# Parent–Child Relationships in Diverse Contexts

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Families often serve as the most important social contexts for child development, with their most significant quality being complex relationships in which socialization influence flows in more than one direction. Children are not just passive social beings who are shaped by their surrounding environment. Instead, they are active agents who help reshape their environment over time as they exert countervailing influence on others in their social context. As children interact with parents, siblings, and other family members, significant symbols are exchanged, meanings and patterned behaviors are co-created, and roles are reciprocally determined and constantly renegotiated as children experience development in context. Patterned behavior within the parent–child relationship is a product of shared genetic characteristics, parents' shared values and resources, common elements of the family environment, and patterned ways that parents respond to the young.

Despite the appearance of patterned behaviors, however, the influence of children on their parents and the larger system of family relationships demonstrate significant variation across time and in the different psychosocial outcomes that develop in individual children. Beginning in infancy, children are sources of powerful influence on their parent's behavior and the larger patterns of family interaction. Early within the parent–child relationship, for example, infant cries, verbalizations, movements, and gazes both elicit and influence parental responses. Consistent with this circular process, the responses of parents elicit further responses from children, with the result being that patterns of interaction emerge that have been characterized as a "dance" between partners in a dynamic relationship (Peterson & Hann, 1999; Peterson & Rollins, 1987). This parent–child dance continues in both patterned and evolving ways throughout the life course, becoming increasingly susceptible over time to outside influences as children develop and expand their social networks.

The metaphor of a "dance" that socializes both parents and children serves as backdrop for defining the purpose of this chapter, which is to provide an overview of the current research on parent–child relationships in diverse contexts. To accomplish this complex goal, an extensive review is provided first of the theoretical and empirical work on the impact of family structural variations on parent–child relationships consisting of such influences as family socioeconomic status (SES), poverty status, maternal employment, divorce, remarriage, and the presence of siblings. This is followed by attention to several dimensions of parent–child processes consisting of parental styles, dimensions of parental behavior, parent–child conflict, and interparental or marital/couple conflict on child development.

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Although a goal of this chapter is to describe and draw conclusions about the general state of knowledge relating to parent–child relationships, the primary focus is on recent empirical literature completed during the first decade of the twenty-first century. Prior to describing and drawing these conclusions, however, a brief review of relevant theories is provided that conceptualizes parent–child relationships, the process of socialization within families, and some of the socialized outcomes demonstrated by children.

## Socialization Within and Beyond Families

Families are often viewed as influencing the development of children through social dynamics referred to as the family socialization process. These interpersonal dynamics within families provide the means for transferring important values to the young, constructing shared meanings, and providing models for instilling psychosocial outcomes in children. A more encompassing arena of socialization beyond family boundaries is the broader social context consisting of experiences that family members have within neighborhoods, communities, cultural settings, legal systems, religious institutions, political institutions, and diverse aspects of the natural environment (Bornstein & Sawyer, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994).

Families provide a continual evolving social context for the socialization of parents, children, and other family members as development proceeds across the life course. Beyond family boundaries, connections exist with other ecological niches (e.g., cultural settings, economic institutions, neighborhoods, etc.) that contribute to developmental change. Traditional conceptions of family socialization have involved various kinds of unidirectional or social mold approaches. From a traditional social mold perspective, parents are viewed as shaping and influencing children (i.e., who are largely viewed as passive recipients) to internalize societal values and expectations that are valued by families and other social institutions (Inkeles, 1968; Parsons & Bales, 1955; Peterson & Hann, 1999).

At the risk of stating the obvious, a more accurate view of socialization that contrasts with the social mold perspective is one that portrays children as active participants in this process. Recent theoretical and empirical work recognizes more accurately the complex nature of socialization and asserts that this process involves at least bidirectional influences or, more accurately, multidirectional influences (Crosnoe & Cavanagh, 2010; Kuczynski, 2003; Peterson & Hann, 1999). That is, children both influence and are influenced by many social agents and experiences in their ecological context (e.g., parents, siblings, peers, teachers, extended family members). Simultaneously, these dyadic mutual influences are embedded in a larger social context and, in turn, influence and are influenced by institutions and social settings that compose the larger human ecology (e.g., schools, community settings, laws, culture, economic patterns, etc.) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994).

## Ecological Theory Applied to Parent–Child Relationships

Although family socialization is the focus of this chapter, the larger socialization process occurs within a complex multifaceted context consisting of several ecological systems within which children and families are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994) such as neighborhoods, schools, and larger social-cultural systems (e.g., cultural, religious institutions, etc.). That is, a combination of social, genetic, and maturational factors are major contributors to child development (Lerner, 2002). However, due to the diverse ecological complexities in which development takes place, any efforts to isolate specific socialization influences (e.g., family, peer, biological) as the sole influences on development are unlikely, if not impossible, to establish.

The ecological perspective of Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994), in particular, has been applied effectively to conceptualize the multiple socialization contexts of child development. This theory is especially important for its comprehensiveness because both immediate and more distant (or indirect)

sources of influence on children's development are conceptualized in one model. Current definitions of the ecological approach includes five ecosystemic levels or dimensions as follows: (a) the microsystem, which refers to the family (or subsystem, or individual family member); (b) the mesosystem, which refers to connections between microsystems such as the linkages between families and schools; (c) the exosystem, which refers to influences originating from larger systems that encompass and provide an immediate context for families such as neighborhoods and communities; (d) the macrosystem, which represents the largest social contexts at the national, societal, or general cultural level (such as political, religious, economic, cultural, and legal institutions); and (e) the chronosystem, which refers to the timing and patterning of events across the life course (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979, 1994, 2005). The Ecological approach highlights the notion that no one social context can be understood in isolation from the others. Although it is difficult to truly operationalize the entire theory simultaneously, "spillover" is likely to occur among the various ecosystemic levels, which means that interconnections between the family and surrounding social contexts must always be considered (Goodnow, 2006).

## Family Systems Theory Applied to Parent–Child Relationships

Viewing parent–child relationships from a family systems perspective, the focus is on the interaction between parents and children. That is, the reciprocity between parents and children allows for more powerful (i.e., hierarchal relationships) parents (compared to their child) to contribute to their children's competence through reciprocal interactions. A family systems perspective also allows for continuity in conceptualization without applying constraints for the particular structural qualities of families. Thus, all families operate as systems and follow the properties of a system regardless of composition, SES, ethnicity, or other possible structural variations (Minuchin, 1974). Perhaps the most fundamental idea of this framework is that family systems are complex entities whose members are tied together as part of larger relationship wholes. That is, all elements of family systems are interrelated through dynamic, mutual, and circular processes that link together the constituent individuals and relationships within families (Bornstein & Sawyer, 2006).

Several assumptions or constructs of family systems theory are useful for conceptualizing and understanding parent–child relationships. The first of these constructs, isophorphism, refers to an equivalence of form, such that aspects of the larger system (e.g., family) are reflected in interactions among the parts (i.e., the individuals and subsystems) of the system (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Common patterns of interaction can be identified by observing interaction between family members and subsystems which are reflective of or represent the rules and boundaries of the family system. For example, themes of the larger family system, such as tolerance for individuality, are reflected in how parents and children interact, how the parenting subsystem interacts with the child/sibling subsystem (internal boundaries), and how a family interacts with or presents itself to the outside world (external boundaries).

Another concept, the assumption of nonsummativity or holism, refers to viewing the whole system as more than simply the sum of its components or parts (Bornstein & Sawyer, 2006). In other words, a family is more than simply a parent plus a child, but also involves the interactions between each of the systems subcomponents (i.e., individuals and/or subsystems), such as the constituents within the parent–child relationship. An important aspect of a family system or subsystem is the meaning(s) and structure(s) that emerge out of this interaction. A systems perspective often focuses on these emergent qualities of the system as a whole vs. the qualities of any particular component (i.e., individual or subsystem) in isolation from the whole (Bornstein & Sawyer; Broderick, 1993).

Yet another important concept or assumption is self-reflexivity within human systems, which refers to the ability of individuals (separately or collectively) to examine the operation of their systems and establish their own goals (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). The multiple and reciprocal directionality of family influences as well as

the potential for conflict spawned by divergent views between individual members and family subsystems highlights the importance of self-reflection and goal orientation within family systems.

Unique patterns of interaction develop within each family system through the processes of carrying out roles and accomplishing goal-oriented tasks, as both explicit and implicit rules are created and represented through the construct of boundaries (Bornstein & Sawyer, 2006; Minuchin, 1974). For example, each family develops unique patterns of communication that define their relationships, roles, goals, and strategies for accomplishing goals, all of which provide structure for daily life.

A systemic view of parent–child relations, for example, often focuses on the degree of openness in information exchange. Such a focus on communication is important, because open communication between parents and children facilitates close and supportive relationships. Parent–child relationships that are close and supportive, in turn, provide the impetus for healthy negotiations of conflict and autonomy, both of which lead to positive parent–child relationships and child outcomes.

## Children's Social Competence and Problem Behavior: Outcomes of Socialization

Most parents intend to foster social competence in their children by setting appropriate expectations that are consistent with behavior and values considered to be normative in their social-cultural context and contribute to adaptive relationships with others (Bloom, 1990; Gillespie, 2003; Peterson, 2005; Peterson & Bush, 2003; Peterson & Leigh, 1990). Social competence is defined as a set of attributes or psychological resources that help children adapt to and cope with diverse social situations they are likely to encounter in everyday life (e.g., Baumrind, 1966, 1991; Peterson, 2005; Peterson & Bush, 2003). Recent conceptualizations of social competence identify several subdimensions, including (a) social skills and prosocial behavior with peers and other interpersonal relationships; (b) psychological or cognitive resources (e.g., self-regulation, conflict management, problem-solving skills); (c) a balance between age-appropriate autonomy and connectedness in reference to parents; and (d) an achievement orientation.

The opposite of socially competent attributes, problem behavior, can generally be classified as externalizing or internalizing behavior. The first of these types of problem dimensions, externalizing behavior, refers to aggressive, violent, and conduct disordered behavior that acts out against society at home, school, or other social contexts (Meyer, 2003). A second problem dimension, internalizing attributes, refers to difficulties such as anxious or depressive symptoms that are manifest psychologically and directed internally toward the self (Kovacs & Devlin, 1998). The prevalence of internalizing or externalizing attributes among the young increases the chances of children experiencing other problems during development such as school failure, parent–child conflict, and poor peer adjustment. Similarly, these other problems (e.g., parent–child conflict) can also lead to or exacerbate internalizing and externalizing problems. For example, children's conflict with fathers has been found to mediate the relationships between paternal depression and children's internalizing and externalizing problems (Kane & Garber, 2009). In contrast, dimensions of children's social competence (e.g., self-regulation or social skills) as well as aspects of family socialization processes that foster such outcomes (e.g., parental support) are sources of social-psychological resilience that assist children to cope successfully with situations that threaten effective adaptation and lead to internalizing or externalizing problems (Gillespie, 2003; Hauser, 1999).

## Family Structural Variation

Structural variations in family life refer to differences across families in the composition (i.e., the number of family members, types of relationships and statuses), resources available (e.g., income and education level), and structural organization

(e.g., intact two-parent, bi-nuclear families). Over the years there have been continuing debates regarding the comparative impact of structural family variations vs. family processes on child outcomes, parent–child relationships, parenting, and marriage. Growing evidence indicates that a focus on both structural and family process variables is necessary to develop a thorough understanding of families in the form of direct and indirect effects (e.g., Crosnoe & Cavanagh, 2010). Most of the impact from family structural variations is typically conveyed indirectly through influences on specific family processes and social psychological variables, such as patterns of communication, conflict management, and parental behavior (Cherlin, 2004; Demo & Cox, 2000; Teachman, 2000; Wilson, Peterson, & Wilson, 1993). The structural characteristics of family life impact the quality of interaction or processes that take place during socialization. Thus, although some direct structural effects may be evident, the primary means of specifying the impact of these family characteristics is to delineate how they have consequences for the dynamic processes within family systems that contribute to family functioning. These influences on family processes, in turn, will have psychological and behavioral consequences for family members (Rutter, 2002).

## Family SES

Often considered within the larger topic of social stratification, the construct family SES is commonly used to define the social and economic standing of a particular family and it members within the larger society. SES is often provided empirical meaning based on indicators of parental education, income, residence, and/or other measurements of social class standing.

Research during the first decade of the twenty-first century suggests that SES is predictive of parenting beliefs, values, and behaviors as well as child outcomes within families (see Conger, Conger, & Martin, 2010 for recent review). Two common theoretical models that have been applied to understand the relationship between SES, parent–child processes, and child outcomes are the Family Stress and the Investment Models (Conger et al.).

Following the *Family Stress Model*, SES influences child outcomes through parents and related family processes. Lower SES, for example, is associated with greater stress, depression, poor neighborhoods, and disadvantaged living conditions for parents. Moreover, economic hardship for parents is associated with such patterns as higher levels of interparental conflict (IPC), parenting behavior characterized as punitive, uninvolved and inconsistent parenting, as well as problematic child outcomes (Conger & Conger, 2002; Conger et al., 2002). Thus, from the standpoint of the Family Stress Model, the primary effects of economic influence/stress on children are mediated through variations in the kinds of parenting that can result from the circumstances of economic hardship. Recent studies with diverse samples and methodologies support the Family Stress Model by concluding that economic pressure on parents leads to emotional distress and IPC, which, in turn, leads to greater use of problematic forms of parenting. Parents who are more likely to foster problematic child outcomes tend to engage in IPC, use punitiveness frequently with children, are disengaged, and are frequently inconsistent in their discipline and socialization patterns (e.g., Benner & Kim, 2010; Conger et al., 2002; Mistry, Biesanz, Taylor, Burchinal, & Cox, 2004; Parke et al., 2004).

The basic premise of the *Investment Model* is that parents who have more economic resources are better able to provide significant investments in the development of their children (e.g., private schools, tutors, etc.). In contrast, parents with fewer economic resources must focus their limited capital on more immediate family needs (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Duncan & Magnuson, 2003). Parental investment includes childrearing practices aimed at facilitating child competence and includes such things as parental stimulation of learning (e.g., directly and through advanced training/support), meeting basic needs (e.g., healthy food, shelter, medical care), and the ability to reside in an economically advantaged neighborhood/community. The Investment Model

includes the idea that economic well-being often translates into parenting approaches that encourage social, cognitive, and behavioral competence in the young. Findings from recent studies suggest that higher family incomes, that often serve as resources for greater parental investment, have been found to predict both prosocial outcomes during the time when children and adolescents are present in families (Gershoff, Aber, Raver, & Lennon, 2007; Linver, Brooks-Gunn, & Kohen, 2002; Yeung, Linver, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002) as well as financial and occupational success by the young after adulthood is attained (e.g., Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Recent studies also provide evidence for more than one perspective by concluding that the parental investment model is a better predictor of cognitive development, whereas the family stress model is a better predictor of social-emotional development in the young (Gershoff et al., 2007; Linver et al., 2002; Yeung et al., 2002).

Besides economic hardship, it is also important to recognize that parents of different SESs often have distinctive conditions of life as well as values and priorities that reflect these conditions. These values and priorities, in turn, influence parental goals and practices perceived as adaptive in their particular context. Most of the studies in this area follow Melvin Kohn's (1963; 1977; Pearlin & Kohn, 1966) pioneering work on the relationships between parental education, occupation, values, and parenting beliefs and practices. These early studies found that parents in blue-collar occupations emphasized obedience and conformity in their parenting values (viewed as related to success within blue-collar occupations). Parents situated in white-collar occupations, on the other hand (i.e., higher education), were found to emphasize and value independence, creativity, and initiative in their children, which are values associated with success in middle-income occupations.

In recent extensions of this work on the consequences of parents' SES, Weininger and Lareau (2009) report a paradox, in that, although working class and lower SES parents emphasized children's conformity to external authority, they also appeared to grant considerable autonomy to their children. Lareau's (2002, 2004) qualitative work, in turn, describes higher SES parents as facilitating children's achievement and talents through the provision of additional opportunities beyond those typically available to children of lower SES. Parents of higher SES standing provide these advantages through their access to resources and time in the form of such involvements as advocacy work in schools/communities and facilitating children's engagement. That is, higher SES parents are able to provide greater opportunities and more access to resources that they value highly and believe are necessary for their children's well-being. This process by parents, or "concerted cultivation," is believed to operate in the same manner across race and ethnicity, while being more a function of variation in SES. The process of concerted cultivation can be seen, therefore, as producing qualities that are necessary for success in the parent's work and socioeconomic environment (e.g., Weininger & Lareau, 2009). Among lower SES parent's, in contrast, rather than "concerted cultivation," parents are reported to use a "natural growth" approach to child rearing. This natural growth approach provides more open schedules and free time activities to the young, while also emphasizing children's conformity to external authority (Lareau, 2002, 2004). The work of Lareau has been followed up by various quantitative studies, which have, for the most part, confirmed these processes (Bodovski & Farkas, 2008; Crosnoe & Huston, 2007). The only exception to supportive findings is some negative findings for concerted cultivation by parents across varied race and ethnic groups (Cheadle & Amato, 2011). Thus, more work is needed in this productive area of research, especially where mixed methods approaches can be used to examine more thoroughly the more subtle variations among working class and those experiencing poverty. Another possibility, in turn, is that these parents emphasize conformity to help prepare their children for types of work that they have experienced themselves. At the same time, these parents also may realize the increasing importance of acquiring other skill sets and assets (e.g., attaining a college education) that are beyond their own expertise, and thus grant more

autonomy for the youth to explore areas in which they have limited or no experience.

This early work of Kohn et al. and recent work by Lareau et al. highlight the continuing importance of the social context on parent–child relationships and child outcomes. That is, the quality of the social contexts in which parenting and socialization occur is predicted by the social and economic resources available to parents (e.g., the quality of neighborhoods, nutrition, home learning environments, schools/education, as well as underlying parental beliefs and socialization goals) (Leyendecker, Harwood, Comparini, & Yalcinkaya, 2005). The specific components of SES, however, are likely to have differential effects on family processes and child development.

Human capital (i.e., nonmaterial resources such as parental education), for example, is reported to be the most robust aspect of SES for predicting parenting practices among parents of young children (e.g., Richman, Miller, & Levine, 1992). As children develop, however, social capital (e.g., supportive social networks outside the family) and financial capital (e.g., the ability to provide for basic necessities) are likely to become more salient influences on parenting and the socialization of children (Leyendecker et al., 2005). Recent empirical work suggests that the relationships among SES, parenting, and child development are not simple linear relationships. Instead, the effects of changes in SES have been found to be more pervasive at the lower ends of the socioeconomic continuum, such as for families living at or below the poverty line. In contrast, the same amount of change in education or income at the other end of the continuum (high SES families) may have diminishing returns and is not as likely to have an equivalent effect (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997; Duncan & Magnuson, 2003). Moreover, social capital is especially helpful for families with low financial capital and low human capital, because supportive social networks can serve to buffer the effects of poverty on the parenting environment and child outcomes (e.g., Field, Widmayer, Adler, & De Cubas, 1990; Leyendecker et al., 2005).

Another illustration of socioeconomic effects on parent–child relations and child outcomes is the impact of poverty on child development. The influence of poverty on parent–child relationships occurs, in part, through diminished resources and a deprivation of enriched learning environments in the home (e.g., fewer books, educational toys, less concerted cultivation) as well as stressors associated with living in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. The detrimental effects of poverty appear to be greater among families with young children compared to those with older offspring. That is, exposure to poverty in early childhood appears to have more negative consequences than exposure to poverty during later developmental stages (Duncan, Ziol-Guest, & Kalil, 2010; Hao & Matsueda, 2006; Leyendecker et al., 2005). For example, researchers in this area have reported that children exposed to poverty during early childhood (compared to adolescents exposed to poverty) earn less money and work fewer hours after adulthood is attained (Duncan et al., 2010), have lower cognitive abilities and realize lower educational achievement (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997). These findings support an ecological perspective in which it is increasingly recognized that the economic circumstances of family environments provide key contexts for cognitive and socioemotional development during early childhood, which are necessary for acquiring school age human capital (e.g., Cunha, Heckman, Lochner, & Masterov, 2005).

## Maternal Employment

The increasing prevalence of women in the work force and the coinciding rise in dual-earner families over recent decades is one of the most influential changes that US families and society have experienced (Baum, 2004; Riggio, 2006). Not surprisingly, this trend has been less pronounced among women at the lower end of the SES continuum (e.g., Cromartie, 2007) because maternal employment has been simply business as usual among this group. In 2008, 71% of mothers with minor children worked outside of the home (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). The research evidence regarding the effects of maternal employment on parents, parenting, and child

outcomes is largely inconclusive and varies depending on many factors including age of child, family structure (e.g., two parent vs. single parent), SES (e.g., poverty compared to other economic circumstances), type of work (e.g., rewarding and flexible vs. tedious and nonstandard schedules), quality of child care, and parent–child relationships (Brooks-Gunn, Han, & Waldfogel, 2002). Studies have found negative effects (e.g., Han, Waldfogel, & Brooks-Gunn, 2001), positive effects (e.g., Makri-Botsari & Makri, 2003), and the lack of long-term negative effects (Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst, & Killian, 1999; Hoffman, 2000).

On the positive side, maternal employment has been shown to directly facilitate positive child outcomes, such as through the provision of positive role models, especially for girls. Maternal employment typically increases family income (at least among dual-earner families/couples), which, in turn, is a positive predictor of beneficial child outcomes such as cognitive development and academic performance (e.g., Baum, 2004), presumably through increased access to educational and related social resources in the surrounding micro- and mesosystems (e.g., higher quality neighborhoods and schools). In contrast, early maternal employment has been reported as negatively related to children's behavioral adjustment (Belsky & Eggebeen, 1991; Joshi & Bogen, 2007), cognitive development (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1991; Han, 2005), and academic performance (Baum, 2004).

Some evidence has been reported that supports the differential effects of maternal employment based on ethnicity, SES, type of employment, and children's developmental stage. For example, several studies have found negative effects for maternal employment on child outcomes among European American samples but not for African American samples (Han et al., 2001; Waldfogel, Han, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002). The detrimental effects of maternal employment also are more amplified among families living in poverty, compared to those is the middle and upper class. For example, among recent welfare leavers, Dunifon, Kalil, and Bajracharya (2005) reported that lengthy parental commute time was related to the lower socioemotional adjustment among their school age children. Related studies of similar populations, on the other hand, have concluded that entry into work was not associated with child outcomes (Chase-Lansdale et al., 2003) and, when parents met the work requirements of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, the psychosocial outcomes of low income children improved or even surpassed peers in nonworking families (Wertheimer, Moore, & Burkhauser, 2008).

The impact of maternal employment on child outcomes and family processes appears to vary with children's developmental stage. Han et al. (2001) found that maternal employment produced negative effects on both cognitive and behavioral outcomes for White children during the first year of life, but also concluded that positive consequences were evident for the cognitive outcomes of children at ages 2 and 3. Morris, Gennetian, and Duncan (2005) found similar results for 2–5-year olds, but reported that the cognitive gains from maternal employment faded after age 5. By middle childhood, nonfamily influences such as peers, teachers, and schools play an increasing role in children's lives, with a result being that maternal employment may have less direct impact for children in the latter portion of middle childhood than in earlier periods (e.g., Baum, 2004). The increase in family income from maternal employment, on the other hand, is likely to impact the quality of children's schools and neighborhoods (Baum). Moreover, older children are more likely to perceive their parents as potential role models, and thus benefit from having employed mothers, especially girls.

The type and quality of the mother's employment and/or her job satisfaction also have important influences on parental health, parenting practices, and child outcomes. Although paid employment can have positive effects on mothers' mental health through the alleviation of financial strain and the experience of psychological rewards (e.g., work/career achievement and satisfaction from employment), not all employment has positive outcomes. Employment conditions characterized by long hours, nonstandard schedules, stressful circumstances, menial tasks, or physically

taxing requirements are more likely to contribute to maternal frustration, stress, fatigue, and possibly psychological symptoms. Such difficult and stressful employment conditions, in turn, can have negative consequences for parenting quality and child outcomes. In low-income families, for example, maternal employment that involves nonstandard schedules is associated with socioemotional problems of children during early childhood (Han, 2005; Joshi & Bogen, 2007). Similarly, mothers employed in low prestige jobs are more likely to manifest coercive parenting (Raver, 2003), which, in turn, is predictive of child outcomes (e.g., internalizing and externalizing problems) that are inconsistent with social competence. Employed mothers who work longer hours have been found to spend less time with children, engage in less monitoring, talk less, express less affection, and engage in more arguments with their children (Crouter, Bumpus, Maguire, & McHale, 1999; Muller, 1995; Repetti & Wood, 1997; Sayer, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004). Consequently, an overall assessment is that research on the effects of maternal employment has been found to be replete with nuanced complications, often contradictory, and probably of largely moderate impact on children and youth.

## Divorce

Most children experience important family structural and process changes when their parents divorce (for a more detailed review of this area see Chap. 21). It is estimated that approximately 50% of children in the United States will experience their parents' divorce (Lansford, 2009). Results from meta-analyses (Amato, 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991) indicated that children of divorced parents scored significantly higher on measures of problematic outcomes (e.g., depression and conduct problems) and significantly lower on positive measures of well-being (e.g., academic achievement, self-concept, social relations, and quality of relationships with parents) compared to children with continuously married parents (Amato, 2000; 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991). However, such findings must be interpreted and applied cautiously, as the relationships between parental divorce and child outcomes are quite complex (Chap. 9; Lansford, 2009).

A sizable portion of the research on the impact of divorce can be characterized in terms of two extremes, with some researchers asserting that parental divorce has serious long-term effects on children (e.g., Popenoe, 2003; Wallerstein, Lewis, & Blakeslee, 2000), while others assert that there are no measureable long-term effects (e.g., Harris, 1998). Much of the scholarship, however, falls within a broad middle-ground position in which researchers conclude that it is common for some negative effects to become prevalent, most of which consist of small, temporary, and nonuniversal consequences (Lansford, 2009). That is, drawing any conclusions about divorce consequences requires a complex process of analyzing the relevance of various mediators (e.g., income, parental quality, IPC), moderators (e.g., age of child, adjustment prior to divorce), and methodological factors (e.g., indicators of adjustment, analyses and type of study) that can impact the identified links between parental divorce and children's outcomes. Although divorce can have negative consequences for children, compared to families with intact marriages, the majority of children from divorced families do well on most indicators of child well-being (Amato, 2003; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Lansford, 2009; O'Conner, 2003). For example, Hetherington and Kelly (2002) report that 10% of individuals whose parents stayed married experienced serious long-term problems, compared to 25% of those in families whose parents divorced.

Children's adjustment to divorce can be enhanced through factors that decrease IPC and/or shield children from this conflict. Other aspects of the family environment that foster children's adjustment to divorce include the provision of adequate maternal and paternal involvement (e.g., parental monitoring along with emotional and economic support), co-parenting, social support (e.g., from extended family members), and other sources of formal and informal support (Chen & George, 2005). In an overall sense, therefore, the quality of the parent–child relationship has been found to be an important mediator of children's

adjustment to parental divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagen, 1999; Kelly & Emery, 2003; O'Conner, 2003). Children who continue to experience positive parent–child relationships and positive parenting environments are more likely to demonstrate constructive short- and long-term adjustment to divorce (Hetherington & Stanley-Hagen, 1999; O'Conner, 2003).

## Siblings

Another important structural variation of the family system that influences child development within families is the presence and number of siblings as well as the quality of sibling relationships (see Chap. 15). Though the sibling and parent–child relationships often have distinctive boundaries, these subsystems are often intensely related to each other, with the result being that many issues from one subsystem often spill over into the other. A majority of children in the United States are raised with at least one sibling, and sibling relationships typically serve as the models for peer relations and a "practice" ground for developing social skills and peer relationships. Sibling relationships are complex (Myers & Bryant, 2008) and the impact on child outcomes varies by a variety of factors including age, gender, birth order, spacing, and gender constellation of sibling dyad.

Attachment relationships between siblings can serve as a positive support throughout life (Cicirelli, 1995; Dunn, 2007; Teti & Ablard, 1989). Sibling relationships change over the life course, as does the impact of sibling relationships on individual outcomes. Positive sibling relationships are particularly beneficial for engaging in cooperative and pretend play, which provides opportunities for children to develop mutual understanding of each other. For example, having one or two siblings instead of none is related to enhanced social skills within peer group interactions (Downey & Caldron, 2004). During middle childhood, poor quality sibling relations are a frequent source of parent–child conflict (McHale & Crouter, 2003), which, in turn, impacts child outcomes. Sibling relationships also can be characterized as consisting of more egalitarianism, higher intensity, and greater emotionality with age as children progress from late middle childhood into early adolescence (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Moreover, early and middle childhood are times when siblings will typically experience less pull from relationships outside of the family that might weaken the close and intimate bonds of siblings (Dunn, 2002). Studies have found that sibling conflict in middle childhood is predictive of problem behavior in adolescence and early adulthood (Bank, Patterson, & Reid, 1996; Paterson, 1982; Richman, Stevenson, & Graham, 1982; Stocker, Burwell, & Briggs, 2002). Recent studies also have found several positive effects of sibling relationships on child development (Pike, Coldwell, & Dunn, 2005; Richmond, Stocker, & Rienks, 2005). For example, Richmond et al. (2005) found that as sibling relationships increased in quality (e.g., more warmth and less conflict) over time, the extent of children's depressive symptoms decreased.

Another important influence on child development and sibling relationships is the extent to which differential parental treatment occurs in families. Parents often recognize behavioral differences among their children (e.g., temperament differences from infancy and beyond) and adjust their parenting accordingly (Templeton, Bush, Lash, Robinson, & Gale, 2008). Perhaps consistent with gene–environment conceptions, parents treat children differently based on children's personal characteristics which often elicit differential responses from parents (McHale & Crouter, 2003). Children typically become well aware of the differences in behavior directed toward them by parents compared to their siblings (Dunn & Munn, 1985). Researchers have consistently reported that perceptions of receiving less favorable parental treatment (e.g., greater restrictiveness) compared to one's sibling is positively related to externalizing and internalizing problems (Dunn, Stocker, & Plomin, 1990; McHale, Crouter, McGuire, & Updegraff, 1995; McHale, Updegraff, Jackson-Newsom, Tucker, & Crouter, 2000; Richmond et al., 2005). Recent studies have concluded that parental differential treatment is more strongly related to children's

externalizing problems than to children's internalizing attributes (e.g., Boyle et al., 2004; Kowal, Kramer, Krull, & Crick, 2002; Richmond et al., 2005). Thus it appears that the experience of being treated unfairly by parents in a comparative sense is more salient in predicting the behavioral problems of children than the quality of sibling relations. It is important to keep in mind, of course, that complex relationships may exist between sibling relationship quality, differential parental treatment, and children's outcomes.

Sibling relationships are unique in several ways. First, most siblings spend a great deal of time together and, by middle childhood, young siblings spend more time with one another than they spend with parents or peers (McHale & Crouter, 1996). Second, sibling relationships tend to be emotionally uninhibited, which increases the chance of siblings influencing one another (Dunn, 2002). Third, the role structure of sibling relationships is different than other close relationships in that they can contain both complementary (as seen in parent–child relationships) and egalitarian (as seen in peer relationships) components (Dunn, 1983). The role structure of sibling relationships is highly variable across time and place, and has been found to differ across gender constellation, age spacing and birth order, and age (Chap. 15).

Although sibling relationships can serve as both positive and negative influences on child development, it is important to note the complexity of siblings' impact on each other. Neither the quality of sibling relationships nor the extent of differential parental treatment defines the whole picture of sibling relationships. Instead, sibling relations may be conceptualized best in terms of complex interactions among many factors that closely impinge upon brother and sister relationships (e.g., degree of maturation, peer relations, and parent–child relations) and that are associated with changes in children's adjustment (Chap. 15; Richmond et al., 2005).

In summary, the influence of family structural variations on parent–child relationships and child development occurs primarily through the impact of these differing structural organizations on family processes and interactions such as parenting behaviors, goals, and parent–child relationships. That is, structural variations in families (e.g., divorce, SES, siblings) have consequences for parent–child relationships and child development by influencing interaction and relationships as well as resources and opportunities within families, which, in turn, have consequences for children's development.

## Family Process and Relationship Variables

The aspects of family life that typically have the strongest direct influences on child development (i.e., dimensions of social competence and problem behaviors) are family processes and relationships, rather than structural dimensions of families. Consequently, subsequent sections of this chapter review the most prominent parental and family process dimensions of the parent–child relationship that have either negative or positive consequences for child development. More specifically, two broad strategies commonly used for conceptualizing the parental socialization of children are examined, the social mold perspective (i.e., parenting styles and behaviors) and the bidirectional perspective (i.e., parent–child conflict and IPC).

### Parenting Styles and Behaviors

In most societies, parents have the primary responsibility for socializing children to demonstrate culturally acceptable qualities that at least, in part, foster children's successful functioning within and conformity to societal norms. Although "researchers have begun to more clearly articulate how the meaning of a parenting behavior influences its developmental significance" (Crosnoe & Cavanagh, 2010, p. 599), there remains much room for improving the consistency of operationalizing conceptualizations of parenting (e.g., McLeod, Weisz, & Wood, 2007; Stewart & Bond, 2002). The recent debate regarding parental knowledge vs. parental monitoring (e.g., Stattin & Kerr, 2000; Smetana, 2008) is an excellent

example of moving the field forward (Crosnoe & Cavanagh, 2010), but much more work is still needed. For example, although there is acceptance of common conceptualizations of parenting influence (e.g., responsiveness and demandingness), consistent use of standardized, valid, and reliable instruments/methods to operationalize these concepts and corresponding terminology is very limited indeed (e.g., Stewart & Bond, 2002). One might find two studies, for example, that use the same terminology to describe a specific dimension of parental influence (e.g., parental punitiveness or coerciveness), but, upon closer inspection, notice that the scales and items are tapping different constructs. This dilemma is more pronounced in studies across different cultures and social contexts.

A long history of research exists that examines the socialization of children by parents, which delineates how various types of parenting behavior or styles influence various child outcomes and how this varies across gender, age of child, SES, and other contextual variables (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Peterson & Rollins, 1987; Rollins & Thomas, 1979). Some researchers still use the terms "parenting style" and "parenting behavior" synonymously (Spera, 2005), though there are important distinctions between these concepts (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Stewart & Bond, 2002). In general, parenting styles are composed of complex sets (or multiple dimensions) of attributes and refer to emotional climates or contexts in which parents raise their children. Compared to parental styles, in turn, parenting behaviors refer to more precisely defined practices (i.e., many of which are one dimensional) directed by parents at children within specific contexts (Barber, 1997; Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Peterson & Rollins, 1987; Rollins & Thomas, 1979; Stewart & Bond, 2002). Given the context specificity of parenting practices, these practices may vary considerably in presence and meaning across cultures and other social contexts, whereas parenting styles may be more likely to apply generally across diverse settings (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Hart, Nelson, Robinson, Olsen, & McNeilly-Choque, 1998; Stewart & Bond, 2002). That is, parenting styles refer to behaviors and interactions that occur over a broad range of situations and over time that create a general atmosphere in which parent–child relationships occur. Parental behaviors, on the other hand, refer to specific techniques rooted in the parent's belief and value systems that are more likely to vary across cultural and social circumstances.

Although specific terms and instruments may vary, which make comparisons very difficult across studies, instruments, and constructs, consensus does exist that the key components of parenting styles consist of responsiveness (e.g., acceptance, warmth) demandingness (e.g., behavioral regulation or control) (Maccoby & Martin, 1983) and more recently, autonomy granting (Peterson, Bush, & Supple, 1999; Ryan, Deci, & Grolnick, 1995). Research on frequently identified parental styles and dimensions of parental behavior is briefly reviewed in subsequent sections of this chapter.

## Parental Styles

For several decades the popularity or focus of researchers on parenting styles has waxed and waned to some extent, but remains a prominent aspect of studying parent–child relationships (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Peterson & Rollins, 1987; Rollins & Thomas, 1979). The most prominent researcher in the parenting styles literature is Baumrind (1971; 1978; 1991; Baumrind & Black, 1967; Baumrind, Larzelere, & Owens, 2010) who conceptualized several childrearing typologies—or multidimensional patterns of parental behavior, expectations, and values that contribute to an overall climate within the parent–child relationship. Although changing somewhat over time, Baumrind's most commonly identified typology includes the three categories: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting. Her most recent conceptualizations include making further specifications to distinguish between types of power assertion across varied reconceptualizations of parenting styles (e.g., Baumrind et al. 2010).

Currently, many researchers still find parenting styles to be a viable option for examining

parental influence, at least among White middle class families (Gavazzi, 2011). Some problems have arisen, however, when parenting styles have been applied to diverse populations. More specifically, instruments developed to operationalize parenting styles for Western samples have not always predicted child outcomes consistently within ethnic minority populations and/or non-Western cultural groups (e.g., Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg, Mounts, & Lamborn, 1991). This inconsistency appears to occur because the instruments used to measure parenting styles are rooted in the history of the specific culture in which they were developed (i.e., most often middle class Caucasians in the United States). That is, specific "parental behavior or practice" items are frequently included as components of parenting style measures, which collectively are more culturally specific and do not necessarily apply across cultures (Chao, 1994, 2001; Stewart & Bond, 2002).

Scholars from Asian cultures, for example, have concluded, with growing frequency, that Western measures of parenting style do not capture aspects of Asian (e.g., Chinese) parenting. A particularly notable proposal along these lines has been evident for forms of control (i.e., the control dimension itself is composed of several different dimensions) as illustrated by the strong Chinese emphasis on child-training and the different methods used by these parents to convey love and caring to their children (Chao, 1994, 2001). That is, cultural influences among Asian-American parents and other non-Western cultural groups may not be captured and may be overlooked in current conceptualizations of parenting style typologies (Chao, 1994, 2000, 2001).

Perhaps in a conceptual sense, however, once the context-specific practice items are removed or adjusted to a specific culture/context, the hope remains by some that a general parenting style can be assessed. At least two of the key parenting style constructs, warmth and dominating control, have demonstrated some evidence for cross-cultural generality. For example, Stewart and Bond (2002) reported evidence based on a series of cross-cultural studies which provided support that "warmth" (i.e., responsiveness) and dominating control (i.e., demandingness) generally apply across diverse cultures. Similarly, Kagitcibasi (1996) reported support for the construct of parental "warmth" as a parental attribute that is generally applicable across cultures. Autonomy granting actions by parents also have garnered some support in ethnically diverse and non-Western samples (e.g., Bush, 2000; Bush, Peterson, Cobas, & Supple, 2002; Bush, Supple, & Lash, 2004; Supple, Ghazarian, Peterson, & Bush, 2009).

#### Authoritarian Parenting Style

The authoritarian parenting style is characterized as being high on demandingness (control) and low in responsiveness (warmth) and tends to be associated with the most problematic psychosocial outcomes among children and adolescents. Authoritarian parents are described as using hostile control or harsh punishment in an arbitrary manner to gain compliance (i.e., arbitrary discipline, Hoffman, 1983), without tolerating much give and take in their relationships with children (i.e., unqualified power assertion, Hoffman, 1983). A common objective is to shape and control the behavior and attitudes of children in accordance with an absolute set of standards to gain obedience and conformity. Researchers examining US samples have reported that parents (at least among middle-class European-Americans) who use the authoritarian style tend to foster lower levels of social competence dimensions (e.g., self-concept and school performance) and higher levels of problematic outcomes such as conduct disorder, externalizing behavior, and noncompliance in the young (Baumrind, 1971, 1978, 1991; Baumrind et al., 2010; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Steinberg et al., 1991).

#### Permissive Parenting Style

Baumrind (1978, 1991) describes the permissive parenting style as being tolerant and accepting of children's impulsive behavior. She describes these parents as using very little punishment and as avoiding the implementation of firm controls or restrictions. This category has been further divided into (a) permissive-neglectful and (b) permissive-indulgent styles.

Parents who demonstrate the permissive-neglectful style of parenting convey low levels of responsiveness and low levels of demandingness. Children living with permissive-neglectful parents are at risk for experiencing too much autonomy without the continuing bond of parental supportiveness that provides a secure base. As a result, these children are more likely to experience "separation" from a parent, rather than attain autonomy through a negotiated process that establishes a healthy balance between growing self-determination and remaining connected to parents. Children in permissive-neglectful homes are more likely to associate with deviant peers, especially as they enter adolescence and young adulthood. The results of such deviant associations for children may be increased resistance to authority, partially due to limited or no exposure to consistent discipline (e.g., monitoring) and the enforcement of rationally based parental rules. Another issue is that children of permissive-neglectful parents have not experienced parental nurturance, which limits their opportunities to establish and/or maintain close relationships with authority figures that are a continuing reaffirmation of attachment bonds.

The permissive-indulgent parenting style is characterized by low levels of parental demandingness, but high levels of responsiveness (parental support and nurturance). Some children with permissive-indulgent parents may experience positive outcomes such as high levels of self-esteem/confidence and autonomy. The lack of parental control by permissive-indulgent parents, however, can override some of the positive impact of parental responsiveness. The high autonomy granting of permissive indulgent parents tends to occur within the context of few if any parental rules or discipline, which can result in children being granted independence too fast and too soon. That is, ironically, for different reasons, the end result of permissive-indulgent parenting may be similar to that of permissive-neglectful parenting. This parental approach may have such similar consequences for the young by creating an atmosphere that allows and fosters associations with deviant peers, lower motivation for or engagement in school, as well as externalizing behavior problems (Baumrind et al., 2010; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson & Hann, 1999). Explanations for these adverse child outcomes are the lack of exposure to sufficient firm control in the form of parental monitoring, the guidance provided by parental rules, and consistent discipline.

### Authoritative Parenting Style

The authoritative style of parenting is characterized by high levels of demandingness (i.e., firm consistent behavioral control, not psychological or punitive control) and high levels of responsiveness. In other words, parents in this category convey support, warmth, clearly defined rules, have effective communication (promoting psychological autonomy), and provide consistent discipline with moderate to high levels of behavioral control (Baumrind, 1991; Steinberg et al., 1991). Authoritative parenting is characterized by rational power assertion in which discipline involves clear communication and is a logical consequence of children's actions. This approach to parenting involves effective monitoring, predictable consequences based on rules, consistency, and demands that are adjusted to children's developmental needs (Baumrind et al., 2010; Hoffman, 1983). US researchers have consistently found authoritative parenting to predict desirable psychosocial outcomes among children and adolescents, at least most strongly among middle-class European-American children (Baumrind, 1991; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Larzelere, Sather, Schneider, Larson, & Pike, 1998; Peterson, 2005; Steinberg, 2001). More specifically, authoritative parenting has been associated with high levels of self-esteem, school performance, social skills, and fewer problems with antisocial behaviors and substance abuse (Baumrind, 1971, 1978, 1991; Baumrind et al., 2010; Dornbusch et al., 1987; Steinberg, 2001; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992; Steinberg et al., 1991). Research by Larzelere et al. (1998), for example, found that parenting consistent with the authoritative parenting style reduced noncompliance and aggression among toddlers.

## Parenting Behaviors

A focus on specific dimensions of parental behaviors is an alternative strategy to the use of more

global conceptions of parenting, such as parenting styles (e.g., Barber, 1997, 2002a). Because parenting styles represent combinations of parenting behaviors, it is difficult to determine how specific dimensions of parenting are predictive of particular developmental outcomes of children and adolescents when using typologies (Barber; Herman, Dornbusch, Herron, & Herting, 1997; Linver & Silverberg, 1997).

Studies examining the relationships between specific parental behaviors (i.e., practices or dimensions of parenting) and child outcomes across diverse cultural groups have found significant relationships for several dimensions of parental behavior such as support (responsiveness), behavioral control, reasoning (i.e., induction), punitiveness (demandingness), and autonomy granting as predictors of a variety of positive and negative child outcomes. This conclusion must be qualified, in some cases, in which relationships have been found to vary somewhat across cultures (see Chao & Otsuki-Clutter, 2011 for recent review). In reference to indicators of social competence (self-concept, conformity to parents, autonomy, school readiness/achievement), for example, positive relationships have been found with parental support, behavioral control, and autonomy granting (e.g., Bean, Bush, McKenry, & Wilson, 2003; Bush et al., 2002; Gavazzi, 2011; Herman et al., 1997; Karavasilis, Doyle, & Markiewicz, 2003; Linver & Silverberg, 1997; Martin, Ryan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010; Peterson & Hann, 1999). Similarly, studies also have found significant negative relationships between parental support, behavioral control, autonomy granting, and externalizing and internalizing problems (e.g., Gavazzi, 2011; Hill & Bush, 2001; Hill, Bush, & Roosa, 2003; Luyckx et al., 2011).

## Parental Support

Supportive parenting practices convey the broader construct of parental responsiveness and warmth to children and include behaviors related to acceptance, affection, nurturance, and companionship (Barber, 1997; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Rohner, 1986, 2004). Parental support can be conveyed through verbal expressions of love and caring as well as nonverbal behaviors including physical affection in the form of hugs and kisses (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Rohner, 1986, 2004). Additionally, recent evidence from studies among non-Western samples and ethnic minority groups in the US suggests that parental support also can be conveyed through parenting practices not typically considered/assessed with Western measures of parental support. Instead, supportiveness in some cultures may be more intertwined and conveyed through moderate parental behavioral control (e.g., setting, communicating, and enforcing clear and high expectations) and involvement (Chao & Otsuki-Clutter, 2011). That is, assessments of support that only include conventional Western indicators (e.g., physical affection and praise) are likely to miss important elements and methods of conveying and perceiving supportiveness that are rooted in the diverse value systems across cultures.

Findings from studies among Mexican populations in the US (Hill et al., 2003) and Mexico (Bush et al., 2004), for example, suggest that children perceived support as being a conceptual component of firm behavioral control/expectations. Among parents in collectivistic cultures where displays of affection are subdued and emotional restraint is emphasized, it is likely that support is conveyed through other means such as establishing firm expectations through communication and teaching and monitoring adherence to these standards which may be perceived by children as parents believing in and caring for them (cf. Wu & Chao, 2005).

Supportive parental behavior serves as a means of expressing care, confidence, love, acceptance, and value for children and is useful for fostering positive parent–child relationships and is predictive of children's social competence (Baumrind, 1978, 1991). Supportive parental behavior facilitates positive relationship outcomes such as secure attachment (Karavasilis et al., 2003; Kerns, Tomich, Aspelmeier, & Contreras, 2000), and positive child outcomes such as academic achievement, self-concept development (Bean et al., 2003; Bush et al., 2002) and serves to inhibit dimensions of internalizing and externalizing

attributes (Atzaba-Poria, Pike, & Deater-Deckard, 2004; Caron, Weiss, Harris, & Catron, 2006; Hill & Bush, 2001; Hill et al., 2003).

### Parental Behavioral Control

Parental behavior characterized as behavioral control relates to the broader construct of "demandingness" (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Following what Hoffman (1983) termed "rational power assertion," demandingness refers to behaviors that help regulate children's behavior through the implementation of a coherent and consistent system of rules with predictable consequences (Baumrind et al., 2010). This consistent system is facilitative of positive parent–child relationships and assists parents to maintain trust and open communication. Parental control practices that are part of this system include monitoring, clearly communicated expectations, enforced rules, and consistent discipline in a manner that provides a pattern of firm rational control (Baumrind, 1971; Bugental & Grusec, 2006; Peterson & Hann, 1999).

Specific parental practices facilitative of behavioral control will vary across stages of development as well as social contexts. For example, during early childhood, behavioral control involves more direct supervision by parents or others in authority, whereas, among older children and adolescents, behavioral control assumes more distal forms of influence. That is, as children continue to develop during middle childhood and especially during adolescence, autonomy is granted gradually by negotiating relationship change and by using more distal forms of parental control. Methods of parental supervision (necessary as a means of fostering social competence, but also for guarding against any drift toward delinquent behavior) are adjusted as children begin to establish and maintain peer relationships and interact with an expanding social network beyond family boundaries (Kerns, Aspelmeier, Gentzler, & Grabill, 2001; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Templeton et al., 2008). As development progresses from early to middle childhood, the young assume more and more responsibility for self-regulation. That is, behavioral control is mutually negotiated, as parents still need to ensure that their child complies with family and societal standards. A major issue in parent–child relationships during middle childhood, therefore, is how parents and children negotiate appropriate levels of parental behavioral control as children's autonomy becomes more manifest (Kerns et al., 2001; Peterson & Hann, 1999).

Parents who use behavioral control monitor the activities of their children and are more likely to facilitate positive child outcomes. These positive outcomes include secure attachments (Kerns et al., 2001), school readiness/achievement, and social competence through clear sets of standards from which children can evaluate themselves (Barber, 1997; Baumrind et al., 2010; Crouter & Head, 2002; Herman et al., 1997; Linver & Silverberg, 1997; Martin et al., 2010). Moreover, parental behavioral control also serves to guard against the development of externalizing problems (Barber, 1996; Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Caron et al., 2006; Eyberg, Nelson, & Boggs, 2008).

### Parental Psychological Control

Excessive, arbitrary, and coercive parental behaviors that inhibit the development of psychological autonomy among children are referred to as psychological control (Barber, 1997, 2002a, 2002b), some aspects of which are characteristic of the authoritarian parenting style (Baumrind et al., 2010). Psychological control attempts are currently conceptualized as indirect and covert and supposed to follow what Hoffman (1983) termed "unqualified power assertion," where prompt compliance is demanded without reason or explanation (enforcing rigid hierarchy in the family system) (Baumrind et al., 2010). Parental practices of this type are also supposed to include parental intrusiveness, guilt induction, and love withdrawal (Bugental & Grusec, 2006). More specifically, psychological control can be manifest through the suppression of children's development of psychological autonomy or through inducing guilt in children as an expression of over protectiveness as well as authoritarian control. For example, parents who use intrusive psychological control do not negotiate ("my way or the highway") as they desire and demand compliance, thus providing children little choice. An interesting

complexity is that, perhaps because intrusiveness is viewed as parental caring in collectivistic cultures with strong traditions of parental authority, this socialization behavior seems to foster prosocial outcomes in children such as academic achievement and conformity (e.g., Bugental & Grusec, 2006). In contrast, guilt induction and love withdrawal involve emotional manipulation, and in U.S. samples, are less likely to foster positive child outcomes or be viewed by children as acts of parental caring (Baumrind et al., 2010).

Parenting practices using unqualified power assertion focus on psychological manipulation and ignore the developmental needs of children, with the result being that the young are not provided with clear expectations from which to evaluate themselves (Barber, 1996, 2002a, 2002b). Recent studies among diverse samples have supported the view that psychological control, and particularly perhaps its power assertive quality, is a negative predictor of self-esteem and academic achievement (Aunola & Nurmi, 2004; Bean et al., 2003; Bush et al., 2002; Herman et al., 1997; Linver & Silverberg, 1997) as well as a positive predictor of internalizing and externalizing attributes (Bugental & Grusec, 2006; Caron et al., 2006).

Significant validity issues exist with this multidimensional conception of psychological control and have caused other scholars, both present and past, to propose that a distinction be made between two conceptually separate aspects of this construct: (1) punitiveness or unqualified power assertive behaviors and (2) intrusive forms of psychological control. The first component of psychological control, punitiveness or unqualified power assertive behaviors (or coercive control attempts), was initially conceptualized as imposing arbitrary authority to demand children's behavioral compliance to parents (Peterson & Hann, 1999; Peterson & Rollins, 1987; Peterson, Rollins, & Thomas, 1985; Rollins & Thomas, 1979). In contrast, intrusive forms of psychological control, such as guilt induction and love withdrawal, were originally focused on the emotional manipulation of children's dependency on parents rather than demanding their behavioral compliance to arbitrary external authority (Holmbeck et al., 2002; Levy, 1943; Parker, 1983). These conceptual and empirical distinctions have a long history in the study of parent–child relationships, with punitiveness or coercive control attempts being the featured dimension of authoritarian parenting and intrusive psychological control (i.e., guilt induction and love withdrawal) being the key dimension of overprotective parenting (Holmbeck et al., 2002; Levy, 1943; Parker, 1983; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Peterson & Rollins, 1987; Peterson et al., 1985; Rollins & Thomas, 1975, 1979; Schaefer, 1959; 1965). Consequently this recent confounding of these established conceptual and empirical distinctions may result in losses of useful information about real differences in the meaning of parental practices, the masking of nonequivalent meanings when parental psychological control (as recently reconceptualized) is examined within different cultures, and problematic or misleading predictions of children's psychosocial outcomes (see Chap. 9, for a further discussion of these distinctions; Peterson, Steinmetz, & Wilson, 2004, 2005).

#### Psychological Autonomy Granting

Parenting practices related to the broader construct of psychological autonomy granting refer to behaviors and the establishment of a climate that balances connectedness in the parent–child relationship with developmentally appropriate levels of autonomy by children (Bugental & Grusec, 2006; Peterson, 2009; Peterson et al., 1999, see Chap. 1). That is, autonomy granting does not entail that parental control or involvement is absent but rather that extensive parental involvement or a secure base (i.e., a secure connection with the parent) is at the heart of autonomy granting and one of the most important psychosocial outcomes of children (e.g., Bugental & Grusec, 2006; Herman et al., 1997; Peterson, 2009; see Chap. 1). A secure base or attachment is a fundamental requirement for successful socialization within parent–child relationships and fosters children's receptivity to parental socialization attempts. Successful parents recognize the importance of children's developmental needs (i.e., the need to develop autonomy) and use discipline and support to encourage children's feelings of

self-direction. An important aspect of autonomy granting by parents is providing children with opportunities to make choices (Grolnick, 2003), while balancing this with the maintenance of their authority (Peterson, 2009). This process of balancing the provision of choice and autonomy while maintaining discipline within the family system and close parent–child relationships is a complex process involving gradual renegotiation over time (Peterson, 2009; Peterson & Hann, 1999; Peterson et al., 1999; see Chaps. 1 & 9).

Parents who grant psychological autonomy as part of their parenting behavior provide opportunities and encouragement of the young to express their growing independence within supportive parent–child relationships (Gray & Steinberg, 1999). Parental psychological autonomy granting fosters positive self-worth, academic achievement (Barber, 2002a; Bush et al., 2002), and secure attachment in children (Karavasilis et al., 2003).

## Family Conflict: Parent–Child and Interparental Conflict

### Parent–Child Conflict

Similar to other interpersonal relationships, conflict within parent–child relationships should not be assumed uniformly to be a negative or destructive process. Conflict in all human interpersonal systems can have a range of relationship consequences from being a negative, neutral, or positive force, depending on how it is managed. So, instead of inevitably being a destructive force within parent–child relationships, conflict has the potential to be a source of positive change and a signal that change is needed. Thus, it is not the conflict per se that causes negative outcomes, but rather how it is managed through the kinds (and meaning) of the sequential responses of children and parents to the presence of conflict that determines whether positive or negative patterns will emerge. Although frequently assumed to be especially characteristic of parent–adolescent relationships in families, conflicts between parents and their young occur throughout the family life course. Conflict also is common, for example, during early and middle childhood, especially during major transitions, such as when the young enter child care, preschool, and elementary school. Entry into school and, to a lesser extent, child care and preschool has the potential to expose children to a more complex array of peers and often results in increased bids for autonomy. Children's efforts to attain autonomy and parental responses vary depending on the age and developmental stage of the child. Parent–child conflict that occurs early and is often severe (i.e., poorly managed), in turn, can be an important predictor of later developmental outcomes including antisocial behavior and diminished social competence (Brennan, Hall, Bor, Najman, & Williams, 2003; Ingoldsby et al., 2006; Loeber, Farrington, Strouthamer-Loeber, Moffit, & Caspi, 1998). For example, parent–child conflict in early and middle childhood is associated with the "early starter" pathway, in which behavior problems in childhood evolve into serious delinquency in adolescence and a stable pattern of criminal behavior in adulthood (Brennan et al., 2003; Ingoldsby et al., 2006).

Parent–child conflict is a bidirectional process and does not simply refer to maladjustment as long as the conflict is moderate, negotiated, and managed to some degree. Instead, the kind of conflict (i.e., either negative or positive conflict) that emerges in a particular relationship often depends on other aspects of the relationship, such as the quality of the attachment relationship, the specific parenting style used, and how the specific parenting practices contribute to the frequency and severity of parent–child conflict. These dimensions of the parent–child relationship, in turn, help determine the extent to which conflict can either be managed and used as a positive force for developmental change or contribute to very severe conflict that can become a threat to relationship quality or even its existence.

The use of an authoritative parenting style in which parents use rational control attempts, is more likely to convey clearly communicated expectations, maintain a trusting mutual relationship, and is more likely to elicit or predict more positive or modulated responses from children (Baumrind et al., 2010). Such relationship patterns are more likely to successfully resolve

conflicts because children who experience authoritative parenting are more likely to perceive parents as reasonable, fair, and trustworthy. In contrast, children exposed to authoritarian parenting often receive high frequencies of unqualified coercive control attempts and arbitrary demands for compliance (Hoffman, 1983). Children who are subject to such punitive forms of parenting behavior are more likely to feel hostile toward parents and become less willing to comply with parents because this type of control attempt is perceived as arbitrary and unfair. Similarly, authoritarian parents are more likely to respond with more forceful contingencies in the face of persistent defiance by children (Larzelere, 2001), with the result being that such coercive cycles often escalate in frequency and severity (Paterson, 1982).

Other sources of conflict management within the parent–child relationship are the quality of parent–child communication and the degree of relationship closeness (i.e., supportiveness or attachment quality). These aspects of parent–child relations are important predictors of conflict management by preventing conflictual exchanges between parents and the young from escalating in frequency and severity. Conflict will continue to exist in such supportive relationship environments but will be tempered in frequency and severity by the positive bonds between parent and child.

### Interparental Conflict

Other potential causes of parent–child conflict involve influences outside of the parent–child relationship, including conflicts between other family members such as interparental or marital/couple conflict. Several recent studies have found that parent–child conflict mediates the relationship between marital conflict and children's adjustment (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Gerard, Krishnakumar, & Buehler, 2006). That is, the frustrations associated with marital conflict may spill over into the parent–child relationship which, in turn, tends to inhibit children's social competence and foster externalizing behavior and internalizing outcomes (Rhoades, 2008).

The link between IPC and undesirable short-term and long-term outcomes for children has become well established in parent–child research (DeBoard-Lucas, Fosco, Raynor, & Grych, 2010; Grych & Fincham, 2001). Children who are exposed to IPC are at increased risk for developing psychological problems (e.g., depression and anxiety), social adjustment difficulties, and behavioral difficulties (e.g., disruptive behaviors and aggression) both during childhood as well as later in life (Gerard et al., 2006; Grych, 2005; Grych & Fincham, 2001; Kelly, 2000).

Not all children who witness IPC, however, develop poor outcomes because many variables mediate the presence or absence of such consequences for the young (Cummings & Davies, 2002; Deboard-Lucas et al., 2010; Grych & Fincham, 2001). Although some conflict is likely to occur in all intimate relationships, all conflict is not necessarily negative for the couple or for their children. At the most basic level, conflict in relationships signals the need for change and a key point is to focus on the proximal processes (e.g., children's responses to conflict) involved in the relationships between IPC and child outcomes (Rhoades, 2008). That is, children's responses to IPC imply how they perceive and make meaning of the IPC in consideration of their context (needs, desires, and goals).

An analysis of the impact of IPC on children and parent–child relationships must take into account several attributes of parents and children. These attributes include the coping resources and conflict management strategies of parents and children as well as the socialization practices of parents. Other factors of importance are the overall quality of parent–child relationships, the quality of marital/couples' relationships, and the attachment relationships within families. Additional issues of importance are the frequency and severity of conflict as well as the extent of children's exposure to and involvement in reoccurring patterns of conflict. All of these factors play important roles in regard to the impact of conflict on parents, parent–child relationships, and children's outcomes (DeBoard-Lucas et al., 2010; Grych, 2005).

Research on the relationships between child attributes, IPC, and child outcomes has identified an important intervening role for the coping

capacities and resources of children. In a recent meta-analysis, for example, Rhoades (2008) sheds light on what recent findings indicate about children's responses to IPC and subsequent associations with child outcomes. Using studies of children between the ages of 5 and 19 years, Rhoades reported mostly small to moderate effect sizes for relationships between children's responses to IPC and children's outcomes, with negative responses by the young being predictive of negative child outcomes. More specifically, moderate effect sizes were reported for associations between (1) children's negative cognitions (e.g., self-blame) in response to IPC and internalizing problems and self-esteem problems; (2) children's negative affect in response to IPC (sadness, fear, and anger) and internalizing problems; and (3) children's behavioral responses to IPC (involvement in and avoidance of IPC) and internalizing problems. For the most part, the findings from this recent meta-analysis suggest that IPC has a larger impact on children's internalizing problems than externalizing behavior.

Recent work that examines the role of parental attributes and the relationship between IPC and children's outcomes highlights the intervening role of children's coping strategies, resources, and parental behavior. For example, IPC can influence child outcomes either directly (e.g., child externalizing or internalizing problems) or indirectly by "spilling over" and disrupting the socialization behaviors of parents that promote children's well-being. That is, child development can be detrimentally effected indirectly when IPC leads to parents' increased use of psychologically controlling parenting behavior, decreased involvement/support, and more frequent negative interactions between parents and children (DeBoard-Lucas et al., 2010; Gerard et al., 2006). Recent research that examines the link between IPC and parenting behaviors reported that the relationship between harsh discipline and IPC was stronger than the relationships found between IPC and other parenting behaviors (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Moreover, aspects of high-quality parent–child relationships in the form of authoritative parenting can buffer the negative effects of IPC on children, particularly when secure attachments, supportive and responsive parenting are involved (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; DeBoard-Lucas et al., 2010).

Other important intervening variables include the frequency and type/level of IPC. Results from longitudinal studies indicate that the effects of divorce on children may vary according to the level of IPC prior to divorce (for review see Amato, 2001; Amato & Keith, 1991). More specifically, a seemingly surprising result is that children, whose parents engaged in relatively low frequencies and severity of overt conflict, appear to experience decreased adjustment following divorce (Amato, Loomis, & Booth, 1995; Hanson, 1999; Jekielek, 1998; Morrison & Coiro, 1999). Conversely, children whose parents engage in chronic, overt, intense, and unresolved conflict seem to have better adjustment if their parents divorce. These contrary to common sense anomalies, in turn, can be explained by the fact that children, whose parents did not engage in overt and chronic conflict, are likely to experience their parents' divorce as unexpected and a source of considerable stress (Amato, 2001). Children whose parents engaged in chronic and overt conflict would be less likely to see the divorce as shocking and unexpected, and more likely to experience less exposure to conflict and/or stress, and might even feel relieved.

## Conclusion

Throughout the period of childhood, parent–child relationships are complex, diverse, and malleable in response to influences from the broader social ecology and internal changing dynamics. Comprehensive models of parent–child relationships for future research should include the simultaneous examination of variables from the larger human ecology beyond family boundaries (e.g., the neighborhood and community), structural variations in family life (e.g., SES, family composition, divorce, step-parenting, etc.), and relationship processes (e.g., parenting styles and practices) within the parent–child microsystem. The examination of only one of these dimensions without the others presents an

incomplete picture of parent–child relationships within an increasingly diverse configuration of contemporary family life (see Chaps. 6, 9, 14 & 32). Moreover, studies of parent–child relationships should include reports from the multiple members of these relationships rather than capture only portions of the whole. The need to assess multiple perceptions recognizes that "reality" within families, these most elementary of human relationships, is socially constructed and only partially shared as overlapping "absolutes" by its participants.

Parent–child relationships are a product of creating shared meanings which, in turn, are dependent on both very intimate and more distant contextual influences for their substance. When elements of the family system or the broader ecological context experience change, parent–child and other family relationship subsystems often require parallel adaptations for optimum development to occur. This need for change is often experienced as conflict within parent–child marital/couple and other family relationships. How families and parent–child relationships deal with such change-inducing conflict involves the extent to which these dynamics are managed in positive directions toward the development of social competence or toward negative developments in the form of externalizing or internalizing outcomes by children (see Chaps. 9 and 14).

Thus, a key focus should be on designing and conducting studies that allow for the careful examination of the complex multidirectional influences within family systems and the larger ecological contexts that encompass family life. Few studies, for example, fully apply family systems theory or the broader human ecological approach that captures family life, parent–child relationships, and the surrounding social-cultural context. Instead, most parent–child research only examines a small piece of the picture. For true knowledge advancement in parent–child relations to occur, more complex research approaches are needed that simultaneously examine the larger social contexts and the more intimate face-to-face dynamics within the parent–child relationship. Other required strategies include complex longitudinal designs, the use of multiple methodologies, the involvement of multiple informants, and the concerted examination of multiple contexts that shape interpersonal patterns within parent–child relationships.

Although some consistency exists in the conceptualization of constructs related to parent–child relationships, standard methods of operationalizing these concepts often are lacking. Some of this lack of conceptual clarity may result from a frequent pattern of conducting research that is methodologically elegant and statistically sophisticated but is either atheoretical or superficial in reference to the theoretical basis used to conceptualize the constructs/variables examined in a study.

Although variation in measurement and operationalization is necessary across age and developmental stages during childhood, even within specific developmental periods, standardization in the conceptualization of constructs is lacking. Future progress in parent–child research will depend, in part, on the extent to which investigators strive for greater theoretical substance, clarified constructs, and greater emphasis on assessing the validity of methods used to operationalize parent–child variables. Moreover, the validity of measures created within one culture or ecological niche must be tested thoroughly for cross-cultural validity prior to making the ethnocentric presumption that the exact same concept can be measured with the same method in another cultural context (Stewart & Bond, 2002). In the absence of constructs that lack validity and consistent operational strategies, it is difficult for our knowledge about parent–child relationships to advance through cumulative science based on sound theory testing and by making comparisons across studies that build upon each other.

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