

## ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: EFFECTS OF DIFFERENCES IN PARENTING STYLES ON  
COUPLE DISTRESS AND CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF  
FAMILY SUPPORT

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Research has been conducted on different aspects of parenting and how it affects both the couple's relationship and the children involved. The literature suggests that an authoritative parenting style is most optimal for children's outcomes contributing to better school achievement, adjustment, and self-efficacy, and proposes that the quality of the parents' couple relationship affects the experiences of the child(ren). The current study, utilizing a clinical sample of 37 families, explored the relationship between differences in parenting styles and the child's perception of family support and the differences in parenting styles and the couple's distress level. No significant relationships were found among differences in parenting styles and a child's perception of family support. One significant relationship was found among differences in the permissive parenting style and mother's level of relationship distress and father's level of relationship distress. The possible meanings of these findings for this sample are discussed.

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AND CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF FAMILY SUPPORT

by

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## Chapter I: Introduction

### Statement of the Problem

There have been a plethora of studies conducted on different aspects of parenting and how it affects both the parenting couple's relationship and the children involved. Baumrind (1966) identified and defined three different parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. According to Baumrind, authoritarian parents participate in interactions with their children characterized by low warmth and utilize a strict and harsh discipline style. Authoritative parents participate in interactions with their children characterized by high warmth and utilize non-punitive discipline in which they share reasoning behind rules with their children. Permissive parents participate in interactions with their children characterized by high acceptance and utilize low parental supervision, often consulting with children about how discipline should be exercised. It has been speculated that the choice of parenting style may guide and explain parenting behavior. Parenting behavior includes emotional, behavioral, and psychological dimensions.

Cummings, Davies, and Campbell (2000) defined two dimensions of parenting behavior: (1) the quality of the *emotional relationships* (e.g., acceptance, warmth, and nurturance) between parents and children, and (2) the degree of *control* utilized, including both behavioral (e.g., discipline practices, child management strategies) and psychological (e.g., control through guilt) dimensions. Parents who utilize an authoritative parenting style will have more accepting and nurturing interactions with their children while using a lesser degree of control with their children, whereas parents who utilize an authoritarian parenting style will have less accepting and nurturing interactions with their children while using a higher degree of control. Parents who utilize a permissive parenting style may have either

more or less accepting and nurturing interactions with their children while using a lesser degree of control with their children. Both the quality of the emotional relationships between parents and children and the degree of control utilized have been addressed in studies that evaluate parenting styles. For example, Maccoby and Martin (1983) found that children achieve the most positive outcomes when reared by parents exhibiting an authoritative parenting style. This finding has been replicated in numerous subsequent studies (Baumrind, 1991; Dornbusch, Ritter, Liederman, Roberts & Fralieg, 1987; Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, & Dornbusch, 1991), with parenting styles assessed from one parent rather than both parents together (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000; Simons & Conger, 2007), or only parents with similar parenting styles (omitting those with conflicting parenting styles) (Baumrind, 1973; Simons & Conger, 2007), or averaging the styles of the two parents (Steinberg et. al., 1989; Steinberg et. al., 1991; Simons & Conger, 2007). Thus the research has typically focused on parents who exhibit similar parenting styles (e.g., both exhibit authoritative parenting styles) or has examined one parent and his/her parenting style (e.g., mother is authoritarian). Consequently, there is a lack of research that examines both parents' parenting styles, including situations in which parents do not share the same style, such as an authoritative mother and a permissive father, or an authoritarian father and an authoritarian mother.

Shamir, Schudlich, and Cummings (2001) stated that the quality of the parental relationship affects the experiences of the child(ren) being parented, because children are continuously exposed to marital interactions, whether positive or negative. It could be posited

that parents who do not share the same parenting style may experience conflict in their interactions around parenting beliefs, and these differences may spill into their couple relationship. The conflict might arise from disagreements on how to parent in general, or it might erupt in specific situations. For example, an authoritarian parent and a permissive parent may find it hard to agree on an appropriate punishment in general, or they might disagree on the consequences for specific behaviors such as a child's lying or missing curfew. These parenting disagreements may lead to discord in their relationship, and witnessing these parental struggles may influence how the child(ren) perceive the family.

According to Davies and Cummings (1994), couple conflict affects the children's sense of security about family functioning. Therefore, a difference in parenting styles may have an effect on the child's perception of the family. Conflict related to parenting style may cause children to worry: "Is my family falling apart? Are my parents getting divorced? Is my family available to meet my needs? Are we happy together?" Additionally, Cummings and Davies (1996) hypothesized that interparental conflict might influence children's views of multiple family relationships. Specifically, it may affect how the child views his/her mother-child relationship, his/her father-child relationship, and/or how he/she views him/herself in the context of the parents' relationship.

It is important to study the impact of differing parenting styles on the couple relationship and whether these differences affect the children's perceptions of their families. Exploring these relationships may increase understanding of the influence of parenting practices on children's perceptions of support (e.g., I can go to my family for support; I wish my family were different.). However, little is known about the degree to which differences between parents' parenting styles contribute to distress in the parents' relationship and

whether this distress might be associated with children's views of their families as negative and/or non-supportive. Additionally, research supports how different parenting styles may contribute to different child outcomes. However, what is unclear is how marital conflict due to parents having differing parenting styles affects children's perceptions of the family. Therefore, the focus of this study was to explore these relationships.

## **Chapter II: Theoretical Framework**

### **Bowen Family Systems Theory**

Bowen's Family Systems Theory can be used to examine the impact of differing parenting styles on children's perceptions of family support, as well as couple's relationship satisfaction and in turn how this level of satisfaction affects children's perceptions of family support. Bowen Family Systems Theory proposes that there is an "order and predictability to human family relationships" (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 4). This theory aims to explain how families operate through an emotional interdependence. In other words, families are made up of semi-autonomous members who influence one another. Through working with and observing family interactions, Bowen discovered the reciprocal nature of family relationships.

The idea of the reciprocal nature of family relationships is useful when conceptualizing a couple whose members have differing parenting styles. For example, one parent may fall into the disciplinarian role while the other attempts to balance the strict style of that parent by reciprocating in a more permissive manner, or one parent may be dominant while the other is more passive. This idea of reciprocal relationships helps one understand parents who may have differing and perhaps opposing parenting styles. With differing parenting styles, it is important to study the implications for the children that arise from these differences.

Bowen Family Systems Theory is rooted in eight fundamental concepts: differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position, emotional cutoff, and societal emotional process (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). For the purposes of this study, we will focus on

four of these concepts: differentiation of self, triangles, nuclear family emotional process, and family projection process.

### **Differentiation of Self**

The concept of differentiation of self is used to explain that within the family's emotional unit, individuals who make up the family have the ability to differentiate themselves from other members. In other words, there is variability in cohesion, altruism, and cooperativeness among varied families and within the same family (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowen and colleagues explain:

The higher the level of differentiation of people in a family or other social group, the more they can cooperate, look out for one another's welfare, and stay in adequate contact during stressful as well as calm periods. The lower the level of differentiation, the more likely the family, when stressed, will regress to selfish, aggressive, and avoidance behaviors; cohesiveness, altruism, and cooperativeness will break down. (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 93)

Differentiation of self is important in families because the more differentiated an individual is, the more the individual is able to be autonomous in his/her functioning. If a family consisting of highly differentiated individuals is experiencing conflict, family members will be able to help each other and not be completely engulfed in the chaos. Furthermore, if a child is able to differentiate from his/her family, his/her view of himself/herself is not created by an anxiety and reaction to others (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). An individual with lower differentiation of self will lose his/her individuality, and his/her welfare will be dependent upon the family's overall functioning.

Families experiencing high levels of conflict due to couple distress will likely have lower levels of differentiation. Because parents who are more reactive are less differentiated, they are more likely to have children who learn these patterns of interaction and have lower levels of differentiation as well. Therefore, a distressed couple is more likely to have less

differentiated children, which means they are less likely to feel supported by their family. Instead, these children may view their families as less cohesive and more selfish.

### **Triangles**

Triangles are a three-person relationship system; families are made up of a system of interlocking triangles (Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Triangles occur when anxiety arises within a dyad. In order to alleviate the anxiety, a third person is pulled into the tension of the dyad, thus creating a triangle. Triangles are created and maintained in many ways. When parents are experiencing conflict with each other, one parent may triangulate a child through complaints and criticisms about the other parent. According to Bowen, a child could be triangulated into his/her parents' conflict just by being in earshot of their arguments; the problem spills over onto him/her (Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

When parents are experiencing couple distress, it is common for them to triangulate their children into their couple conflict, or for the child, in an attempt to alleviate the tension, to triangulate him/herself into the couple conflict. Children who feel they have to support one parent at the expense of the other, or create conflict to distract their parents from arguing, may feel their role is more of a supporter than one who is being supported.

### **Nuclear Family Emotional System**

The concept of the nuclear family emotional system describes three basic relationship patterns that occur in families. Undifferentiation between family members (i.e. families that lack autonomy in emotional functioning) causes these archetypes of emotional functioning, and it is intensified by anxiety (Kerr & Bowen, 1988, p. 163). The anxiety may be expressed in three categories of dysfunction, which are (1) dysfunction in a spouse, (2) marital conflict, and (3) impairment in one or more children.

***Dysfunction in one spouse:*** In this relationship pattern, one spouse pressures the other to do certain things and the spouse obliges. The couple continues to interact with one spouse yielding more self-control. Eventually, as family tension increases, the subordinate spouse experiences increased levels of anxiety. (Kerr, 2003)

This category of dysfunction is a clear example of how a couple with differing parenting styles may result in having lower levels of couple satisfaction. If one partner takes on the “dysfunction” this can affect the couple relationship, as well as the parent-child relationship. Dysfunction in a spouse can present itself with mental and/or physical symptomology.

***Marital conflict:*** In this relationship pattern family strains increase and the couple experiences increased anxiety. Eventually, the one or both members of the couple externalizes his/her anxiety onto their relationship (Kerr, 2003).

This category of dysfunction also highlights how differing parenting styles may lend themselves to lower levels of couple satisfaction. If a couple is not agreeing on how to parent a child or one partner thinks that his/her way of parenting is the better choice, the couple conflict caused by these differences in opinion will negatively affect the couple’s relationship satisfaction.

***Impairment of one or more children:*** In this relationship pattern the couple focuses their anxiety on their child(ren). The couple can either have a very positive or negative view of the child(ren) and this causes great worry. The child(ren) notices this increased attention and becomes more reactive to the parents’ wants, views, and expectations (Kerr, 2003).

This category of dysfunction highlights how differing parenting styles may affect the child’s functioning and how he/she perceives the family. If a parent feels anxious because he/she does not believe in the other parent’s parenting abilities, and/or a parent is experiencing anxiety due to low couple satisfaction, the parent may focus this anxiety on the



child. This extreme focus on the child can be overly positive (bordering on fusion), or it can be overly negative (projecting negative feelings towards spouse onto the child).

### **Family Projection Process**

The family projection process is a theoretical assumption of what occurs within a family that can influence the child. The family projection process describes the primary way parents transmit their emotional problems to their children. This concept states that children inherit both positive and negative traits through the relationship and interactions with their parents. However, it is postulated that the traits that will most affect their lives are an increase in attention and approval, feeling responsible for making other people happy or thinking other people are responsible for their own happiness, and acting impulsively to decrease anxiety (Kerr, 2003).

In a family where there is high conflict and low couple satisfaction, a child could likely be triangulated into the parent's couple conflict via the parents projecting their emotional needs onto the child. This will leave the child feeling like he/she must be there emotionally and physically to support one or both parents, thus leaving the child feeling unsupported him or herself.

### **Chapter III: Review of Literature**

#### **Parenting Styles**

There has been a vast amount of research conducted on the effects of the authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles. Takeuchi and Takeuchi (2008) found that authoritarian parenting leads to a competitive environment in which parents discourage spontaneity and support within the parent-child relationship decreases. In contrast, authoritative parenting was found to lead to a cooperative environment in which parents encourage spontaneity and support within the parent-child relationship increases.

Simmons and Conger (2007) looked at the differences between mothers and fathers with regard to authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent, and uninvolved parenting styles. Adolescents self-reports of parents' responsiveness and demandingness as well as observational data of parents' responsiveness and demandingness were used to classify parents into different parenting typologies (in contrast to using median-splits on measures). Parents who were high on both responsiveness and demandingness were classified as authoritative, whereas those low on these two dimensions of parenting were considered uninvolved. Parents who were low on responsiveness but high on demandingness were defined as authoritarian and parents who were high on responsiveness but low on demandingness were labeled indulgent. This study highlighted the deficits in research regarding how differences in parenting styles affect the family. The researchers examined 16 possible parenting style combinations, such as two authoritative parents, mother authoritative and father authoritarian, mother authoritative parent and father permissive, etc. This study was able to form these 16 possible parenting style combinations because they had 451 families to categorize. Results indicated that the most common form of family parenting

style was authoritative and the family parenting styles which are associated with the best results (lower levels of depression and delinquency) for children are either two authoritative parents or an authoritative parent paired with an indulgent one. The worst child outcomes are associated with combinations of parenting styles that include an uninvolved mother paired with either an indulgent or an uninvolved father. However, Simmons and Conger (2007) did not discuss how differences in parenting styles between mother and father might affect the couple relationship, or how children viewed the support they received based on parenting similarities or differences.

Milevsky, Schlechter, Klem, and Kehl (2008) examined patterns of maternal and paternal parenting styles among parents of adolescents, and explored adolescent well-being as a function of parenting style. Parenting styles were assessed for maternal and paternal styles separately using the acceptance/involvement and the strictness/supervision subscales of the Authoritative Parenting Measure (Steinberg et al., 1994). To assess parenting styles, the sample was divided into four parenting style groups based on a median split of acceptance/involvement and strictness/supervision scores. This study used a categorical approach of parenting practices, as opposed to a dimensional approach, to replicate the parenting practices proposed by Baumrind (1971). Authoritative parents were those scoring above average on both the acceptance/involvement and strictness/supervision scales, authoritarian parents were those scoring below average on the acceptance/involvement subscale and above average on the strictness/supervision subscale, permissive parents were those scoring above average on the acceptance/involvement subscale and below average on the strictness/supervision subscale, and neglectful parents were those scoring below average on both the acceptance/involvement and strictness/supervision scales.

This categorization was followed separately for maternal and paternal styles. In this study, 272 students in grades 9 and 11 from a public high school completed the Authoritative Parenting Measure, Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, and the Center for Epidemiology Studies Short Depression Scale. Participants with either both parents authoritative or only the mother authoritative reported higher well-being than participants with no authoritative parent. Participants without a permissive parent or with a permissive mother scored lower on self-esteem than participants with only a permissive father. These findings also support the idea that the parenting style that yields the most optimal outcomes for children is authoritative. Children with authoritative parents exhibited higher self-esteem, higher life satisfaction, and lower depression levels than children with no authoritative parents. Again, Milevsky et al. (2008) neglected to examine how a difference in parenting styles affects the couple relationship.

Research supports the idea that marital conflict has an impact on the child's perception of the family (Cummings, Davies, & Simpson, 1994; Erel & Burman, 1995); Shamir, Schudlich, & Cummings, 2001; Rinaldi & Howe, 2003). Very little is known empirically about how children experience their families in such situations. This study focuses on this gap in research by examining the relationships between marital conflict and children's perception of family support.

### **Couple Conflict and Its Impact on Children**

There is research suggesting that marital conflict can influence children's perceptions of the family, including the children's view of family and marital relationships. Shamir, Schudlich, and Cummings (2001) explored whether couple conflict was associated with children's representations of family relationships, including parent-child and couple

relationships. The study was comprised of 47 couples with a child between the ages of 5 and 8. Parents were first asked to privately complete a series of questionnaires, including the Conflict and Problem-Solving Scales, O'Leary Porter Scale, and the parent-report version of the Children Report on the Parents Behavior Inventory. One parent then brought the child into the laboratory to complete the Family Stories Task which consisted of extensive assessment of children's representations of multiple family systems. Shamir et al. (2001) found that for both parents, negative couple conflict strategies were linked with negative child representations of family relationships in the mother-child, father-child, marital, and triadic domains.

Additionally, Cummings, Davies, and Simpson (1994) examined the role of children's perceptions and appraisals of the impact of couple conflict. Their study examined 51 children from intact families ranging in age from 9 to 12 years, who completed a questionnaire assessing their perceptions of marital conflict. After filling out the questionnaire, the children viewed a video of a conflict between a man and a woman and were interviewed regarding their reactions. Additionally, the children completed the Children's Perception of Interparental Conflict Scale (CPIC; Grych et al., 1992). Findings suggested that lower appraisals of coping efficacy and perceptions of threat posed by marital conflict predicted negative adjustment in boys, whereas appraisals of self-blame were linked with internalizing problems for girls.

Rinaldi and Howe (2003) examined the perceptions of constructive and destructive conflict within and across family subsystems. The researchers found support for the "Spillover Hypothesis" (Engfer, 1988). This hypothesis suggests that marital and parent-child relations are highly interrelated and influence one another in a bi-directional manner.

Therefore, if the couple relationship is doing poorly, this will have an effect on the parent-child relationship as well; if the parent-child relationship is problematic, the couple relationship will be negatively affected. It is believed that what happens is that the couple experiences conflict, and instead of taking it out on one another, the parent takes it out on the child(ren) by being overly harsh or critical, leaving the child feeling unsupported by the family. Additionally, Erel and Burman (1995) concluded that better quality in the marital relationship yields better functioning in the parent-child relationship. Moreover, Rinaldi and Howe (2003) postulate that children may reproduce both positive and negative parental interactions and pass on these behavior patterns in other relationships as part of their acquired relationship schemas. This study also found a connection between couple conflict and perceptions of conflict between parent-child and siblings. Consequently, children may feel less social support from their family if there are high levels of conflict between the children and the parents and/or between the children themselves.

According to Davies and Cummings (1994), how a couple's conflict affects their children is represented in their children's emotional well-being. In their research, Davies and Cummings propose the emotional security hypothesis model. This hypothesis states that, "Children's concerns about emotional security play a role in their regulation of emotional arousal and organization and in their motivation to respond in the face of couple conflict" (p. 387). Furthermore, this hypothesis assumes that over time, children's internalized representations of their parent's relationship will affect the children's long-term adjustment. Du Rocher Schudlich, Shamir, and Cummings (2004), in accordance with the emotional security hypothesis, found that couple conflict was associated with children's negative

perceptions of various forms of family relationships, including the parent-child relationship and the couple relationship.

From a clinical perspective, couple conflict can also cause triangulation between the parents and the child. Triangulation is a system process in which a child is involved in the parents' conflictual interactions (Bowen, 1978). There is a great possibility that parents who have conflicting parenting styles will make conflicting demands on their child(ren). The child is forced to make a decision to follow what one parent says to do. Essentially, the child is forced to side with one parent over the other, causing a triangle (mother-child against father coalition or father-child coalition against mother).

Buehler and Welsh (2009) conducted a study which included 416 families taken from a larger longitudinal study of the effects of family life on the transition from childhood into adolescence. The sample included sixth graders in 13 middle schools in a large, geographically diverse county in the southeastern United States. The sample was representative of families in this county on race, parents' marital status, and family poverty status. It should be noted that the sample was not representative of the racial and economic diversity of the United States. Adolescents and parents filled out questionnaires and participated in a home visit that included three interaction tasks. The first two tasks focused on parent-child relationships between the child and mother and the child and father, whereas the third task was a problem-solving discussion activity where the mother, father and child had to solve a problem together. Triangulation was measured with self-reports and spouse reports of each other's behavior using a 13-item triangulation questionnaire scale created using items from four existing measures (Buehler et al., 1998, 4 items; Grych, Seid, & Fincham, 1992, 3 items; Kerig, 1996, 3 items; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001, 3 items).

Buehler and Welsh (2009) found that triangulation was associated with increases in adolescents' internalizing problems and an association between emotional reactivity and increased internalizing problems, with youth having lower levels of hopefulness and attachment to parents.

Triangulation between parents and a child can be very detrimental to the child because it leads to emotional reactivity (Bowen, 1978). According to Bowen's concept of the nuclear family emotional system, marital conflict can lead to impairment in one or more children. The spouses focus their anxieties on the child(ren) and worry excessively about the child. The parents usually have an idealized or negative view of that child(ren). Consequently, the child(ren) becomes aware of the intense focus and becomes more reactive to the parents' attitudes, needs, and expectations. The process makes the child vulnerable to act out or internalize family pressure. This anxiety experienced by the child can influence school performance, social relationships, and his/her overall health.

Another implication of parents in conflict is the "compensatory hypothesis." This hypothesis postulates that parents will focus more attention on their child to compensate for the lack of intimacy and love they are receiving from their partner. This behavior causes parents to become fused with and psychologically reactive to their children (Cox, Paley, & Harter, 2001; Robinson, 2004). Consequently, children may not be as supported by their family because their support system may not feel hierarchical (parent-child relationship) but rather non-hierarchical (peer relationship).

### **Perceived Family Support**

Social support is a widely studied construct in both psychology and sociology. Research supports the importance of social support in that social support has been found to



have a positive influence on an individual's coping with a stressful environment (Lyons, Perrotta, & Hancher-Kvam, 1988). House (1987) divides social support in the context of social relationships into three aspects: existence or quantity of support, formal structure (structure between interactions – reciprocity, frequency, multiplexity), and functional content (emotional concern, instrumental aid). Research suggests that perceived availability of emotional or instrumental support (functional content) buffers the influence of stress on mental wellbeing (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Kessler & McLeod, 1985; Price, Price, & McKenry, 2010). Thus, those who feel they have more support and tangible help feel less stressed and have greater mental health. Furthermore, House (1987) postulates that perceptions of availability of support may change the perception of potentially stressful situations. In other words, those who perceive less available support are likely to perceive stressful situations more negatively. Therefore, if a child does not feel supported by his/her family, the child may feel a potentially stressful situation such as the parents arguing as a more stress-evoking experience than a child who feels he/she has more emotional and instrumental support available.

Two major sources of social support are friend social support and family social support (Lyons et al, 1988). For the purposes of this study, only family social support was examined. This study is only focusing on how perceptions of family support may be affected if/when there are differences in parenting styles and/or relationship discord between the parents. Therefore, friend social support was not accounted for in this study. Parental support has been associated with greater mental health in children including healthy peer relationships, higher academic achievement, and greater self-esteem (McNeely & Barber, 2010; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Rollins & Thomas, 1979;

Steinberg, 1990). The aforementioned literature has shown the impact that the parent relationship has on the child(ren)'s perceptions of the family in general.

Pertaining directly to this current study, Colarossi and Eccles (2000) examined the impact of the parental relationships and adolescents' perceptions of their family's support. In this study, 285 adolescents (ages 11-15 years), and their parents filled out surveys that measured parents' friend and spouse support, child's parent support, and adolescent peer support. The researchers found that the relationship parents have with one another affects the amount of support the parents provide to their children, thus affecting the children's perception of having more or less familial support. Additionally, this study supports the notion that negative couple relations affect the parents' relationships and interactions with their children, and this is linked to perceptions of less familial support.

### **Purpose**

Past research has evaluated how differing parenting styles may affect children, as well as how relationship distress may affect children's perceptions of the family. This study aimed to explore both of these relationships in order to develop a better understanding of factors that may influence children's perceptions of their families. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between differences in parenting styles and children's perceptions of family support. In addition, parental relationship distress was explored as a potential mediator between parenting styles and children's perceptions.

### **Hypotheses**

According to the emotional security hypothesis regarding influences on children's sense of security in their lives (Davies & Cummings, 1994), exposure to couple conflict decreases children's sense of security about family functioning. In other words, the more

parental conflict a child experiences, the more likely the child will perceive the family negatively; that is, the family is not seen as a safe and secure environment. If children do not feel safe or secure, it is hypothesized that they will not feel supported by their family. Furthermore, as previous research suggests, any parenting style combination other than joint authoritative parenting is likely to negatively affect a child's emotional well-being (Simmons and Conger, 2007). Therefore, parents with dissimilar parenting styles (e.g., authoritative and permissive) or joint parenting styles (e.g., differences within authoritarian style) other than authoritative, may have children feeling a lack of support. The current study will test three hypotheses:

1. The greater the difference between the two parents' parenting styles, the less support the children will perceive in the family.
2. The greater the difference between the two parents' parenting styles, the more distress the parents will experience within their couple relationship.
3. The relationship between differences in parenting styles and the children's perceptions of family support will be mediated by the parent's degree of relational distress. That is, the relationship between the greater the degree of difference in two parents' parenting styles, the less support the children will perceive in the family will significantly increase when couple's distress level mediates the relationship.

Figure 1, Hypothesis 1

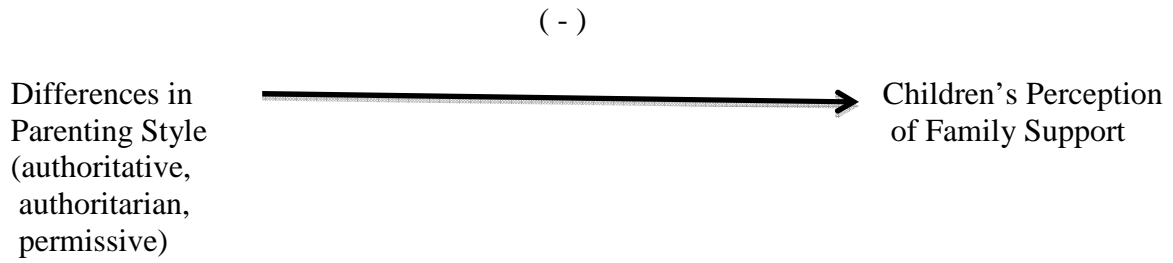


Figure 2, Hypothesis 2

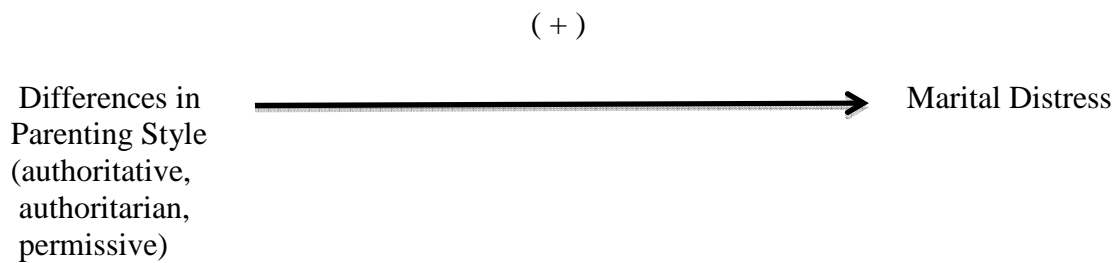
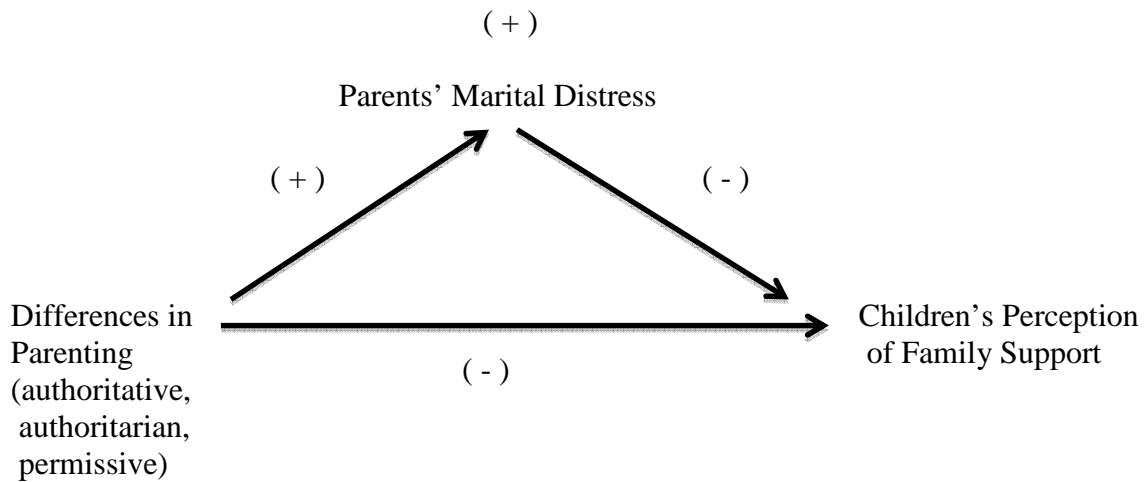


Figure 3, Hypothesis 3, Mediation Model



### **Chapter III: Methods**

#### **Sample**

This study used previously collected data from pre-therapy assessments at the Center for Healthy Families (CHF), an outpatient couple and family therapy clinic located at the University of Maryland, College Park. The CHF is a therapy-training clinic that serves a diverse population of families, couples, and individuals in the Maryland and surrounding Washington, D.C. areas. Presenting problems range from general communication difficulties to concerns about parenting, divorce, adolescent adjustment, school behavior problems, substance abuse, family violence, and other issues that may affect couples, families, and/or individuals. The CHF provides low cost therapy based on a sliding fee scale. Additionally, the CHF receives referrals from outside agencies such as the Department of Social Services, the University of Maryland's Health Center, mobile crises units, and the Maryland State Court system. Because the CHF sees a diverse sample of clients, it was expected that the sample for this study would be diverse in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, religion, and socio-economic status. In this study, couples were cohabiting or married (29 married, 8 not married). Because only adolescents (age 13 and older) fill out assessments at the clinic, this sample was limited to families with at least one child aged 13 to 21. If the family had more than one child aged 13 to 21, one child was picked at random to participate. Only data from families with two parents completing the assessment who sought therapy for family problems (not couple therapy) were used.

## **Variables and Measures**

Degree of difference in parenting styles was assessed from the Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ; Robinson, Mandleco, Olsen, & Hart, 1995). The PPQ has 62 items and measures three global parenting styles; authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. The authoritative scale is made up of 27 items: 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 12, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 25, 27, 29, 31, 33, 35, 39, 42, 46, 48, 51, 53, 55, 58, 60, and 62. The authoritarian scale is made up of 20 items: 2, 6, 10, 13, 17, 19, 23, 26, 28, 32, 37, 40, 43, 44, 47, 50, 54, 56, 59, and 61. Lastly, the permissive parenting scale is made up of 15 items (“r” means this item was reverse coded because it was negatively worded, this was done in place of subtracting the item when adding up the scale): 4, 8, 11, 15, 20, 24r, 30, 34, 36, 38r, 41, 45, 49, 52r, and 57. The PPQ uses response scales on a continuum from “Always (5)” to “Never (0).” Parents received a score on all three parenting dimensions. Using this measure, difference scores (higher score minus lower score) were generated to assess the dissimilarity of the two parents' parenting styles on each parenting dimension (authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive), with higher difference scores indicating a greater difference in parenting styles. (See Appendix A, pp. 46-47).

Distress levels in the couple relationship were assessed using each parent's overall scores on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976). The Dyadic Adjustment Scale measures individual's perceptions of the quality of the couple relationship, with items asking about discussions of divorce, regretting marrying, degree of confiding in each other, kissing, etc., using response scales on a continuum from “Always Agree (5)” to “Always Disagree (0).” Scores on this measure range from 0-151. Lower scores on the DAS indicate more distress. (See Appendix B, pp. 48-49).

The perceived family support subscale from the Perceived Social Support measure (PSSFA; Procidano & Heller, 1983) was used to determine the child's perceptions of support from their family. The PSS measures perceived social support (PSS), defined as "the extent to which an individual believes that his/her needs for support, information, and feedback are fulfilled" (Procidano & Heller, 1983, Note 3, p. 2). The PSS has two subscales, the perceived social support from friends (PSS-Fr) subscale and the perceived social support from family (PSS-Fa) subscale ( $\alpha = .90$ ). Only the family subscale was used in this study. This study is only focusing on how perceptions of family support may be affected if/when there are differences in parenting styles and/or relationship discord between the parents. Therefore, perceived friend social support was not accounted for in this study. Each subscale has 20 items to which the participant answers "yes" or "no" to indicate level of perceived support (e.g., "My family gives me the moral support I need," "Most other people are closer to their family than I am," "Members of my family come to me for emotional support." Responses that are representative of perceived social support on the PSS-Fa are scored as + 1 so that scores range from 0 to 20, as provided by child. Therefore, higher scores indicate more perceived support within the family. (See Appendix C, p.p. 50)

**Independent variable: Degree of difference between two parents' parenting styles.** This study explored how much this difference in parenting styles is associated with their children's perceptions of the support within their family. Discrepancy scores within parenting styles (e.g., mother's permissive score versus father's permissive score) were computed by subtracting father's parenting score on each parenting style from mother's parenting score on the same parenting style and using the absolute value of that score. Parents received a score on all three parenting dimensions.

**Mediator: Couple relationship distress.** Parents' levels of couple relationship distress will be examined as possible mediators of the association between differences in parenting styles and children's perceptions of support within the family. Each couple has two distress scores: one score for the female and one score for the male.

**Dependent variable: Children's perceptions of support within their family.** Children's perceptions of social support within his or her relationships with their family were examined to assess whether differences in parenting styles and/or their parents' couple distress is related to these perceptions.



*Table 1, Summary of Conceptual and Operational Definitions of Variables and Tools of Measurement*

| Variable   | Conceptual Definition   | Operational Definition   | Tool of Measurement  |
|--|---|--|--|
| <b>Independent Variable</b>                                  |   |  |  |
| 1) Degree of Difference Between Two Parents' Parenting Style | Style by which a parent raises his/her child(ren) measured by the amount of discrepancy between or degree of difference within their authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive styles. | Parenting styles defined on the three subscales within the <i>Parenting Practices Questionnaire</i> (authoritarian(20 items, authoritative: 27 items, permissive: 15 items) developed by Robinson et al, 1995. | <i>Parenting Practices Questionnaire</i> (PPQ) total score on each subscale. |
| <b>Mediator Variable</b>                                     |   |  |  |
| 2) Distress Level For Each Parent                            | Level of dyadic adjustment, lower scores reflecting more distress.  | Dyadic adjustment measured by DAS on 0-151 scale.  | Total score on <i>Dyadic Satisfaction Scale</i> .                            |
| <b>Dependent Variable</b>                                    |   |  |  |
| 1) Perceived Social Support From Family                      | Physical and emotional impact family networks have on individuals   | Extent to which an individual perceives that his/her needs for support, information, and feedback are fulfilled by family on a scale 0-100.  | Perceived Social Support Scale (SS) Family Subscale                          |

## **Procedure**

During a family's first session at the Center for Healthy families, family members are asked to read and sign an informed consent form agreeing to participate in the procedures of the clinic. Then the family members are asked to fill out a set of questionnaires assessing a variety of aspects of individual and family functioning. Adults and any children age 13 and older fill out the assessment measures. The measures that were used for the current study, the PPQ, DAS, and SS, are among those completed by the family members during this pre-therapy assessment. Parents' and children's scores on the relevant measures from the data set were utilized. This study was a secondary analysis of pre-existing data that are in a computer file located in the Center for Healthy Families. Data are securely stored on a hard drive that can only be accessed by students in the Couple and Family Therapy graduate program and faculty. Additionally, data are completely coded using a numerical system so that the identities of clients cannot be determined.

## Chapter IV: Results

This study was conducted in order to better understand the relationship between the degree of difference in parents' parenting styles and children's perceptions of family support. In addition, parental relationship distress was explored as a potential mediator between parenting styles and children's perceptions. The following hypotheses were tested:

1. The greater the difference between the two parents' parenting styles, the less support the children will perceive in the family.
2. The greater the difference between the two parents' parenting styles, the more distress the parents will experience within their couple relationship.
3. The relationship between differences in parenting styles and the children's perceptions of family support will be mediated by the parent's degree of relational distress.

The sample was largely African American (42%) and White (42%), with an average income of over \$39,800. The average age for mothers was approximately 43 years; the average age for fathers was approximately 48 years. Daughters averaged 15 years and sons averaged 17 years of age. The reported demographics of this sample can be found in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

*Table 2: Family Members in Sample*

| Family Member | n  | Mean Age in Years | SD   |
|---------------|----|-------------------|------|
| Wives         | 37 | 43.22             | 8.15 |
| Husbands      | 37 | 47.67             | 8.55 |
| Sons          | 17 | 16.87             | 6.30 |
| Daughters     | 20 | 14.78             | 1.61 |

*Table 3: Clients' Race*

| Race                   | n  | Percentage |
|------------------------|----|------------|
| Native American        | 1  | .9%        |
| African American       | 42 | 38%        |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 3  | 2.7%       |
| Hispanic               | 6  | 5.4%       |
| White                  | 42 | 38%        |
| Other or multiracial   | 12 | 10.8%      |
| Did not specify        | 5  | 4.5%       |

*Table 4: Client's Yearly Family Gross Income*

|                | Family yearly gross income |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| Mean           | \$38,822                   |
| Std. Deviation | \$30,293                   |

Prior to testing the hypotheses, the distributions of scores for mother's and father's parenting styles (PPQ), mother's and father's relationship distress (DAS), and the children's perceptions of family support (PSSFA) were examined. The descriptive statistics for these variables can be found in Table 5.

*Table 5: Descriptive Information for Study Variables*

|                          | n  | Potential Range of Scores on Measure | Mean  | SD    |
|--------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Mother Permissiveness    | 37 | 0.0-5.0                              | 2.03  | .37   |
| Father Permissiveness    | 37 | 0.0-5.0                              | 2.10  | .42   |
| Mother Authoritativeness | 37 | 0.0-5.0                              | 3.91  | .41   |
| Father Authoritativeness | 37 | 0.0-5.0                              | 3.62  | .67   |
| Mother Authoritarian     | 37 | 0.0-5.0                              | 2.08  | .53   |
| Father Authoritarian     | 37 | 0.0-5.0                              | 2.01  | .40   |
| Mother DAS               | 37 | 0.0-151.0                            | 96.31 | 25.71 |
| Father DAS               | 37 | 0.0-151.0                            | 97.73 | 27.44 |
| Child PSSFA              | 37 | 0.0-100.0                            | 63.05 | 17.47 |

## **Overview of Analysis**

Because the three parenting dimensions found in the PPQ have a differing number of items (i.e., authoritative subscale = 27 items, authoritarian subscale = 20 items, and permissive subscale = 15 items), each individual's score total on each subscale was summed and then divided by the number of items in the subscale. This average item value represented each parent's degree of parenting on that subscale (e.g., authoritarian score:  $30/20$  items = 1.5). The parenting style in which each parent had the highest average item value became the assigned typology of the parent (e.g., mother authoritative = 3.91, mother permissive = 2.03, mother authoritarian = 2.10, this mother would be classified as an authoritative parent). As noted in Table 5, both mothers and fathers reported greater tendencies toward authoritative parenting (mother  $M = 3.91$ ,  $SD = .41$ ; father  $M = 3.62$ ,  $SD = 3.62$ ) in comparison to permissive (mother  $M = 2.03$ ,  $SD = .37$ ; father  $M = 2.10$ ,  $SD = .42$ ) and authoritarian (mother  $M = 2.08$ ,  $SD = .53$ ; father  $M = 2.01$ ,  $SD = .40$ ) parenting styles. There were not enough subjects in each parenting combination group (e.g., authoritative mother and authoritarian father, permissive mother and authoritative father, etc.) to run ANOVAs to test differences across parenting styles. For this reason, differences in parenting styles were assessed within one parenting style (e.g., permissive score for mother versus permissive score for father), rather than across parenting styles (e.g., discrepancies in authoritative parenting vs. discrepancies in one authoritative parent or one permissive parent).

## **Discrepancy Scores in Parenting Styles**

Couple discrepancy scores within each parenting style (e.g., mother's permissive score versus father's permissive score) were computed by subtracting the father's parenting

score on each parenting style from mother's parenting score on the same parenting style and using the absolute value of that difference score (e.g., mother authoritarian = 2.33, father authoritarian = 1.73, authoritarian difference score = .60). The highest score a parent could have on each parenting style is a 5.0 and the lowest score is a 0.0; therefore, these couples' discrepancy scores measure the degree of difference on each parenting style dimension.

### **Test of Hypothesis 1**

Once discrepancy scores were calculated between the mother and father of each pair of parents of the three on each parenting styles, these difference scores were correlated with children's perceptions of parental support (Child PSSFA). Hypothesis one was not supported. There was a small nonsignificant correlation between parents' differences in permissiveness and the child's perception of family support. There was a small nonsignificant negative correlation between parents' differences in authoritativeness and the child's perception of family support. Lastly, there was a small nonsignificant correlation between parents' differences in authoritarian style and the child's perception of family support. The correlations for differences in parenting styles and child's perception of parental support can be found in Table 6.

*Table 6: Correlations between Differences in Parenting Styles and Child's Perceptions of Family Support*

|                                 |                     | Child SSFA |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Difference in Permissiveness    | Pearson Correlation | .001       |
|                                 | Sig. (1-tailed)     | .498       |
|                                 | n                   | 37         |
| Difference in Authoritativeness | Pearson Correlation | -.199      |
|                                 | Sig. (1-tailed)     | .119       |
|                                 | n                   | 37         |
| Difference Authoritarian        | Pearson Correlation | .208       |
|                                 | Sig. (1-tailed)     | .108       |
|                                 | n                   | 37         |

### **Test of Hypothesis 2**

Once discrepancy scores were found between mother and father on each parenting style, these difference scores were correlated with mother's distress level (Mother DAS) and father's distress level (Father DAS) in order to test hypothesis 2. A higher score on the DAS represents less relationship distress. Hypothesis 2 was partially supported. There was a significant negative correlation found between differences in the permissive parenting style and mother's relationship satisfaction level and father's relationship satisfaction level. That is the more discrepancy in permissive parenting between parents, the higher the relationship distress. The correlations for differences in parenting styles and mother's distress level and father's distress level can be found in Table 7.

*Table 7: Correlations for Differences in Parenting Styles and Mother's Distress Level and Father's Distress Level*

|                             |                     | Mother DAS | Father DAS |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|------------|------------|
| Difference<br>Permissive    | Pearson Correlation | -.361*     | -.369*     |
|                             | Sig. (1-tailed)     | .014       | .013*      |
|                             | n                   | 37         | 37         |
| Difference<br>Authoritative | Pearson Correlation | .019       | .045       |
|                             | Sig. (1-tailed)     | .456       | .397       |
|                             | n                   | 37         | 37         |
| Difference<br>Authoritarian | Pearson Correlation | -.042      | -.066      |
|                             | Sig. (1-tailed)     | .403       | .349       |
|                             | n                   | 37         | 37         |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

### **Test of Hypothesis 3**

Because a significant result was not found in the correlation between differences in parenting style and child's perceptions of parental support and only one significant result was found in the correlation between differences in parenting style and mother's distress level and father's distress level (the more discrepancy in the permissive parenting style, the more relationship distress the couple experiences), there was partial grounds for testing for a mediating effect of relationship distress on the relationship between differences in parenting styles and the children's perceptions of parental support. Baron and Kenny (1986) and Judd and Kenny (1981) have outlined four steps in establishing mediation. In step 1, you must show that the initial variable (differences in parenting styles) is correlated with the outcome (children perceptions of family support); this was not shown. In step 2, you must show that the initial variable (differences in parenting styles) is correlated with the mediator (couple relationship distress); this was only shown for the relationship among differences in the permissiveness parenting style and couple relationship distress, but not in the authoritative or authoritarian parenting styles.



Therefore, step 3 (show that the mediator (couple distress level) affects the outcome variable (children's perception of family support) was not tested, nor was step 4 (to establish that the mediator (couple distress) completely mediates the initial variable (differences in parenting styles)-outcome relationship (children's perception of family support), the effect of differences in parenting style on children's perception of family support controlling for couple distress should be zero. Therefore, hypothesis three was not tested.

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

This study was conducted in order to better understand the relationship between the degree of difference in parenting styles and children's perceptions of family support. In addition, parental relationship distress was explored as a potential mediator between parenting styles and children's perceptions. This study was undertaken in order to better understand how parents who have differing parenting styles which may lead to couple distress via conflictual interactions may negatively influence their children's perceptions of familial support. It was expected that the greater the difference between the two parents' parenting styles, the less support the children would perceive in the family, and the greater the difference between the two parents' parenting styles, the more distress the parents will experience within their couple relationship. It was further hypothesized that the relationship between differences in parenting styles and the children's perceptions of parental support would be mediated by the parent's degree of relational distress.

### **Summary of Overall Findings**

#### **Hypothesis 1**

There were no significant correlations found between differences between parents' parenting styles and the child's perception of family support. This lack of significant results was possibly a result of the relative small sample size, with a total of only 37 families tested. Another sample concern is that most parents in this sample (78%) identified most strongly as authoritative (highest mean in each of the three parenting styles); therefore, as this has been found to be the most optimal style in parenting (Simons & Conger, 2007) it may be that children perceive more family support more similarly and positively within this style. In other words, there was not much variability

in this sample in terms of differences in parenting style groups. The end result was that no significant relationships between differences in parenting styles and the child's perception of family were found.

## **Hypothesis 2**

There were significant negative correlations found between parental discrepancies in the permissive parenting style and both the mother's relationship satisfaction level and father's relationship satisfaction level. That is, the more discrepancy in permissive parenting between parents, the higher the relationship distress. This finding was in contrast to the lack of a correlation between discrepancy in parenting behavior in the other two styles and relationship distress. A permissive parent may do everything for the child (i.e., be overindulgent) from making decisions, eliminating discipline, etc., or do nothing at all for the child; (i.e., be neglectful) and unavailable. If two parents exercise different degrees of permissive parenting in that one is overindulgent and the other is neglectful, this could cause increased relationship distress. It may be that the degrees of differences in the authoritative and authoritarian style are not as vast or consequential to the couples' relationship distress.

## **Hypothesis 3**

Hypothesis 3, that relationship distress mediates between differences between a couple's parenting behavior and children's perceptions of family support, could not be tested because there no support for the hypothesis that differences in parenting styles were associated with children's perceptions of family support and there was only partial support for the hypothesis that differences in parenting styles were associated with couple relationship distress (there was a significant negative correlation between differences in

the permissiveness parenting style and the child's perception of family support); both relationships would need to exist in order for mediation to be possible.

### **Limitations of Current Study**

The current study had several limitations that may have affected the results that were obtained and should be considered when interpreting the findings. The data used for this study come from a secondary analysis of a preexisting data set. Also, the measures used to examine parenting styles, couple satisfaction, and family support were confined to those that are included in this data set. Although these are valid measures, perhaps more of these types of measures or different measures that examine the variables of interest would have produced more significant findings.

Additionally, it may be the age of the child that influenced this current finding. Only children ages 13 and older completed assessments; different results may have been obtained if data from children younger than 13 were included in the analysis. For instance, an older child may not appreciate an authoritative style but rather a permissive style in which the child is able to experience more autonomy, a main desire of adolescents. Furthermore, this sample was comprised of teenagers who are at a developmentally different stage than younger children. Teenagers may not be in the home as often to experience their parents' conflict, nor may they need as much familial support because they have other support networks in place (e.g., school, friends, coworkers). Gender and age of the children in this sample may also explain the result obtained. Thirty-five percent of the daughters in this sample were 14 years-old, whereas thirty-five percent of the sons in this sample were 16 years-old. Developmentally, 14 year-old girls and 16 year-old boys present differing issues for parenting behaviors. For example, 16 year-old

boys are able to drive, are more autonomous, and are more independent from their parents, whereas 14 year-old girls still depend on their parents for things such as transportation and money, and are less autonomous than an older male. Furthermore, parenting behaviors are much different with teenagers than they are with small children. This sample is comprised of older parents who have been parenting for years versus parents who have young children and are still new at parenting; this may influence how prevalent or important parenting behaviors are when parents complete the PPQ and the DAS.

Because this study only examined families with two parents and a child who completed the Perceived Social Support Scale (family subscale; PSSFA), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), and the Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ), the study had a relatively small sample size ( $n=37$ ), therefore, the chances of obtaining significant results were decreased. Additionally, a small sample size affects the generalizability of the findings and confirms that they are most relevant to families who match the demographic characteristics of the current sample. A larger sample may have increased the likelihood of finding a significant relationship between these variables. Moreover, families in which only one parent brought the family for therapy due to various reasons could not be included in this sample and may have provided significant data to the hypotheses being explored.

In addition, the study was restricted by the measures that were in the data set and accessible for analysis. The results of this study could be limited as a result of using only one measure for parenting style, couple distress, and family support. It is possible that the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) does not fully or accurately measure couple distress influenced by differences in parenting style choices. The DAS may capture a lot of

characteristics that influence dyadic adjustment (e.g., time spent together, household tasks, religious practices, etc.), however, it does not directly ask questions about child rearing or parenting practices. Therefore, a couples' score on the DAS may not accurately reflect the relationship distress they experience from parenting practices.

Child's perceived social support in families seeking treatment may be lower, or less variable than in non-clinical families. Furthermore, children's perceptions of family support as derived from the PSSFA may not be influenced by parenting conflict or parenting style, but rather other variables such as home environment, family cohesiveness, time spent together, or other factors. The PSSFA focuses on family support rather than parental support, therefore the child is evaluating the entire family not just their parents. Thus, a child filling out the PSSFA may be basing their scores on the entire family's interactions, recreation time, problem-solving, etc., outside of their parents' parenting practices.

Lastly, a social desirability bias may have affected how the parents described their parenting behavior on the PPQ. For the most part, it is widely known what preferable parenting is (e.g., not abusing the child, setting some sort of limits, etc.). Additionally, parents fill out the PPQ shortly after they have signed an informed consent that notifies the parent that the therapist(s) will report to Child Protective Services (CPS) any type of child abuse or neglect reported by the parent. Therefore, a parent may be more hesitant to disclose their true parenting behaviors if they think they may get in trouble or be reported to CPS.

### **Future Research**

Further studies examining the impact of differences in parenting styles and how this affects both the couple relationship and the child's perceptions of family support should be conducted with both clinical and non-clinical populations. The participants in this study

were from a clinical population, therefore it can only be applied to families who are seeking therapy. Additionally, it is important to research how differences in parenting styles across parenting dimensions influence both the couple and child relationships. Differences in parenting styles may impact the couple relationship in terms of more conflictual interactions, disagreements in disciplining, disagreements in expectations and goals for the child, etc. Differences in parenting styles may also affect the parents' relationships with the child because the child may align with one parent over the other based on his/her preferred parenting style, the child may experience ambiguity about family rules, or the child may perceive less family cohesiveness. The relationships between these variables could be beneficial to clinicians because it highlights potential areas within the family structure and belief systems that need to be addressed and resolved.

Future research may want to consider using different measures to provide a clearer picture of the relationship between parenting practices and couple distress and a child's perceptions of family support. The PPQ, DAS, and SSFA capture parts of these patterns, but there may be other measures to assess the dimensions desired in this current study.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, only one significant result was found in testing these hypotheses; the greater the degree of difference in parents' permissiveness the less support the child perceived in the family. This finding has implications for future research and clinicians. Future research may focus on the differences that exist within a permissive parenting style that may not exist within an authoritarian or authoritative parenting style. Clinicians may want to examine characteristics that define permissiveness and explore the possibilities for children feeling less support.

There are several facets of this dataset that may have influenced the results of this study, particularly the small sample size and measures used. Further studies addressing the relationship between differing parenting styles, both across parenting dimensions and within joint parenting dimensions, couple distress, and the child's perceptions of family support should be conducted in order to evaluate the impact on family wellbeing.



## **Appendix A: Measures**

## Appendix A1: Parenting Practices Questionnaire (PPQ)

### PPQ

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth: \_\_\_\_\_ Therapist Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Family Code: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** This questionnaire is about your parenting practices. Think about what you usually do as a parent in the raising of your child or children and select the response that best indicates how often you usually do the following things: (If you have one child, respond as you usually do to that child in general.)

1. Never      2. Once in a while      3. About half of the time      4. Very often      5. Always

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. I encourage my children to talk about their troubles.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I guide my children by punishment more than by reason.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I know the names of my children's friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I find it difficult to discipline my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I give praise when my children are good.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. I spank when my children are disobedient.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I joke and play with my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I don't scold or criticize even when my children act against my wishes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I show sympathy when my children are hurt or frustrated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I punish by taking privileges away from my children with little if any explanation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I spoil my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. I give comfort and understanding when my children are upset.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. I yell or shout when my children misbehave.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. I am easy going and relaxed with my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I allow my children to annoy someone else.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. I tell my children my expectations regarding behavior before they engage in an activity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I scold and criticize to make my children improve.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I show patience with my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. I grab my children when they are disobedient.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. I state punishments to my children, but I do not actually do them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. I am responsive to my children's feelings or needs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. I allow my children to help make family rules.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. I argue with my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. I appear confident about my parenting abilities.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. I give my children reasons why rules should be obeyed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. I appear to be more concerned with my own feelings than with my children's feelings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. I tell my children that we appreciate what they try to accomplish.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. I punish by putting my children off somewhere alone with little if any explanation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. I help my children to understand the effects of behavior by encouraging them to talk about the consequences of their own actions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. I am afraid that disciplining my children for misbehavior will cause them not to like me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. I take my children's desires into account before asking them to do something.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. I explode in anger towards my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33. I am aware of problems or concerns about my children in school.

1. Never      2. Once in a while      3. About half of the time      4. Very often      5. Always

- \_\_\_\_\_ 34. I threaten my children with punishment more often than I actually give it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35. I express affection by hugging, kissing, and holding my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 36. I ignore my children's misbehavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 37. I use physical punishment as a way of disciplining my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 38. I carry out discipline after my children misbehave.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 39. I apologize to my children when making a mistake in parenting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 40. I tell my children what to do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 41. I give into my children when they cause a commotion about something.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 42. I talk it over and reason with my children when they misbehave.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 43. I slap my children when they misbehave.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 44. I disagree with my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 45. I allow my children to interrupt others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 46. I have warm and intimate times together with my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 47. When two children are fighting, I discipline the children first and ask questions later.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 48. I encourage my children to freely express themselves.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 49. I bribe my children with rewards to get them to do what I want.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 50. I scold or criticize when my children's behavior doesn't meet my expectations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 51. I show respect for my children's opinions by encouraging them to express them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 52. I set strict well-established rules for my children.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 53. I explain to my children how I feel about their good and bad behavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 54. I use threats as punishment with little or no justification.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 55. I take into account my children's preferences in making plans for the family.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 56. When my children ask why they have to conform, I state: "Because I said so" or, "I am your parent and I want you to."
- \_\_\_\_\_ 57. I appear unsure about how to solve my children's misbehavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 58. I explain the consequences of my children's behavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 59. I demand that my children do things.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 60. When my children misbehave, I channel their behavior into a more acceptable activity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 61. I shove my children when they are disobedient.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 62. I emphasize the reasons for rules.

## Appendix A2: Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS)

Most persons have disagreements in their relationship. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list. Place a checkmark (✓) to indicate your answer.

|   | <i>Always<br/>Agree</i> | <i>Almost<br/>Always<br/>Agree</i> | <i>Occasion-<br/>ally<br/>Disagree</i> | <i>Frequently<br/>Disagree</i> | <i>Almost<br/>Always<br/>Disagree</i> | <i>Always<br/>Disagree</i> |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Handling family finances                     |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 2. Matters of recreation                        |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 3. Religious matters                            |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 4. Demonstrations of affection                  |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 5. Friends                                      |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 6. Sex relations                                |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 7. Conventionality (correct or proper behavior) |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 8. Philosophy of life                           |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 9. Ways of dealing with parents and in-laws     |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |

|   | <i>Always<br/>Agree</i> | <i>Almost<br/>Always<br/>Agree</i> | <i>Occasion-<br/>ally<br/>Disagree</i> | <i>Frequently<br/>Disagree</i> | <i>Almost<br/>Always<br/>Disagree</i> | <i>Always<br/>Disagree</i> |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 10. Aims, goals,<br>and things<br>believed<br>important   |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 11. Amount of<br>time spent<br>together   |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 12. Making major<br>decisions   |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 13. Household<br>tasks  |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 14. Leisure time<br>interests and<br>activities   |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 15. Career<br>decisions   |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 16. How often do you<br>discuss or have<br>you considered<br>divorce,<br>separation or<br>terminating your<br>relationship? |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |
| 17. How often do you<br>or your partner<br>leave the house<br>after a fight?  |                         |                                    |  |                                |                                       |                            |

|   | <i>All<br/>the<br/>time</i> | <i>Most<br/>of the<br/>time</i> | <i>More often<br/>than not</i> | <i>Occasion-<br/>ally</i> | <i>Rarely</i> | <i>Never</i> |
|---|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| 18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well? |                             |                                 |                                |                           |               |              |
| 19. Do you confide in your partner?   |                             |                                 |                                |                           |               |              |
| 20. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?                                    |                             |                                 |                                |                           |               |              |
| 21. How often do you or your partner quarrel?   |                             |                                 |                                |                           |               |              |
| 22. How often do you and your partner "get on each others' nerves"?                             |                             |                                 |                                |                           |               |              |

How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate? Circle your answer.

23. Do you kiss your partner?

Everyday      Almost every day      Occasionally      Rarely      Never

24. Do you and your partner engage in outside interests together?

All of them      Most of them      Some of them      Very few of them      None of them

25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas?

|       |                           |                          |                         |               |               |
|-------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Never | Less Than<br>Once a Month | Once or Twice<br>a Month | Once or Twice<br>a Week | Once a<br>Day | More<br>Often |
|-------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|

26. Laugh together?

|       |                           |                          |                         |               |               |
|-------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Never | Less Than<br>Once a Month | Once or Twice<br>a Month | Once or Twice<br>a Week | Once a<br>Day | More<br>Often |
|-------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|

27. Calmly discuss something?

|       |                           |                          |                         |               |               |
|-------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Never | Less Than<br>Once a Month | Once or Twice<br>a Month | Once or Twice<br>a Week | Once a<br>Day | More<br>Often |
|-------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|

28. Work together on a project?

|       |                           |                          |                         |               |               |
|-------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Never | Less Than<br>Once a Month | Once or Twice<br>a Month | Once or Twice<br>a Week | Once a<br>Day | More<br>Often |
|-------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|

---

These are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. Indicate if either item below causes differences of opinion or have been problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. Check "yes" or "no."

29. Being too tired for sex.    Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

30. Not showing love.            Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

-----

31. The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, "happy," represents the degree of happiness of most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.

|                      |                   |                     |       |               |                    |         |
|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------|---------------|--------------------|---------|
| .                    | .                 | .                   | .     | .             | .                  | .       |
| Extremely<br>Unhappy | Fairly<br>Unhappy | A Little<br>Unhappy | Happy | Very<br>Happy | Extremely<br>Happy | Perfect |

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32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship? Check the statement that best applies to you.

\_\_\_ 6. I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.

- \_\_\_ 5. I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do all I can to see that it does.
- \_\_\_ 4. I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do my fair share to see that it does.
- \_\_\_ 3. It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I can't do much more than I am doing now to help it succeed.
- \_\_\_ 2. It would be nice if my relationship succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.
- \_\_\_ 1. My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.



## Appendix A3: Social Support Scale (SSFA)

**Directions:** The statements which follow refer to feelings and experiences which occur to most people at one time or another in their relationships with **FAMILIES**. When thinking about family, please do not include friends. For each statement there are five possible answers (1 through 5) ranging from "Yes" to "No". Please check the answer you choose for each item.

| <u>Yes</u> |   |   |   |   | <u>No</u> |  |
|------------|---|---|---|---|-----------|--|
| 1          | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |           |  |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 1.        | My family gives me the moral support I need.   |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 2.        | I get good ideas about how to do things or make things from my family.   |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 3.        | When I confide in the members of my family who are closest to me, I get the idea that it makes them uncomfortable.           |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 4.        | Most other people are closer to their families than I am.  |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 5.        | My family enjoys hearing about what I think.   |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 6.        | Members of my family share many of my interests.   |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 7.        | Certain members of my family come to me when they have problems or need advice.  |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 8.        | I rely on my family for emotional support.   |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 9.        | There is a member of my family I could go to if I were just feeling down, without feeling funny about it later.              |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 10.       | My family and I are very open about what we think about things.  |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 11.       | My family is sensitive to my personal needs.   |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 12.       | Members of my family come to me for emotional support.   |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 13.       | Members of my family are good at helping me solve problems.  |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 14.       | I have a deep sharing relationship with a number of members of my family.  |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 15.       | Members of my family get good ideas about how to do things or make things from me.   |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 16.       | When I confide in members of my family, it makes me uncomfortable.   |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 17.       | Members of my family seek me out for companionship.  |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 18.       | I think that my family feels that I'm good at helping them solve problems.   |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 19.       | I don't have a relationship with a member of my family that is as close as other people's relationships with family members. |
| —          | — | — | — | — | 20.       | I wish my family were much different.  |

## **Appendix B: Tables**

*Appendix B1: Table 1: Summary of Conceptual and Operational Definitions of Variables and Tools of Measurement*

| Variable   | Conceptual Definition  | Operational Definition   | Tool of Measurement  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Independent Variable</b>                                  |  |  |  |
| 3) Degree of Difference Between Two Parents' Parenting Style | Style by which a parent raises his/her child(ren) measured by the amount of discrepancy between or degree of difference within their authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive styles.. | Parenting styles defined on the three subscales within the <i>Parenting Practices Questionnaire</i> (authoritarian(20 items, authoritative: 27 items, permissive: 15 items) developed by Robinson et al, 1995. | <i>Parenting Practices Questionnaire</i> (PPQ) total score on each subscale. |
| <b>Mediator Variable</b>                                     |  |  |  |
| 4) Distress Level For Each Parent                            | Level of dyadic adjustment, lower scores reflecting more distress.   | Dyadic adjustment measured by DAS on 0-151 scale.  | Total score on <i>Dyadic Satisfaction Scale</i> .                            |
| <b>Dependent Variable</b>                                    |  |  |  |
| 2) Perceived Social Support From Family                      | Physical and emotional impact family networks have on individuals  | Extent to which an individual perceives that his/her needs for support, information, and feedback are fulfilled by family  | Perceived Social Support Scale (SS) Family Subscale                          |

*Appendix 2B: Table 2: Family Members in Sample*

|           | Frequency |
|-----------|-----------|
| Wives     | 37        |
| Husbands  | 37        |
| Sons      | 17        |
| Daughters | 20        |

*Appendix B3: Table 3: Clients' Race*

|                        | Frequency |
|------------------------|-----------|
| Native American        | 1         |
| African American       | 42        |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 3         |
| Hispanic               | 6         |
| White                  | 42        |
| Other or multiracial   | 12        |

*Appendix B4: Table 4: Client's Yearly Gross Income*

|                | Personal yearly gross income (in thousands) |
|----------------|---|
| Mean           | 38822.41                                    |
| Std. Deviation | 30293.018                                   |

*Appendix B5: Table 5: Descriptive Information for Study Variables*

|                      | N  | Mean  | SD    |
|----------------------|----|-------|-------|
| Mother Permissive    | 37 | 2.03  | .37   |
| Father Permissive    | 37 | 2.10  | .42   |
| Mother Authoritative | 37 | 3.91  | .41   |
| Father Authoritative | 37 | 3.62  | .67   |
| Mother Authoritarian | 37 | 2.08  | .53   |
| Father Authoritarian | 37 | 2.01  | .40   |
| Mother DAS           | 37 | 96.31 | 25.71 |
| Father DAS           | 37 | 97.73 | 27.44 |
| Child SSFA           | 37 | 63.05 | 17.47 |

*Appendix B6: Table 6, Correlations Between Differences in Parenting Styles and Child's Perceptions of Family Support*

|                             |                     | Child SSFA |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| Difference<br>Permissive    | Pearson Correlation | .001       |
|                             | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .995       |
|                             | N                   | 37         |
| Difference<br>Authoritative | Pearson Correlation | -.199      |
|                             | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .237       |
|                             | N                   | 37         |
| Difference<br>Authoritarian | Pearson Correlation | .208       |
|                             | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .216       |
|                             | N                   | 37         |



*Appendix B7: Table 7: Correlations for Differences in Parenting Styles and Mother's Distress Level and Father's Distress Level*

|                             |                     | Mother DAS | Father DAS |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|------------|------------|
| Difference<br>Permissive    | Pearson Correlation | -.361*     | -.369*     |
|                             | Sig. (1-tailed)     | .014       | .013       |
|                             | N                   | 37         | 37         |
| Difference<br>Authoritative | Pearson Correlation | .019       | .045       |
|                             | Sig. (1-tailed)     | .456       | .397       |
|                             | N                   | 37         | 37         |
| Difference<br>Authoritarian | Pearson Correlation | -.042      | -.066      |
|                             | Sig. (1-tailed)     | .403       | .349       |
|                             | N                   | 37         | 37         |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

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## Institutional Review Board Approval

Gmail - IRB Protocol Approval

Page 1 of 2



Tara Gogolinski <tgogolinski@gmail.com>

### IRB Protocol Approval

University of Maryland IRB <no-reply@umresearch.umd.edu>

Thu, Feb 23, 2012 at 10:56 AM

To: "Carol A. Werlinich" <cwerlin@umd.edu>, Tara Gogolinski <tgogolinski@gmail.com>



### Initial Application Approval

DO NOT REPLY TO THIS EMAIL ADDRESS AS IT IS UNMONITORED

To: Principal Investigator, Carol A. Werlinich, Family Science  
Student, Tara Gogolinski, Family Science

From: James M. Hagberg  
IRB Co-Chair  
University of Maryland College Park

Re: IRB Protocol: 12-0116 - Effects of differences in parenting styles on couple distress and children's perceptions of family support

Approval  
Date: February 23, 2012

Expiration  
Date: February 23, 2013

Application: Initial

Review Path: Expedited

The University of Maryland, College Park Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office approved your Initial IRB Application. This transaction was approved in accordance with the University's IRB policies and procedures and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects. Please reference the above-cited IRB Protocol number in any future communications with our office regarding this research.

**Recruitment/Consent:** For research requiring written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped informed consent document will be sent via mail. The IRB approval expiration date has been stamped on the informed consent document. Please note that research participants must sign a stamped version of the informed consent form and receive a copy.

**Continuing Review:** If you intend to continue to collect data from human subjects or to analyze private, identifiable data collected from human subjects, beyond the expiration date of this protocol, you must submit a Renewal Application to the IRB Office 45 days prior to the expiration date. If IRB Approval of your protocol expires, all human subject research activities including enrollment of new subjects, data collection and analysis of identifiable, private information must cease until the Renewal Application is approved. If work on the human subject portion of your project is complete and you wish to close the protocol, please submit a Closure Report to [irb@umd.edu](mailto:irb@umd.edu).

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**Additional Information:** Please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 if you have any IRB-related questions or concerns. Email: [irb@umd.edu](mailto:irb@umd.edu)

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