Marital Quality and Paternal Involvement: Interconnections of Men’s Spousal and Parental Roles

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Among family researchers, the study of parenting and parenthood has generated a large volume of research literature. Researchers have sought to understand better how individuals are socialized into the parental role (Gage & Christensen, 1991), how the stress of parenthood affects men and women differently (Scott & Alwin, 1989), and how parenthood can influence marital relationships (McHale & Huston, 1985; Waldron & Routh, 1981). The relationship between marital quality and parenting, however, is of particular interest, given that the vast majority of the research in this area has concluded that the presence of children is associated with decreases in the quality of the marital union (Abbott & Brody, 1985; LeMasters & DeFrain, 1989).

Whereas some studies have established that parenthood may be deleterious to marital quality, the reverse association—the effect of marital quality on parenting—is seemingly overlooked. And it is equally appropriate to consider the effects marital quality may have on parenting (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991). If participation in the parental role leads to decreases in marital quality, it is equally important, if not more so, to understand the effects marital quality has on parenting and parenting involvement.

This study will provide an analysis from the perspective of marital quality influencing parental involvement. We propose that the relationship will be stronger for fathers than for mothers because men tend to have unified views of the parent/spouse role (Pleck, 1987a) while women perceive these roles as distinct (Komter, 1989). It is appropriate to assume, then, that paternal relations will be more susceptible to the nature of the spousal relationship than will maternal relations. Our analyses will be directed toward determining the sources of variation in the parental experience as affected by the different dimensions of marital quality for mothers and fathers.
Men are likely to view the father and husband roles as one role. This pattern derives from the historical legacy of the father-breadwinner model of fatherhood (Pleck, 1987a). In this model, a “good” father and husband was one who provided for his wife and family. Few different behaviors are required for the husband or the father roles. Although this model appears to be breaking down, it continues to be dominant in the United States (Pleck, 1987a). Thus, men are still likely to evaluate relationships with their wives and their children as one and the same.

Women, however, more clearly separate their roles as wife and mother. The two roles involve distinctly different behaviors (Johnson, 1988) and are perceived by women as having unique, though overlapping, spheres. The wife role involves behaviors directly related to the husband, such as companionship. The mother role includes nurturing behaviors involving children, such as caretaking. Research has shown that women derive different levels of satisfaction from the wife and mother roles (Aneshensel, Frerichs, & Clark, 1981; Govc, Hughes, & Style, 1983; Komter, 1989). They may also feel varying levels of stress. For instance, women who experience role conflict between their roles at work and as a wife may not experience role conflict between their roles at work and as a mother.

The gendered socialization of men and women into parenthood has been offered as the primary reason for the dichotomization of parental roles (Thomson, MclJanahan, & Curtin, 1992). Parenting is also a very different experience for each sex. Furthermore, Menaghan (1989) posits that men and women are differently affected by their specific role repertoires (e.g., parent, worker, spouse). Other researchers have concluded that the parental role for men, as compared to women, involves considerably less commitment of self, as well as time and effort (see Daniels & Weingarten, 1988; Kivett, 1988). Scott and Alwin (1989) propose that women are socialized into the parental role more than men; they state, “Mothering is not merely a matter of undertaking the daily tasks associated with raising children, but also implies a close and intimate relationship with the child” (p. 499). Numerous studies have concluded that fathers spend significantly less time with children than do mothers (Leslie, Anderson, & Branson, 1991), and that fathers are less enmeshed in the parental role than women (Scott & Alwin, 1989).

The differences between the roles of fathers and mothers are most evident in reported differences of actual child care (e.g., bathing, feeding). Levant, Slattery, and Loiselle (1987) report that mothers spend approximately twice as many hours as fathers in child care. Similarly, Coverman and Shelley (1986) report that men spend an average of 14.71 minutes per day on child care, while females spend an average of 54.02 minutes per day on child care. It has also been suggested that fathers find the transition into
parenthood more stressful than mothers (Crnic & Booth, 1991).

In sum, most research in this area has concluded that men do not clearly separate their roles as husbands and fathers and may place minimal importance on their paternal roles. Cowan et al. (1985) offer a similar conclusion: "men's psychological involvement as parent increased [during their study], but, relative to their wives, their involvement was usually much smaller" (p. 467).

**MARITAL QUALITY: MEN'S AND WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES**

If men appear to place less importance on their paternal roles, how then do they view their spousal roles? Following Jessie Bernard's (1972) suggestion, numerous researchers have posited that men's and women's experiences and outcomes from marriage are substantively different from one another. Specifically, men regard marriage as being more satisfying (Blair, 1993; Fowers, 1991; Schumm, Jurich, Bollman, & Bugaighis, 1985) and experience more positive outcomes (e.g., mental well-being) than do women (Gove, Style, & Hughes, 1990). This difference may be due to gender variation in the criteria for satisfactory marriage (Williams, 1988).

Variations in perceptions of marital quality have been associated with a variety of factors, both within and outside the marital union itself. Although factors such as family income level have been shown to be positively associated with family relations (Zedek, Maslach, Mosier, & Skitka, 1988), husbands with traditional ideologies report lower marital quality as their wives’ incomes increase (Voydanoff, 1988). Perry-Jenkins and Crouter (1990) suggest that husbands who espouse traditional gender role ideologies, and whose wives are employed, will report lower levels of satisfaction with their marriage. For women, the emotional quality of the marital relationship is the most essential aspect of marriage (Gove et al., 1983).

Ross et al. (1983) have suggested that contemporary marriages are increasingly moving away from a complementary pattern, in which the husband and wife perform different but interdependent functions, towards a more parallel pattern, in which husband and wife share work and family duties. Such a shift towards a parallel form of marriage would imply not only that husbands and wives would share more equally in the division of work and family labor, but also that they would each come to identify with those roles to an equal degree. As Bielby and Bielby (1989) state, “As individuals allocate time and energy to work and family roles, they come to identify with those roles” (p. 776).

Pleck (1987b) has argued that men are indeed placing more emphasis on their family roles (i.e., both spouse and parent) as compared to previous generations, and that this shift is evident in their increasing participation in
household labor and child care, as well as in their increased reports of psychological distress. More recent studies have concluded that parental and marital role quality are significant predictors of men's psychological distress (Barnett, Marshall, & Pleck, 1992). Interestingly, Wilkie (1993) found that only one-fifth of men think that married women should not earn money if the husband can support them; however, Wilkie also found that almost one-half (47%) of men continue to believe that it is better if men achieve outside the home and women take care of home and family. Hence, while there is still general consensus that men place greater importance on their provider role (e.g., worker), there is some ambiguity as to whether men are becoming more enmeshed in and concerned about their family roles.

Women are identifying more with their work roles as labor force participation for women, particularly for mothers with young children, continues to rise. However, the majority of women remain segregated in caretaking occupations (e.g., nursing, childcare workers), which overlap with their homemaking roles (Statham, Vaughn, & Houseknecht, 1987). Working women also put in an estimated “extra month of twenty-four hour days a year” completing household and childcare tasks (Hochschild, 1989, p. 3). Thus, it is no surprise that women continue to be more likely to gain greater satisfaction from their family roles than from their work roles (Williams, 1988).

Previous research thus suggests that because men do not distinctly separate husband and father roles, evaluations of the marital relationship will be strongly related to involvement in the parental role. Women, on the other hand, are highly involved in both their family and spousal roles yet separate the two roles to a greater extent than men. The “crossing” of these roles may not be entirely without consequence, as Baruch and Barnett (1986) report that fathers who are highly involved in family work are more critical of their wives, while their wives report lower levels of life satisfaction. Overall, though, the marital relationship is less likely to be related to involvement in the parental role for women than it is for men.

EXPLAINING THE EFFECT OF MARITAL QUALITY ON PARENTING

While many studies have suggested that fathers are less involved in the parental role than are mothers, a few studies have concluded that father-child relationships are more likely to be influenced by the marriage itself (i.e., marital satisfaction) than arc mother-child relationships (Barber, 1987; Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991; Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984). Belsky et al. (1991) have proposed that the roles of parent and spouse have different implications for and are regarded differently by men and women; specifically, they state, citing an earlier study (Belsky, Rovine, & Fish, 1989), “For women the marital and parent-child relationships are differentiated,
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whereas in the case of men a general pattern of relating—actively involved versus disengaged—is applied to spouse and child alike” (p. 488).

The connections between marriage and parenthood, then, are substantial. Yogev and Brett (1985), for example, find a strong association between overall levels of marital happiness and satisfaction and the perception of fairness in the division of household labor and childcare tasks. In this study, we examine the relationship between marital quality and parenting with marital quality as the dependent variable. We compare the effects of parental involvement variables on husbands’ and wives’ perceptions of marital quality. We expect that there will be a stronger positive relationship between parental involvement and marital quality for men than for women. Furthermore, we expect parental involvement for men and women to be influenced by the structure of the household, the sex and number of children, and gender role ideology.

Data and Measures

Data for this study are taken from the 1988 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH; Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). The NSFH provides a cross-sectional national sample of 13,017 respondents aged 19 and older. The sample used here is limited to 2,073 mothers and fathers from married-couple households in which there is at least one child between the ages of 5 and 18 (this limitation of the sample results from the parenting variables used herein), and for whom data on the parenting measures used herein was complete. Because the NSFH oversamples several groups (e.g., minorities, single parents), sample weights are used in these analyses.

Parental involvement factors were measured in several ways. To provide a measure of parent-child contact, the overall level of interaction between parents and their children was included. Parent-child interaction includes responses to the following question: “How often do you spend time with the children: (1) in leisure activities away from home, (2) at home working on a project or playing together, (3) having private talks, and (4) helping with reading or homework?” Scores ranged from never or rarely (1) to almost everyday (6) (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.76 for men, 0.74 for women). This measure not only assesses the frequency of parent-child contact, but may also capture broader aspects of parental concern for children’s development.

Two other measures of parental involvement are also included, both of which address the issue of parental control. Supportiveness is an indexed variable based upon responses to the request, “Please indicate how often you do each: (1) praise child, (2) allow child to help set rules, and (3) hug child.” Responses ranged from a low of never (1) to a high of very often (4) (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.57 for men, 0.46 for women). Restrictiveness is also
an indexed variable based upon responses to how often parents (1) “spank or slap child, and (2) yell at child.” Here, responses ranged from a low of never (1) to a high of very often (4) (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.53 for men, 0.49 for women).

Marital quality was assessed across multiple dimensions, with all measures being taken directly from husbands’ and wives’ responses. Rather than focusing on a single measure of marital quality, it is proposed here that marital quality encompasses numerous dimensions of the marital relationship and should be measured as such (see Blair, 1993; Crohan & Veroff, 1989; Fowers, 1991; White & Keith, 1990). The first measure of marital quality was frequency of disagreements. Responses were taken from the question, “How often, if at all, in the last year have you had open disagreements about each of the following: (a) household tasks, (b) money, (c) spending time together, (d) sex, (e) in-laws, (f) the children?” Responses ranged from never (1), less than once a month (2), several times a month (3), about once a week (4), several times a week (5), to almost everyday (6) (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.78 for men, 0.79 for women). These areas of disagreement were combined into a single measure, resulting in a scale ranging from 1 to 6.

A series of dummy variables was constructed to measure other dimensions of marital quality. Divorce possible is based on responses to the following question: “It is always difficult to predict what will happen in a marriage, but realistically, what do you think the chances are that you and your (wife/husband) will eventually separate or divorce?” This variable was originally coded on a five-point scale, ranging from very low to very high. However, given the social desirability of responses to such questions, 70.0% of husbands and 69.4% of the wives replied “very low.” With such a skewed distribution of responses, the item was recoded as “very low” (0) and “possible” (1).

A more global measure of marital quality, less than happy marriage, was taken from responses to the following question: “Taking things all together, how would you describe your marriage?” This measure was originally coded on a seven-point scale, ranging from very unhappy to very happy. Among husbands, 74.7% rated their marriage on the sixth and seventh point of the scale (very happy), and, among wives, 72.0% rated their marriage on the sixth and seventh points of the scale. To understand better the variation in this measure, responses were separated into very happy (0) and less than very happy (1). Less than daily contact, a measure focusing on physical contact, was taken from responses to the following question: “During the past month, about how often did you and your (wife/husband) spend time alone with each other, talking, or sharing an activity?” Responses originally ranged from never to almost every day, on a six-point scale. Because 55.3% of husbands and 59.5% of the wives answered that they interacted with their spouses at least two or three times a week or more,
responses were separated into two or three times a week and almost every day (0), and about once a week to never (1). Finally, troubled marriage is a measure indicating whether the respondent felt that the marriage was in trouble, although divorce might not be imminent.

Several variables were included as controls in the analyses. Couples’ earnings is a measure of family income. The number of sons and number of daughters are included because fathers are seemingly selective in their involvement with children depending upon the sex of the child, typically spending more time with sons (Franklin, 1988; Harris & Morgan, 1991; Power & Parke, 1982). Employment status is included to control for differences that would influence parental and spousal contact, especially for women. Duration of marriage, a measure of the number of years the couple has been married, controls for variation in marital quality. Gender-role ideology is taken from responses to the following statements: "(1) It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and the family; (2) Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed; (3) Parents should encourage just as much independence in their daughters as in their sons; (4) In a successful marriage, each partner must have the freedom to do what they [sic] want to individually; and (5) If a husband and a wife both work full-time, they should share household tasks equally." Responses ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree, across a five-point scale. Each item was coded accordingly, resulting in a scale ranging from 5 to 25, with a low score indicating egalitarian gender-role orientations (combined Cronbach’s alpha = 0.50). We also control for educational attainment, which is related to both marital quality and parental involvement. Finally, stepparent status is likely to influence the level of parent-child contact, particularly for fathers.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for all variables used in the analysis. Women have significantly higher levels of parental involvement than men. Fathers reported a mean of 3.58 for parent-child interaction, indicating a substantial amount of contact between fathers and their children. However, paternal involvement is slightly lower than maternal involvement, as mothers reported a mean of 4.18 for parent-child contact. Fathers and mothers both reported higher levels of supportiveness than restrictiveness (3.19/2.22 among fathers; 3.42/2.35 among mothers). While fathers were slightly less supportive than mothers, it is interesting to note that they are also slightly less restrictive.

No significant differences between men’s and women’s assessment of their marital quality appeared. As shown, fathers reported an average of 2.00 and mothers 1.99 on the disagreements scale, indicating that spouses
experience disagreements several times a month. On the other dimensions of marital quality, about 30% of the fathers and mothers reported that they considered a divorce to be possible, about 25% considered their marriage to be less than entirely happy, and slightly more than 40% had less than daily shared contact with their spouses. Among the fathers, 26% indicated their marriages were in trouble, and 31% of the mothers indicated their marriages were in trouble. Overall, it would appear that couples report moderate to poor levels of marital quality.

**TABLE 1**

Means for Marital Quality and Parental Involvement Variables, by Sex of Parent

|                      | Fathers            |          | Mothers           |          |
|----------------------|--------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|
|                      | Mean   | SD     | Mean   | SD     |
| **Marital Quality**  |        |        |        |        |
| Disagreements        | 2.00   | .73    | 1.99   | .75    |
| Divorce possible     | .30    | .45    | .31    | .45    |
| Less than happy marriage | .25  | .43    | .27    | .44    |
| Less than daily contact | .45  | .50    | .42    | .49    |
| Troubled marriage    | .26    | .43    | .31    | .45    |
| **Parental Involvement** |        |        |        |        |
| Parent-child interaction | 3.58| 1.12   | 4.18   | 1.09   |
| **Parental Control** |        |        |        |        |
| Supportiveness       | 3.19   | .52    | 3.42   | .45    |
| Restrictiveness      | 2.22   | .66    | 2.35   | .64    |
| **Household Level & Individual Characteristics** |        |        |        |        |
| Couples’ Earnings    | 45.04  | 39.52  | a      |        |
| (in thousands)       |        |        |        |        |
| Number of sons       | .92    | .86    | a      |        |
| Number of daughters  | .90    | .83    | a      |        |
| Employment status    | .93    | .25    | .67    | .47    |
| Duration of marriage | 15.09  | 7.04   | a      |        |
| Gender-role ideology | 13.31  | 2.71   | 12.25  | 2.83   |
| Educational attainment | 13.31| 2.97   | 12.97  | 2.55   |
| Stepparent status    | .13    | .33    | .03    | .18    |

N = 2073

*Note:* a indicates that spouses share the same value.
To what extent are the marital quality measures associated with parental involvement? Table 2 presents the results from multivariate regression analysis for each of the three measures of parental involvement. In general, marital quality negatively affects the amount of parent-child interaction and parental supportiveness, but positively influences parental restrictiveness. For fathers, having a less than happy marriage ($\beta = -0.05$), less than daily contact with wife ($\beta = -0.17$), and a marriage characterized as troubled ($\beta = -0.06$) significantly—and negatively—affects the amount of their parent-child interaction. Marital quality was less influential for mothers' interaction with children. Having a less than happy marriage ($\beta = -0.05$) and less than daily contact with husband ($\beta = -0.09$) had significant negative effects on mother-child interaction. However, 22% of the variance in the model of father-child interaction was explained by marital quality whereas only 7% of the variance in the model of mother-child interaction was explained by marital quality. Hence, the amount of time fathers spend with their spouses affects the amount of time they spend with their children, such that less time spent with wives also implies less time spent with children.

**Table 2**
Multivariate Regression Coefficients for Models of Parental Involvement, by Sex of Parent

| Marital Quality: | Parent-child Interaction | Parental Supportiveness | Parental Restrictiveness |
|------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Disagreements    | .01 (0.02)               | -.03 (-.02)             | -.07** (.04)            | 22** (0.20)   | .22** (.19) |
| Divorce possible | .01 (-.01)               | -.09** (-.11)           | -.05* (-.05)            | -.01 (-.02)  | .02 (.02)   |
| Less than happy marriage | -.05* (-.14) | -.03 (-.04)             | -.00 (-.00)             | .05* (.07)  | -         |
| Less than daily contact | -.17** (-.37) | -.09** (-.09)          | -.02 (-.01)             | .09** (.12) | .12** (.16) |
| Troubled marriage | -.06** (-.16)           | -.01 (-.01)             | .01 (.01)                | -.02 (.03)  | .00 (.00)   |

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| Household level & Individual characteristics |
|---------------------------------------------|
| Couples’ Earnings                           |
| 0.05* -0.06* 0.03 -0.07** -0.06** -0.10**  |
| (.00) (.00) (.00) (.00) (.00) (.00)         |
| Number of sons                              |
| 0.10** 0.07** -0.01 -0.02 0.15** 0.08**     |
| (.13) (.09) (.00) (.01) (.12) (.06)         |
| Number of daughters                         |
| -0.01 0.06** 0.02 0.04 0.05* 0.03            |
| (-.01) (.08) (.02) (.02) (.04) (.02)        |
| Fathers’ employment status                  |
| -0.02 0.09** -0.02 0.05* 0.06** 0.06**       |
| (-.09) (.38) (-.04) (.10) (.17) (.15)       |
| Mothers’ employment status                  |
| -0.02 -0.13** -0.02 -0.08** -0.02 -0.06**   |
| (-.05) (-.30) (-.03) (-.07) (-.03) (-.08)   |
| Duration of marriage                        |
| -0.35** -0.24** -0.13** -0.03 -0.28** -0.28**|
| (-.06) (-.04) (-.01) (-.00) (-.03) (-.03)   |
| Gender-role ideology                        |
| -0.05* 0.03 -0.08** -0.11** 0.04 0.01        |
| (-.02) (.01) (-.01) (-.02) (.01) (.00)      |
| Educational attainment                      |
| 0.15** 0.22** 0.16** 0.19** 0.04 0.06**      |
| (.06) (.09) (.03) (.03) (.01) (.02)         |
| Stepparent status                           |
| -0.25** -0.11** -0.16** -0.05* -0.13** -0.09**|
| (-.84) (-.63) (-.25) (-.13) (-.25) (-.31)   |
| R² change due to measures of marital quality |
| 0.04 0.01 0.03 0.02 0.06 0.08               |
| R² 0.18 0.14 0.09 0.07 0.17 0.20             |
| F 31.20** 23.45** 13.92** 11.89** 29.59** 36.60** |

N = 2,073
Note: Unstandardized coefficients shown in parentheses
* p < .05
** p < .01

The models of parental supportiveness are not as strong as the other models of parental involvement, yet they also reveal several interesting associations. The measures of marital quality maintain their negative asso-
ciations with paternal involvement. Fathers who have less than daily contact (in the sense of shared, intimate time) with their spouses are less supportive of their children (β = -0.08). Similarly, the possibility of divorce is also significantly associated with paternal supportiveness (β = -0.09). For mothers, frequent disagreements with husband (β = -0.07) and the possibility of divorce (β = -0.05) were significant predictors of supportiveness. Although less than 10% of the total variance in parental supportiveness is explained, marital quality does account for about 30% of the explained variance in the models for fathers and mothers.

In the models of parental restrictiveness, marital quality is positively associated with greater restrictiveness. For fathers, spousal disagreements (β = 0.22) and less than daily contact with spouse (β = 0.09) significantly increase restrictiveness. Marital disagreements (β = 0.22), a less than happy marriage (β = 0.05), and less than daily contact with husband (β = 0.12) significantly increase the restrictiveness of mothers. Marital quality explains about 35% of the explained variance in the models of parental restrictiveness for fathers and about 40% for mothers.

Thus, the relationship between spouses has the potential to shape the quality of the parent-child relationship. It is quite conceivable that fathers who frequently argue with their wives (or vice versa), and particularly those with an extended history of poor spousal relations, may develop a pattern of hostile or antagonistic relations with their spouse which, over time, sets the mode for parent-child relations. Less contact with a spouse may make it necessary to set harsher limits on children’s behavior because control is more difficult to achieve for one parent. The associations between marital quality and paternal involvement seem to follow the expected patterns. That is, lower levels of marital quality are associated with less parent-child interaction, less paternal supportiveness, and greater parental restrictiveness.

To support the earlier contention that the spousal and parental roles are intertwined for men, and distinct for women, we should find that marital quality has a stronger impact on parental involvement for men than for women. We find mixed support for this hypothesis. In regards to the amount of parent-child interaction, the hypothesis apparently holds true. Marital quality has a much stronger impact on father-child interaction than mother-child interaction. However, in regards to the nature of the interaction, the hypothesis does not hold. Marital quality influences fathers’ and mothers’ supportiveness and restrictiveness nearly equally.

We examine this issue further in a second set of analyses presented in Table 3. If indeed the two roles are bound together for men, then detachment from one role would imply detachment from the other. Detachment from one role and attachment to the other would be possible, though not necessary, for women. Fathers and mothers in this sample were therefore separated into two groups: (1) attached and (2) detached. Parents in this study were asked to respond to the statement: “I often wish I could be free
from the responsibility of being a parent.” Possible responses ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree, on a five-point scale. Of the fathers, 78.6% replied either disagree or strongly disagree to the statement, with the remaining 21.4% claiming that they either agreed, strongly agreed, or had no clear opinion. Of the mothers, 78.2% replied either disagree or strongly disagree to the statement, with the remaining 21.8% claiming that they either agreed, strongly agreed, or had no clear opinion.

Table 3 shows the percent of detached parents by levels of marital quality. The data indicate that both mothers and fathers indicating low marital quality are significantly more likely to feel detached from the parental role. About 30% of the parents with high levels of disagreements, the possibility of divorce, unhappy marriages, less than daily contact with spouse, and troubled marriages indicate that they feel detached from the parental role. Less than 20% of the parents with high marital quality indicate that they feel detached from the parental role. This supports the contention that marital

| Marital Quality Disagreements | Fathers | Mothers |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                              | %       | N       | %       | N       |
| Low                          | 18.4    | 1359    | 17.8    | 1404    |
| High                         | 29.4    | 715     | 31.7    | 670     |

| Divorce possible             | Fathers | Mothers |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                              | %       | N       | %       | N       |
| No                           | 18.4    | 1484    | 18.5    | 1476    |
| Yes                          | 32.0    | 589     | 31.5    | 597     |

| Less than happy marriage     | Fathers | Mothers |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                              | %       | N       | %       | N       |
| No                           | 19.6    | 1572    | 19.1    | 1531    |
| Yes                          | 30.4    | 501     | 31.2    | 542     |

| Less than daily contact      | Fathers | Mothers |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                              | %       | N       | %       | N       |
| No                           | 18.6    | 1150    | 18.5    | 1214    |
| Yes                          | 26.7    | 923     | 27.6    | 860     |

| Troubled marriage            | Fathers | Mothers |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|
|                              | %       | N       | %       | N       |
| No                           | 19.6    | 1560    | 18.4    | 1455    |
| Yes                          | 30.3    | 514     | 31.5    | 618     |
quality and parental involvement are highly related. However, the proportion of men and women indicating detachment from the parental role by marital quality is almost identical. Clearly, these findings do not support the hypothesis that the parental and spousal roles are more highly intertwined for men than for women. Indeed, these findings seem to raise further questions concerning the interconnections of parental and spousal roles for both partners.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study examines the relationship between marital quality and parenting, with the premise that marital quality can be viewed as a determinant of parental behaviors. We find that the quality of marriage, the nature of the parental relationship, and the attachment to the parental relationship are highly intertwined for both men and women. This suggests two possible scenarios: that (1) men separate the two roles more than in the past, or that (2) women have consolidated the parental and marital roles more. In either case, there is a convergence in the degree to which marital and parental roles are related for men and women. However, the finding that for women the amount of interaction with children has a substantially smaller relationship to marital quality than it does for men suggests that the gender convergence in these roles is not complete.

Over the past decade, family researchers have sought to focus on the notion of the "modern father." Specifically, it is commonly perceived that fathers today are quite dissimilar from their own paternal role models in the sense that fathers today are much more involved with their children. Despite this perception, minimal evidence has been offered to invalidate the previous conceptualization of fathers' roles in the family (Coverman & Shelley, 1986; Lamb, 1987). Our findings support previous research that suggests that while men's and women's attitudes concerning the sharing of roles within the family have changed toward a more egalitarian stance, role behaviors within the family have changed at a much slower rate (Hiller & Philliber, 1986). Given the similarity in the findings for men and women, though, it appears evident that fathers' and mothers' role experiences are more alike than disparate.

Beyond the associations between marital quality and parenting, fathers exhibited substantial variation in their paternal involvement across several household characteristics. Of particular note was the same-sex tendency in affective parenting. Fathers spent considerably more time with their children as the number of sons present in the home increased. This finding implies that fathers prefer to spend their parenting time with sons rather than with daughters, and it supports conclusions made by earlier studies (see Harris & Morgan, 1991). Fathers were more restrictive and slightly less supportive as more sons were present in the family.
Lest these results present a negative view of fathers, it should be pointed out that fathers are just as capable as mothers to be effective caregivers for their children. As stated by R. A. Thompson (1986),

It is important to distinguish between caregiving competence and caregiving performance. *Both* men and women can be effective caregivers of infants and young children; what distinguishes them in the traditional family are the roles they assume in relation to young children, not characteristics associated with gender per se. (p. 71)

Participation in domestic roles, both spousal and parental roles, is not an inherently determined choice, but rather it is a conscious decision made by both men and women.

Overall, the paternal and spousal roles for men do appear to be bound together, such that changes in one will necessarily lead to changes in the other. Eggebeen and Uhlenberg (1985) have suggested that contemporary fathers may be shifting further away from their paternal roles. To determine whether this tendency is truly sex-based, it will be necessary to consider changes in parental behaviors over time or across generations. On the basis of the findings from this study, it seems that our contention that fathers perceive their spousal and paternal roles to be bound together is appropriate. Fathers may indeed consider the roles of parent and spouse to be essentially one and the same. This conclusion must be tempered, though, with the findings that mothers also seem to combine their parental and marital roles. The notion of men moving toward an image of the contemporary father, a man who wants to be more involved with his children and with his family as a whole, may not be entirely valid, given our results.

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