in the current study. This would help researcher to determine how younger or older children are affected by marital conflict and parenting practices. It would be interesting to find out if developmental stages are related to these variables. A longitudinal study on the effects of marital conflict on children might produce fascinating results. One previous study suggests that parental conflict impacts child anxiety and depression four years later (Jekielek, 1998).

Instead of looking at intact families, it may be interesting to conduct a similar study with recently divorced parents. It is likely that parents who have gone through a divorce had more frequent inter-parental conflicts than the parents in the current study. A longitudinal study, which followed adolescents over a two year period, showed that the children whose parents later divorced demonstrated behavior problems that were consistent with those of children whose parents were already divorced (Sun, 2001). It would be interesting to incorporate different variables into future studies dealing with this topic, such as child's age at time of parental divorce, various measures of behavior problems, such as internalizing and externalizing, or characteristics of marital conflict prior to divorce.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
TABLES OF CORRELATIONS

Inter-Domain Correlations

*Marital Conflict and Parenting Variables*Marital Conflict and Parents' Perceptions of Their Permissive Parenting

	Moms' Perspective of Her Permissive Parenting	Dads' Perspective of Moms' Permissive Parenting	Dads' Perspective of His Permissive Parenting	Moms' Perspective of Dads' Permissive Parenting
Marital Conflict	$r(34) = .302$ $p = .04$	$r(34) = .336$ $p = .03$	$r(34) = .124$ $p = .24$	$r(34) = -.175$ $p = .16$

Marital Conflict and Parents' of Their Use of Harsh Discipline

	Moms' Perspective of Her Use of Harsh Discipline	Dads' Perspective of Moms' Use of Harsh Discipline	Dads' Perspective of His Use of Harsh Discipline	Moms' Perspective of Dads' Permissive Parenting
Marital Conflict	$r(37) = .337$ $p = .02$	$r(35) = .247$ $p = .08$	$r(36) = .347$ $p = .01$	$r(34) = .226$ $p = .10$

Marital Conflict and Parents' Perceptions of Their Authoritarian Parenting

	Moms' Perspective of Her Authoritarian Parenting	Dads' Perspective of Moms' Authoritarian Parenting	Dads' Perspective of His Authoritarian Parenting	Moms' Perspective of Dads' Authoritarian Parenting
Marital Conflict	$r(34) = .213$ $p = .11$	$r(34) = .363$ $p = .02$	$r(34) = .231$ $p = .10$	$r(34) = .097$ $p = .29$

Parenting Variables and Child Behavior Variables

Parents' Perceptions of Their Permissive Parenting and Child Externalizing Behaviors

	Moms' Perspective of Her Permissive Parenting	Dads' Perspective of Moms' Permissive Parenting	Dads' Perspective of His Permissive Parenting	Moms' Perspective of Dads' Permissive Parenting
Child Extnlzg Beh.- Moms'Perspec	$r(34) = .336$ $p = .026$	$r(33) = .247$ $p = .083$	$r(33) = .201$ $p < .131$	$r(34) = .218$ $p = .108$
Child Extnlzg Beh.- Dads' Perspec.	$r(32) = -.100$ $p = .29$	$r(32) = .355$ $p = .02$	$r(32) = .406$ $p = .01$	$r(32) = -.098$ $p = .30$

Parents' Perceptions of Their Permissive Parenting and Child Internalizing Behaviors

	Moms' Perspective of Her Permissive Parenting	Dads' Perspective of Moms' Permissive Parenting	Dads' Perspective of His Permissive Parenting	Moms' Perspective of Dads' Permissive Parenting
Child Intlzg Beh.- Moms'Perspec	$r(34) = .420$ $p = .007$	$r(33) = .134$ $p = .228$	$r(33) = -.002$ $p = .496$	$r(34) = .204$ $p < .124$
Child Intlzg Beh.- Dads'Perspec	$r(32) = -.025$ $p = .45$	$r(32) = .389$ $p = .01$	$r(32) = .273$ $p = .07$	$r(32) = -.230$ $p = .10$

 Parents' Use of Harsh Discipline and Child Externalizing Behaviors

	Moms' Perspective of Her Use of Harsh Discipline	Dads' Perspective of Moms' Use of Harsh Discipline	Dads' Perspective of His Use of Harsh Discipline	Moms' Perspective of Dads' Use of Harsh Discipline
Child Extnlzg Beh.- Moms'Perspec.	$r(35) = .583$ $p < .000$	$r(33) = .098$ $p < .294$	$r(34) = .298$ $p < .043$	$r(33) = .380$ $p < .015$
Child Extnlzg Beh.- Dads' Perspec.	$r(33) = .309$ $p = .04$	$r(32) = -.026$ $p = .44$	$r(33) = .234$ $p = .10$	$r(31) = .400$ $p = .01$

 Parents' Use of Harsh Discipline and Child Internalizing Behaviors

	Moms' Perspective of Her Use of Harsh Discipline	Dads' Perspective of Moms' Use of Harsh Discipline	Dads' Perspective of His Use of Harsh Discipline	Moms' Perspective of Dads' Use of Harsh Discipline
Child Intlzg Beh.- Moms'Perspec	$r(35) = .256$ $p < .069$	$r(33) = .194$ $p < .140$	$r(34) = .185$ $p < .147$	$r(33) = .188$ $p < .148$
Child Intlzg Beh.- Dads' Perspec.	$r(33) = .216$ $p = .11$	$r(32) = .312$ $p = .04$	$r(33) = .416$ $p = .01$	$r(31) = .263$ $p = .08$

 Parents' Perceptions of Their Authoritarian Parenting and Child Externalizing Behaviors

	Moms' Perspective of Her Authoritarian Parenting	Dads' Perspective of Moms' Authoritarian Parenting	Dads' Perspective of His Authoritarian Parenting	Moms' Perspective of Dads' Authoritarian Parenting
Child Extnlzg Beh.- Moms'Perspec	$r(34) = .497$ $p = .00$	$r(33) = .145$ $p = .21$	$r(33) = .256$ $p = .08$	$r(34) = .382$ $p = .01$

Child Extnlzg Beh.- Dads' Perspec.	r(32) = .225 p= .11	r(32) = .322 p= .04	r(32) = .409 p= .01	r(32) = .219 p= .11
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Parents' Perceptions of Their Authoritarian Parenting and Child Internalizing Behaviors

	Moms' Perspective of Her Authoritarian Parenting	Dads' Perspective of Moms' Authoritarian Parenting	Dads' Perspective of His Authoritarian Parenting	Moms' Perspective of Dads' Authoritarian Parenting
Child Intlzg Beh.- Moms'Perspec	r(34) = .336 p< .026	r(33) = .009 p< .481	r(33) = .153 p< .198	r(34) = .367 p< .016
Child Intlzg Beh.- Dads' Perspec.	r(32) = .126 p= .25	r(32) = .233 p= .10	r(32) = .394 p= .01	r(32) = .421 p= .01

Marital Conflict and Child Outcome Variables

Marital Conflict and Child Externalizing Behaviors

	Child Externalizing Behavior –Moms' Perspective	Child Externalizing Behavior-Dads' Perspective
Marital Conflict	r(35) = .078 p= .33	r(33) = .096 p= .30

Marital Conflict and Child Internalizing Behaviors

	Child Internalizing Behavior –Moms' Perspective	Child Internalizing Behavior-Dads' Perspective
Marital Conflict	r(35) = .027 p= .44	r(33) = .131 p= .23

Intra-Domain Correlations

Marital Conflict Variables

	Mom to Dad directed MC- Moms' Perspec.	Mom to Dad directed MC- Dads' Perspec	Dad to Mom directed MC- Moms' Perspec.
Mom to Dad directed MC- Moms' Perspec.			
Mom to Dad directed MC- Dads' Perspec.	$r(35) = .603$ $p = .00$		
Dad to Mom directed MC- Moms' Perspec.	$r(35) = .603$ $p = .00$	$r(36) = 1.000$ $p = .00$	
Dad to Mom directed MC- Dads' Perspec.	$r(33) = .486$ $p = .00$	$r(34) = .706$ $p = .00$	$r(34) = .706$ $p = .00$

Parenting Variables

Authoritarian

	Moms' perception of her authoritarian parenting towards child	Dads' perception of Moms' authoritarian parenting towards child	Dads' perception of his authoritarian parenting towards child
Moms' perception of her authoritarian parenting towards child			
Dads' perception of Moms'	$r(33) = .465$ $p = .00$		

authoritarian parenting towards child			
Dads' perception of his authoritarian parenting towards child	$r(33) = .430$ $p = .01$	$r(34) = .802$ $p = .00$	
Moms' perception of Dads' authoritarian parenting towards child	$r(35) = .681$ $p = .00$	$r(33) = .529$ $p = .00$	$r(33) = .686$ $p = .00$

 Permissive

	Moms' perception of her Permissive parenting towards child	Dads' perception of Moms' Permissive parenting towards child	Dads' perception of his Permissive parenting towards child
Moms' perception of her Permissive parenting towards child			
Dads' perception of Moms' Permissive parenting towards child	$r(33) = .243$ $p = .09$		
Dads' perception of his Permissive parenting towards child	$r(33) = .291$ $p = .05$	$r(34) = .536$ $p = .00$	
Moms' perception of Dads' Permissive parenting towards child	$r(35) = .701$ $p = .00$	$r(33) = -.136$ $p = .23$	$r(33) = .277$ $p = .06$

Harsh Discipline			
	Moms' perception of her use of harsh discipline	Dads' perception of Moms' use of harsh discipline	Dads' perception of his use of harsh discipline
Moms' perception of her use of harsh discipline			
Dads' perception of Moms' use of harsh discipline	$r(35) = .491$ $p = .00$		
Dads' perception of his use of harsh discipline	$r(36) = .637$ $p = .00$	$r(35) = .806$ $p = .00$	
Moms' perception of Dads' use of harsh discipline	$r(35) = .785$ $p = .00$	$r(33) = .568$ $p = .00$	$r(34) = .751$ $p = .00$

Permissive Parenting and Authoritarian Parenting				
	Moms' perception of her Permissive parenting towards child	Dads' perception of Moms' Permissive parenting towards child	Dads' perception of his Permissive parenting towards child	Moms' perception of Dads' Permissive parenting towards child
Moms' perception of her authoritarian parenting towards child	$r(35) = .301$ $p = .04$	$r(33) = .262$ $p = .07$	$r(33) = .264$ $p = .07$	$r(35) = .151$ $p = .19$
Dads' perception of Moms' authoritarian parenting towards child	$r(33) = .098$ $p = .25$	$r(34) = .586$ $p = .00$	$r(34) = .564$ $p = .00$	$r(33) = -.145$ $p = .21$
Dads' perception of his authoritarian parenting towards child	$r(33) = .058$ $p = .38$	$r(34) = .778$ $p = .00$	$r(34) = .420$ $p = .01$	$r(33) = -.178$ $p = .16$

authoritarian parenting towards child				
Moms' perception of Dads' authoritarian parenting towards child	$r(35) = .187$ $p = .14$	$r(33) = .529$ $p = .00$	$r(33) = .074$ $p = .34$	$r(35) = -.059$ $p = .37$

Permissive Parenting and Parents' use of Harsh Discipline

	Moms' perception of her use of harsh discipline	Dads' perception of Moms' use of harsh discipline	Dads' perception of his use of harsh discipline	Moms' perception of Dads' use of harsh discipline
Moms' perception of her Permissive parenting towards child	$r(34) = .086$ $p = .31$	$r(32) = .004$ $p = .49$	$r(33) = .000$ $p = .55$	$r(32) = -.108$ $p = .28$
Dads' perception of Moms' Permissive parenting towards child	$r(34) = .291$ $p = .05$	$r(33) = .492$ $p = .00$	$r(34) = .537$ $p = .00$	$r(32) = .225$ $p = .11$
Dads' perception of his Permissive parenting towards child	$r(34) = .258$ $p = .07$	$r(33) = .030$ $p = .43$	$r(34) = .191$ $p = .14$	$r(32) = .235$ $p = .10$
Moms' perception of Dads' Permissive parenting towards child	$r(34) = -.110$ $p = .27$	$r(32) = -.285$ $p = .06$	$r(33) = -.266$ $p = .07$	$r(32) = -.267$ $p = .07$

Parents' use of Harsh Discipline and Authoritarian Parenting

	Moms' perception of her use of harsh discipline	Dads' perception of Moms' use of harsh discipline	Dads' perception of his use of harsh discipline	Moms' perception of Dads' use of harsh discipline
Moms' perception of her authoritarian parenting towards child	$r(34) = .604$ $p = .00$	$r(32) = .274$ $p = .06$	$r(33) = .331$ $p = .03$	$r(32) = .423$ $p = .01$
Dads' perception of Moms' authoritarian parenting towards child	$r(34) = .529$ $p = .00$	$r(33) = .594$ $p = .00$	$r(34) = .559$ $p = .00$	$r(32) = .473$ $p = .00$
Dads' perception of his authoritarian parenting towards child	$r(34) = .524$ $p = .00$	$r(32) = .602$ $p = .00$	$r(33) = .644$ $p = .00$	$r(32) = .429$ $p = .00$
Moms' perception of Dads' authoritarian parenting towards child	$r(34) = .470$ $p = .00$	$r(33) = .692$ $p = .00$	$r(34) = .619$ $p = .00$	$r(32) = .439$ $p = .00$

Child Behavior Variables

Internalizing and Externalizing

	Child externalizing behaviors- Moms' perspective	Child internalizing behaviors- Dads' perspective
Child externalizing behaviors- Dads' perspective	$r(37) = .420$ $p = .00$	$r(37) = .622$ $p = .00$
Child internalizing behaviors- Moms' perspective	$r(39) = .709$ $p = .00$	$r(37) = .247$ $p = .07$

APPENDIX B
CONFLICT TACTICS SCALE

Conflict Tactics Scale

Sex of Child: Male Female (Circle) Mother Father (Circle)

Use the following scale for your answer, and circle the number that best fits each time:

- 0=never,
 1=less than once a month,
 2=once a month,
 3=2-3 times a month,
 4=once a week,
 5=2-3 times a week,
 6=almost every day

This page is for things you may have done to your child. First, go through the items and answer for this past year (last 12 months). Then, think about how often these things happened before a year ago.

Ago	Past Year	Before a Year
1. Tried to discuss an issue calmly	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
2. Did discuss an issue calmly	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
3. Got information to back up your side of things	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
4. Brought in or tried to bring in someone to help settle things	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
5. Argued heatedly but didn't yell	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
6. Yelled, insulted or swore at your child	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
7. Sulked or refused to talk about it	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
8. Stomped out of the room or house	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
9. Threw, smashed, hit or kicked something	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
10. Threatened to throw something at your child	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
11. Threw something at your child	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
12. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved your child	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
13. Threatened to spank your child	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
14. Spanked your child	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
15. Spanked your child with something	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
16. Threatened to hit your child	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
17. Hit or tried to hit your child	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
18. Hit or tried to hit your child with something	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
19. Threatened to beat up your child	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
20. Beat up your child	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6

This page is for things you may have done to your husband/wife. First, go through and answer for this past year (last 12 months). Then, think about how often these things happened before a year ago.

	Past Year	Before a Year Ago
1. Tried to discuss an issue calmly	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
2. Did discuss an issue calmly	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
3. Got information to back up your side of things	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
4. Brought in or tried to bring in someone to help settle things	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
5. Argued heatedly but didn't yell		
6. Yelled, insulted or swore at your spouse	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
7. Sulked or refused to talk about it	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
8. Stomped out of the room or house	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
9. Threw, smashed, hit or kicked something	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
10. Threatened to throw something at your spouse	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
11. Threw something at your spouse	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
12. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved your spouse	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
13. Threatened to hit your spouse	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
14. Hit or tried to hit your spouse	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
15. Hit or tried to hit your spouse with something	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
16. Threatened to beat up your spouse	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6
17. Beat up your spouse	0 1 2 3 4 5 6	0 1 2 3 4 5 6

APPENDIX C
PARENTING PRACTICES QUESTIONNAIRE

Parenting Practices Questionnaire

Sex of Child: Male Female (Circle) Mother Father (Circle)

1=Never

2=Once in awhile

3=About Half the time

4=Very often

5=Always

1. I encourage our child to talk about the child's troubles
2. I guide our child by punishment more than by reason *
3. I know the name of our child's friends
4. I find it difficult to discipline our child **
5. I give praise when our child is good
6. I spank when our child is disobedient *
7. I joke and play with our child
8. I withhold scolding and/or criticism even when our child acts contrary to our wishes **
9. I show sympathy when our child is hurt or frustrated
10. I punish by taking privileges away from our child with little if any explanation *
11. I spoil our child **
12. I give comfort and understanding when our child is upset
13. I yell or shout when our child misbehaves *
14. I am easy going and relaxed with our child **
15. I allow our child to annoy someone else **
16. I tell our child our expectations regarding behavior before the child engages in an activity
17. I scold and criticize our child *
18. I show patience with our child
19. I grab our child when being disobedient *
20. I state punishments to our child and do not actually do them **
21. I am responsive to our child's feelings or needs
22. I allow our child to give input into family rules
23. I argue with our child *
24. I appear confident about parenting abilities **
25. I give our child reasons why rules should be obeyed
26. I appear to be more concerned with own feelings than with child's feelings *
27. I tell our child that we appreciate what the child tries or accomplishes
28. I punish by putting our child off somewhere alone with little if any explanation *
29. I help our child to understand the impact of behavior by encouraging our child to talk about the consequences of own actions
30. I am afraid that disciplining our child for misbehavior will cause the child to not like his/her parents **
31. I take our child's desires into account before asking the child to do something
32. I explode in anger towards the child *
33. I am aware of problems or concerns about our child in school
34. I threaten our child with punishment more often than by actually giving it **
35. I express affection by hugging, kissing, and holding our child
36. I ignore our child's misbehavior **
37. I use physical punishment as a way of disciplining our child *

38. I carry out discipline after our child misbehaves
39. I apologize to our child when making a mistake in parenting
40. I tell our child what to do *
41. I give into our child when the child causes a commotion about something **
42. I talk it over with our child when the child misbehaves
43. I slap our child when the child misbehaves *
44. I disagree with our child *
45. I allow our child to interrupt others **
46. I have warm and intimate times together with our child
47. When two children are fighting, I discipline the children first and ask questions later *
48. I encourage our child to freely express him/herself even when disagreeing with parents
49. I bribe our child with rewards to bring about compliance **
50. I scold or criticize when our child's behavior doesn't meet our expectations *
51. I show respect for our child's opinions by encouraging our child to express them
52. I set strict well established rules for our child *
53. I explain to our child how we feel about the child's good and bad behavior
54. I use threats as punishment with little or no justification *
55. I take into account our child's preferences in making plans for the family
56. When our child asks why he/she has to conform, I state: because I said so, or I am your parent and I want you to *
57. I appear unsure on how to solve our child's misbehavior **
58. I explain the consequences of the child's misbehavior
59. I demand that our child does things *
60. I channel our child's misbehavior into a more acceptable activity
61. I shove our child when the child is disobedient *
62. I emphasize reasons for rules

Note: Items marked (*) make up the authoritarian scale. Items marked (**) make up the Permissive scale.

APPENDIX D
CHILD BEHAVIOR CHECKLIST

Child Behavior Checklist

Below is a list of items that describe children. For each item that describes your child now or within the past 6 months, please circle the 2 if the item is very true or often true of your child. Circle the 1 if the item is somewhat or sometimes true of your child. If the item is not true of your child, circle the 0. Please answer all items as well as you can, even if some do not seem to apply to your child.

0= Not true (as far as you know) 1= Somewhat or sometimes true 2= Very true or often true

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Acts too young for his/her age |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Allergy (describe) _____ |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Argues a lot |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Asthma |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Behaves like opposite sex |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Bowel movements outside toilet |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Bragging, boasting |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Can't concentrate, can't pay attention for long |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Can't get his/her mind off certain thoughts; obsessions (describe)_____ |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Can't sit still, restless or hyperactive |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Clings to adults or too dependent |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Complains of loneliness |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Confused or seems to be in a fog |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Cries a lot |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Cruel to animals |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Cruelty, bullying, or meanness to others |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Day-dreams or gets lost in his/her thoughts |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Deliberately harms self or attempts suicide |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Demands a lot of attention |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Destroys his/her own things |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Destroys things belonging to his/her family or other children |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Disobedient at home |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Disobedient at school |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Doesn't eat well |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Doesn't get along with other children |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Doesn't seem to feel guilty after misbehaving |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Easily jealous |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Eats or drinks things that are not food (describe)_____ |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Fears certain animals, situations or places other than school (describe)_____ |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Fears going to school |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Fears he/she might think or do something bad |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Feels he/she has to be perfect |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Feels or complains that no one loves him/her |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Feels other are out to get him/her |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Feels worthless or inferior |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Gets hurt a lot, accident-prone |
| 0 | 1 | 2 | Gets in many fights |

- 0 1 2 Gets teased a lot
- 0 1 2 Hangs around with children who get in trouble
- 0 1 2 Hears things that aren't there (describe) _____
- 0 1 2 Impulsive or acts without thinking
- 0 1 2 Likes to be alone
- 0 1 2 Lying or cheating
- 0 1 2 Bites fingernails
- 0 1 2 Nervous, highstrung, or tense
- 0 1 2 Nervous movements or twitching (describe) _____
- 0 1 2 Nightmares
- 0 1 2 Not liked by other children
- 0 1 2 Constipated, doesn't move bowels
- 0 1 2 Too fearful or anxious
- 0 1 2 Feels dizzy
- 0 1 2 Feels too guilty
- 0 1 2 Overeating
- 0 1 2 Overtired
- 0 1 2 Overweight
- Physical problems without know medical cause:
- 0 1 2 A. Aches or pains
- 0 1 2 B. Headaches
- 0 1 2 C. Nausea, feels sick
- 0 1 2 D. Problems with eyes (describe) _____
- 0 1 2 E. Rashes or other skin problems
- 0 1 2 F. Stomachaches or cramps
- 0 1 2 G. Vomiting, throwing up
- 0 1 2 H. Other (describe) _____
- 0 1 2 Physically attacks people
- 0 1 2 Picks nose, skin, or other parts of the body (describe) _____
- 0 1 2 Plays with own sex parts in public
- 0 1 2 Plays with own sex parts too much
- 0 1 2 Poor school work
- 0 1 2 Poorly coordinated or clumsy
- 0 1 2 Prefers playing with older children
- 0 1 2 Prefers playing with younger children
- 0 1 2 Refuses to talk
- 0 1 2 Repeats certain acts over and over; compulsions (describe) _____
- 0 1 2 Runs away from home
- 0 1 2 Screams a lot
- 0 1 2 Secretive, keeps things to self
- 0 1 2 Sees things that aren't there (describe) _____
- 0 1 2 Self conscious or easily embarrassed
- 0 1 2 Sets fires
- 0 1 2 Sexual problems (describe) _____
- 0 1 2 Showing off or clowning
- 0 1 2 Shy or timid
- 0 1 2 Sleeps less than most children
- 0 1 2 Sleeps more than most children during day and/or night (describe) _____
- 0 1 2 Smears or plays with bowel movements
- 0 1 2 Speech problem (describe) _____

- 0 1 2 Stares blankly
- 0 1 2 Steals at home
- 0 1 2 Steals outside the home
- 0 1 2 Stores up things he/she doesn't need (describe)_____
- 0 1 2 Strange behavior (describe)_____
- 0 1 2 Strange ideas (describe)_____
- 0 1 2 Stubborn, sullen, or irritable
- 0 1 2 Sulks a lot
- 0 1 2 Suspicious
- 0 1 2 Swearing or obscene language
- 0 1 2 Talks about killing self
- 0 1 2 Talks or walks in sleep (describe)_____
- 0 1 2 Talks too much
- 0 1 2 Teases a lot
- 0 1 2 Temper tantrums or hot temper
- 0 1 2 Thinks about sex too much
- 0 1 2 Threatens people
- 0 1 2 Thumb sucking
- 0 1 2 Too concerned with neatness or cleanliness
- 0 1 2 Trouble sleeping (describe)_____
- 0 1 2 Truancy, skips school
- 0 1 2 Underactive, slow moving, or lacks energy
- 0 1 2 Unhappy, sad or depressed
- 0 1 2 Unusually loud
- 0 1 2 Uses alcohol or drugs (describe) _____
- 0 1 2 Vandalism
- 0 1 2 Wets self during the day
- 0 1 2 Wets the bed
- 0 1 2 Whining
- 0 1 2 Wishes to be of opposite sex
- 0 1 2 Withdrawn, doesn't get involved with others
- 0 1 2 Worrying
- Please write in any problems that your child has there were not listed above_____

APPENDIX E
IRB APPROVAL FORM

Oklahoma State University
Institutional Review Board

Protocol Expires: 5/27/03

Date: Thursday, May 30, 2002

IRB Application No: HE0256

Proposal Title: DIRECT AND INDIRECT EFFECTS OF MARITAL CONFLICT ON CHILD OUTCOMES

Principal
Investigator(s):

Kara L. Howze
5211 W. 1st Ave
Stillwater, OK 74074

Amanda Harrist
333 C HES
Stillwater, OK 74078

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Approval Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

Dear PI :

Your IRB application referenced above has been approved for one calendar year. Please make note of the expiration date indicated above. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Sharon Bacher, the Executive Secretary to the IRB, in 203 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, sbacher@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA 2

Kara L. Howze

Candidate for the Degree of
Master of Science

Thesis: THE LINK BETWEEN MARITAL CONFLICT AND
CHILD BEHAVIOR OUTCOMES

Major Field: Family Relations and Child Development

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Houston, Texas, On June 25, 1978, the daughter of Terry and Mary Jane Plunk.

Education: Graduated from Bartlesville High School, Bartlesville, Oklahoma in May 1996; received a Bachelor of Science degree in Family Relations and Child Development from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December 2000. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a major in Family Relations and Child Development at Oklahoma State University in December 2002.

Experience: Employed as a child care provider; Kids Under Construction, Stillwater, Oklahoma, 1999 to 2001. Employed by Oklahoma State University, Department of Human Development and Family Science as a graduate research assistant; Oklahoma State University, Department of Human Development and Family Science, 2001 to 2002.