PARENTS' RELATIONSHIP, DIFFERING PARENTING STYLES AND THE

EFFECTS ON THEIR CHILDREN


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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this *disquisition* complies with North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

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# ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of parenting practices, the impact of differing parenting practices, and how gender of the parent and child impact child outcomes. The sample for this study was taken from parents whose children are participating in the Early Risers Program. These parents completed two questionnaires. Parental involvement, communication, and discipline scales were the focus of these questionnaires. To assess the child's strengths, parents also reported on their child's interpersonal strength, family involvement, intrapersonal strength, affective strength, and school functioning. This study examines how the gender of a parent and the differing parenting styles between partners affects a child's development. Specifically, it was expected that the same-sex parent of a child has more influence on a child than the opposite-sex parent, and mixed parenting styles will affect the development of a child differently than parents parenting with similar parenting practices. The results show that same-sex parents have more influence over certain child outcomes. No significance was found for the influences of differing parenting practices on a child's outcome. The study provides a closer look at the influences of gender and parenting practices on child outcomes and compares whether parents' distress level or differential parenting styles

among partners has more influence over child outcomes.

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# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous studies focused on the effects of parenting styles on children (Baumrind, 1966; Gottman & Declaire 1997; Harrison, Dashiff, & Davies, 2008; Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont, 2006; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2007; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Newman, Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). The research suggests that the type of parenting children receive affects the way children develop emotionally, socially, and cognitively (Baumrind, 1971; Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont). The parents' emotional styles, disciplinary styles, and how parents play with their children affects children's development (Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont). Children are highly susceptible to social influence and learn from their environment, i.e. television and parent's modeling (Lamb, 2005; Rice, 1999). Parents have a significant role in their children's lives. Therefore, many researchers focus on the influences of parenting and the effects of their parenting styles on children (Lamb; Rice).

Research has also focused on mothers' and fathers' roles, relationship with their children, and relationship quality, which are factors of children's outcomes (Block, Block, & Morrison, 1981; Lamb, 1979; McKinney & Renk, 2008). The present study is mostly about White, Western, middle class parents. The study focuses on the differential characteristics of the caregivers' parenting styles, the relationship the caregivers have with their children and how parental distress affects children's developmental outcomes. Caregivers' parenting abilities reside within their own personalities and emotional styles. The emotional styles of parents affect children's outcomes.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

**Emotional Styles**

Gottman and Declaire (1997) and Gottman, Katz, and Hooven (1996) developed the theory of parental meta-emotion. Parental meta-emotion is an "organized set of feelings and cognitions about one's own emotions and the emotions of others" (Gottman & Declaire, p. 7). Parents who are aware of their own positive and negative emotions are more equipped to talk about these emotions and their children's emotions. These parents are termed as having an emotion coaching parenting style. Those that are unable to have emotional awareness and talk about their emotions in a differentiated way are termed as having an emotion dismissing parenting style (Gottman et al., 1996). Parents who are able to express their emotions to their children aid children toward their own self-expression. Children with parents who express their emotions in a healthy manner will have an increased likelihood of being able to express their own emotions appropriately (Gottman et al.).

Parents who are emotion coaches are able to talk about the emotions that a child is experiencing and their own emotions, either positive or negative, in a healthy manner (Gottman et al., 1996). A parent who has awareness of their children's emotions may help enable them to develop an increased trust in what they are feeling, emotional regulation, and competency in problem-solving (Gottman et al., 1997).

Parents who are emotion coaches are aware of negative emotions that arise in themselves and their children, are better at talking about negative emotions in a differentiated and healthy manner, are able to be aware of negative emotions in their

children, and ultimately assist their children with their negative emotions, such as anger and sadness, in a healthy way (Gottman et al., 1996). There are specific elements needed in order to serve as an emotion coach. Specifically, the five elements to emotion coaching are; 1) Parents have an awareness of low intensity emotion within their children and themselves, 2) Parents are aware of their children's negative emotion as a way of getting close and teaching, 3) able to validate their children's emotions, 4) Parent are able to label children's emotions, 5) Parents are able to set limits, discuss goals, and problem-solve through the situations that create negative emotions (Gottman et al., 1996). Children at age five have more social competence when their parents are able to be emotion coaches (Gottman et al.). Gottman and colleagues found that these children are then better able to regulate their emotions by being aware of them, and they are able to work through challenging peer situations.

Women are more commonly socialized to be the nurturing parent and therefore may take on more of these emotion coaching elements. Mothers are also believed to take on a permissive parenting style, in which children are held to fewer rules and standards than authoritative or authoritarian styles (Baumrind, 1966; Lee, Daniels, & Kissinger, 2006; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2007). Fathers tend to be socialized to be more authority driven and take on an authoritarian parenting style more often than mothers (McKinney & Renk, 2008). In McKinney & Renk's study a common belief is that a typical father would not take on as many if any emotion coaching elements and instead would use a dismissive approach to emotions and more of an authoritarian role with their children.

As previously explained, the opposite of emotion coaching is emotion dismissing. Parents who are dismissing of emotions see their children's anger or sadness as harmful. The parent then attempts to change these emotions quickly in order for their children to realize these negative emotions will not last, are harmful to feel, and are not important to feel (Gottman et al., 1996). Emotional dismissing parents convey to their children that negative emotions need not be directly addressed and will not cause negative effects if ignored (Gottman et al.). The emotional dismissing parents usually do not have awareness of their own emotions and also lack awareness of their children's emotions, which makes it more difficult for the parent to address any positive or negative emotions in a healthy manner (Gottman et al.). Moreover, this often results in parent's taking on the children's negative emotions and blaming themselves for the children's negative emotions. These children then develop the belief that negative emotions are harmful in any circumstance because of their parents' negative response to the child's negative emotions. Emotion regulation is necessary for children to develop. It is the parents' responsibility to teach their children how to regulate their emotions in a healthy manner (Calkins, 1994).

Grolnick, McMenamy, and Kurowski (2006) describe emotion regulation as, "The extrinsic and intrinsic processes responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and modifying emotional reactions, especially their intensive and temporal features, to accomplish one's goals" (p. 4). The ability to self-regulate emotions is a part of the socialization process and one of parents' many goals of parenting. Society expects people to respond in socially appropriate ways and to be accountable for their actions. Parent modeling is one common way that children learn how to behave emotionally (Calkins, 1994). As children mature

they become aware of how people respond to different situations. Parents are the largest socialization component in emotional expression for children early in life (Calkins).

Development of emotion regulation skills is an interactive process. "Caregivers can act to shape both the infant's cognitive interpretation of given affect-eliciting events and the emotions displayed in response to those events" (Calkins, 1994, p. 58). Therefore, the parent's behavior affects their children and continues through early childhood (Calkins). Parents serve as important elements in helping their children develop the skills to self-regulate their emotions. The literature suggests that caregivers' parenting styles contribute to their children's self-regulation of their emotions (Calkins; Kopp, 1987).

Caregivers have varying ways of parenting, but it is essential for parents to show parental sensitivity or tolerance to help facilitate the development of emotion regulation in their children (Kopp, 1987). "Sensitivity is thought to be crucial for facilitating self-regulation, especially compliance" (Kopp, p. 35). If the parent expresses sensitivity by understanding their children's emotions and accepting them, the children will receive the message that a range of emotions is normal, but need to be expressed in a socially appropriate manner. For example, two children are socializing and one child gets angry at the other. If the angry child is able to regulate his/her emotions, he/she will be able to express the emotion of anger without physically hurting or throwing a tantrum. If a parent expresses sensitivity to their children's emotions, the parent promotes their children's ability to self-regulate their emotions which contributes to the parent's success as an emotion coach (Gottman et al., 1996; Kopp). Children who self-regulate emotions respond

appropriately in varying situations and are accepted socially by their peers (Smith & Hart, 2004).

This outcome shows how important parents are during infancy and toddlerhood in the process of emotion regulation, which promotes their children's positive interactions with peers. When children are able to regulate their emotions they are more likely to have close friends and be accepted by their peer group (Smith & Hart, 2004). Children who are able to feel included and accepted have positive developmental outcomes (Smith & Hart).

**Overview of Parenting/Disciplinary Styles**

Caregivers' parenting styles affect the outcomes of children, which makes examining parenting styles important. Many studies have assessed parenting styles and how these styles promote healthy, competent behaviors in young children (Shonkoff & Phillip, 2000). The goal is for caregivers to parent in order to produce friendly, self-controlled, self-reliant, cooperative, and happy children versus immature or withdrawn children (Shonkoff & Phillips). There are many types of parenting styles that have been identified. Parenting styles are comprised of combinations of characteristics. For example, if parents enforce strict rules and discourage children from participation in family decision making, they are using an authoritarian parenting style (Baumrind, 1966; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2007; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Shonkoff & Phillips). Examples of permissive parenting style characteristics include setting no expectations or limits and showing warm and unconditional support (Baumrind; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi; McKinney & Renk; Shonkoff & Phillips).

Control is defined as having children obey parental standards and follow a higher authority (Baumrind, 1966). Acceptance is affirming children's impulses, desires, and actions (Baumrind). Researchers have categorized parents as either authoritarian, with high control and low acceptance; permissive, with low control and high acceptance; neglectful, with low control and low acceptance; or as having an authoritative style, with high control and high acceptance (Newman, Harrison, Dashiff, & Davies, 2008). The research has found new benefits and costs for each of these parenting styles.

**Authoritative parenting style.** When there is a balance of discipline and nurturing behaviors the parents are using an authoritative parenting style (Lagace-Seguin and d'Entremont, 2006). Parenting with an authoritative perspective has flexibility and reasonable demands given their children's needs, gives their children voice when necessary, and explains reasoning in parenting decisions. Lagace-Seguin and d'Entremont reported that there is a significant amount of research that associates authoritative parenting to children's cognitive and social competence. At times, parents may find it extremely difficult to achieve this authoritative balance of nurture and discipline during the stages of their children's development, but research suggests it is important for children's development to try to maintain this balance.

**Authoritarian parenting style.** The authoritarian parenting style involves more demand with power over children (Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont, 2006). The children receive a high level of discipline, but a low level of nurturing. This type of parenting values discipline to get the children to behave the way the parent desires. This type of parenting also does not give voice to children because what the parents say is final. Children from

these types of homes do well academically, but struggle with self-reliance and self-concept (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbush, 1991). Children who are not permitted to express themselves appear to strive in a structured environment in which decisions are made for them. However, when children get to the launching stage and leave home, they will likely struggle on their own. The negativity, hostility, and punitive discipline of the parents lead to aggressive behavior and hinder development of socially accepted norms within their children (Calkins, 1994). Authoritarian parenting does not meet the needs of children because they are not given the opportunity to develop autonomously. The lack of autonomy hinders children's ability to develop socially and emotionally. It could be suspected that authoritarian parenting would have little to no emotion coaching elements and would, therefore, not be developmentally supportive for children.

**Permissive parenting style.** Parents who use a permissive parenting style are the opposite of an authoritarian parent. Permissive parents lack the enforcement of discipline. These parents are extremely giving to children's needs and wants. However, they do not set the proper limits and boundaries on their children's behavior (Baumrind, 1966). Baumrind explains, "The permissive parent attempts to behave in a non-punitive, acceptant, and affirmative manner toward children's impulses, desires, and actions" (p. 889). The permissive parent may lack follow through with disciplining children, tends to ignore misbehavior, and lacks confidence in parenting (Russell et al., 1998). "Permissiveness can be a form of neglect associated with lack of love or disinterest in the child" (Patterson, 2003, p. 201). When parents use authoritarian parenting or permissive

parenting styles this increases the likelihood their children will not learn impulse control or effective self-regulation (Patterson).

**Cultural influences.** There are many similarities and differences in childrearing approaches across cultures. Parenting practices vary and encompass many important factors that account for variations in children's outcomes (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Three universal goals to childrearing are, "1) physical survival and health, 2) development of the capacity for economic self-maintenance, and 3) development of the behavioral capacities for maximizing other cultural values, e.g., morality, prestige, wealth, intellectual achievement, religion, personal satisfaction, self-realization as formulated and symbolically elaborated in culturally distinctive beliefs, norms, and ideologies" (Shonkoff & Phillips, p. 60). The extent to which parents can promote caring and nonaggressive behaviors in their children lies in the parents' own personalities and parenting abilities (Calkin, 1994).

Parents' personalities and parenting abilities either promote or limit their ability to give their children more responsibilities and opportunities to participate in family decisions as children grow. The ease or difficulty of parenting depends on the parents' awareness of their own feelings, the perceived feelings of their children, and the rules of the family (Calkin, 1994). Parents' personalities depend on their past history, life experiences, and own caregivers' parenting skills, which have shaped them into the people they have become (Calkin).

Parents tend to adopt a particular parenting practice because of their beliefs and values. Differences in cultural beliefs and values mean that one parenting style may not be universally superior. Therefore, this study will evaluate positive and negative child

outcomes based on the relationship of caregivers, caregivers' differing parenting styles, and the influences of gender (both the parent and child's gender).

**Differing Parenting Styles**

As discussed above there are significant associations between parenting styles and developmental outcomes for children. Numerous studies have examined this influence and described the three major typologies discussed above (Baumrind, 1966; Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont, 2006; McGillicuddy-De Lisi & De Lisi, 2007; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Newman, Harrison, Dashiff, & Davies, 2008; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Research conducted on parenting has focused mainly on the responsibility mothers have for their children's adjustment. Majority of the research tends to focuses on the mothers' parenting rather than fathers' parenting. However, some research does focuses on fathers' influences on children adjustment (McKinney & Renk).

Children often have different relationships with their mothers than with their fathers (McKinney & Renk, 2008). These different relationships have differing interactions which influence children's outcomes. There have been few studies (Conrade & Ho, 2001; Glover, Miller, & Palmer, 1998; McKinney & Renk; Russell, et al., 2008) that focus on the female parent-child and male parent-child dyads. For example, Russell and colleagues found sex-based differences in mothers' parenting styles versus fathers' parenting style. Fathers were more likely to use an authoritarian parenting style, whereas mothers used an authoritative parenting style. Also, an authoritative parenting style was used when parenting daughters, whereas an authoritarian parenting style was used when parenting sons (Russell et al.).

A study by Conrade and Ho (2001) supports the findings of Russell et al. (1998). They also found that sons viewed permissive parenting styles in their mothers more often than their fathers, and fathers were more likely than mothers to use an authoritarian parenting style. Furthermore, daughters viewed mothers as using an authoritative parenting style more often than fathers (Conrade & Ho). McKinney & Renk (2008) suggest that these differing interactions of maternal and paternal parenting need to be examined separately. "In support of these unique interactions, research has demonstrated that mothers and fathers may adopt different parenting styles on the basis of the sex of their children and adolescents" (McKinney & Renk, p. 807). Caregivers' gender may play a unique part in the emotional adjustment (i.e., self-esteem, anxiety, depression) of a child (McKinney & Renk).

Sex role theory has been examined to address these differing parenting styles. In the context of feminine and masculine characteristics, femininity is connected with expressiveness and masculinity has been associated with instrumentality (McKinney & Renk, 2008). Females tend to display higher levels of expressiveness, which leads mothers toward a warmer style of parenting than males, who tend to display a more goal-orientated style of parenting. Sex role theory explores parenting differences due to differing characteristics, and it seems reasonable to assume these characteristics play a part in differing parenting styles (McKinney & Renk).

Role theory states that mothers were traditionally socialized into the caregiver role while the fathers' role has traditionally been disciplinarian and provider of the family (Hosley & Montemayor, 1997). Fathers traditionally have little involvement in providing

have significant effects on children's psychological functioning and ego control. The unity or discord of the parental relationship influences a child (Block et al.).

A relationship is two individuals bringing together two different histories, values, beliefs, and practices. There are many influences to which the parental unit is subject. "Parental functioning is influenced by a variety of forces, with its three major determinants being the personality and psychological well-being of the parent, the characteristics of the child, and the contextual sources of stress and support" (Belsky, 1984, p. 91). Among parental stressors is the successful merger of two realities (Deal, Halverson, & Smith Wampler, 1989). At times it is difficult for couples to merge two realities which may create parental disagreement and a dissatisfied couple relationship (Deal et al.). Parental discord is correlated with the development of emotional disturbances in children (i.e., aggressive and antisocial behaviors) (Block, Block, & Morrison, 1981). A couple's ability to agree on a new shared reality of values, beliefs, and parental practices indicates the success of a well-functioning, "healthy" family (Deal et al.). Therefore, parental agreement is viewed as one component that exemplifies effective parenting and positive children's outcomes (Deal et al.).

Parents are intentionally and unintentionally expressing their beliefs and values to their children through their parenting practices (Rice, 1990). When the children are grown, they will either continue their parents' way of parenting or will reject their style and practice parenting differently. Differences have been found among mothers' and fathers' parenting styles.

In one study, fathers added more emphasis on intellectual development than mothers, and mothers put more emphasis on social development than fathers. Also, boys received more attention than girls from their mothers and fathers on intellectual development (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Also, results suggested that fathers use less sensitivity and are slower to respond to their child's signals than mothers (Shonkoff & Phillips). Fathers tend to be stricter discipliners, and mothers tend to be more nurturing. Today, fathers' involvement with their children's lives varies (Shonkoff & Phillips). Some fathers are more involved, whereas other fathers are less involved in their children's lives. However, there are a growing number of involved fathers (Shonkoff & Phillips).

There have been a growing number of single fathers who are parenting, a greater involvement of fathers with their children while their partner is in the work force, and more self-reports of fathers spending more time with their children (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). It is not the involvement of the fathers per se that creates positive child outcomes, but the fathers' way of parenting and taking responsibility for their children. This responsibility includes taking their children to the doctor, bringing them to activities such as sports or piano lessons, arranging child play dates and child care, monitoring the children for safety reasons, and financial support (Shonkoff & Phillips).

The emotional quality of the father-child relationship is also vitally important. For example, it is equally important for both parents to encourage their children's expression of self, which helps the child's development toward individuality (Barber, 1996). The emotional relationship children have with their parents is important for adjustment and overall well-being (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000).

Another important factor is children's perceptions on how they feel about their caregivers' parenting practices, which can differ with how the parents view their parenting practices. The agreement of the parent and child can be viewed as a characteristic of successful parenting (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Current research is now aware of the need to consider how the children affect the parents and how parents affect children especially in regard to parenting styles.

Baumrind's typologies of parenting styles are currently the most accepted model (McKinny & Renk, 2008). Those typologies consist of authoritative, authoritarian and permissive, which were discussed above. It is extremely difficult to place both parents within these three typologies and more research is needed to examine the influence of mixed parenting styles on their children's outcomes.

**Child Outcomes**

Children who do not socialize with other children are at a higher risk for adjustment difficulties (Asendorpf, 1990; Coplan & Rubin, 1998). Coplan et. al. (1994) identify three subtypes of play: 1) Reticent behavior, which is the lengthy on-looking of other children at play, 2) Solitary-active behaviors, which is repetitive and dramatic; a rare type of alone play, and 3) Rough-and-tumble play, which a child displays by fighting and chasing with other children. These types of play are regarded as maladaptive forms of play. These types of play, if frequent, are usually associated with maladaptive parenting such as emotion dismissing, authoritarian, or permissive parenting styles (Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont, 2006). Children's play is how they communicate to others at a young age. Parenting effects how children adjust to their surroundings and their understanding of the world may

be found in the way they interact and play with others. Results from Lagace-Seguin and d'Entrmont propose parents who have an emotion coaching parenting style decrease the chances of their children engaging in rough-and-tumble behaviors (2006). Also, results suggest an authoritarian parenting style and a permissive parenting style were positively associated with children's negative affect while an authoritative parenting style was negatively associated to children's negative affect (Lagace-Seguin & d'Entromont). Other findings indicate negative associated between an authoritative parenting style and solitary-active behaviors among children with high levels of negative affect (Lagace-Seguin & d'Entromont). Results show a negative associated between permissive parenting style and solitary-active behaviors among children who are high in negative affect (Lagace-Seguin & d'Entromont). Results from this study gain insight into associations between parenting styles and child outcomes.

**Parent-Child Relationship**

Parent-child relationships are important for children's successful adjustment and developmental outcome. Mutually responsive orientation (MRO) is a proposed construct and is a positive, parent-child binding, and cooperative relationship (Kochanska, Aksan, Prisco, & Adams, 2008). MRO was developed from Bowlby's attachment theory, a relationship-based approach, and Maccoby's mutuality and reciprocity concepts from the parent-child dyad (Kochanska et al.).

MRO stresses the importance of bidirectional, mutual, cooperative and reciprocal qualities within the parent-child relationship. As stated above, along with the importance of mutual cooperative qualities of the parent-child relationship it is also important that most of

the responsibility be on the parent. "Parenting that is sensitively attuned to children's capabilities and to the developmental tasks they face promotes a variety of highly valued developmental outcomes, including emotional security, behavioral independence, social competence, and intellectual achievement" (Belsky, 1984, p. 85). Children are treated as human beings with a range of emotions and not as objects that the parents can control. The parent and child have an internalized sense of willingness to cooperate with each other and an open responsiveness to each other's cues (Kochanska et al., 2008). There is also a strong importance given to the shared positive affect and enjoyment of "good times" together (Kochanska et al.). Mutually responsive orientation has many of the same characteristics as the authoritative parenting style. Some similar characteristics include having flexibility, reasonable demands on children, giving children some voice when necessary, and explaining the reasons of parenting decisions (Lagace-Seguin & d'Entremont, 2006; Kochanska et al.).

It was repeatedly shown that MRO "coded during naturalistic interactions of parents and children at infant, toddler, and preschool age, had positive implications for multiple aspects of children's conscience, concurrently and longitudinally, across multiple ages, types of assessments, and context" (Konchanska et al., 2008, p. 31). Mutually responsive orientation influenced later moral development when promoting parent-child enjoyable interactions and the self-regulation and compliance children (Konchanska et al.).

Power assertion or forceful discipline has shown to interfere with children's internalization and self-regulation abilities (Konchanska et al., 2008). In examining the use of power assertion, power assertion can be thought of as having an authoritarian parenting

style. As previously defined above, an authoritarian parenting style results in children developing a shallow thought process of parental messages, acting out and noncompliance, and viewing a threat to their autonomy (Konchanska et al.). Also, anger and resentment towards parents may be present and a potential for rejection of parental values may occur later (Konchansk et al.). The findings of Konchanska and colleagues showed the complexity and differential parenting influences between the mother and children and the father and children. This study suggests children who experience a highly mutually responsive relationship early on with their mother and strongly accept their mothers' say-so display strong self-regulation abilities in the first two years of life (Konchanska et al.). Early MRO made power assertion less appropriate and had a beneficial effect on children's present and future internalization of parents' prohibitions and self-regulation (Konchanska et al.). There were also connections between father-child MRO and better self-regulation; however, early father-child MRO did not make as much of a difference as early mother-child MRO. There is a lack of understanding of positive effects of MRO among father-child dyads (Konchanska et al.).

There is a limited amount of knowledge of the role of paternal influence on a children's outcome. There are few empirical studies that focus on the effects of father-child relationships (Lamb, 1979). Mothers and fathers tend to parent differently due to many factors, such as gender socialization and the many similarities and differences among the parent-child dyad (Konchanska et al., 2008). There are complexities regarding parenting and children's outcomes.

**Influences of Gender**

Boys and girls can be treated differently by fathers and mothers due to the different behaviors and attitudes that are deemed socially acceptable for boys and girls (Rice, 1999). What is learned to be socially acceptable is taught to us by parent's modeling, culture, the media, teachers, and others (Rice). Based on the child's gender, a child is raised to fit these socially accepted norms. There are certain qualities deemed socially acceptable for men and women. Rice explains, "Society prescribes how a male and female ought to look and behave, what type of personality she or he ought to have, and what roles should be performed" (p.145).

The concepts of femininity and masculinity are socially derived within the context of culture (Rice, 1999). There are many social expectations placed on children from birth. Society expects children to immediately take on traits based on their gender (Rice). A girl is dressed like a girl and given toys which are considered female toys. As girls age they are told to "be a lady," and follow feminine activities and jobs (Rice). Girls are molded into women in numerous ways. They watch the women in her lives and mimic their actions to develop into ladies. Boys are also molded into dressing, talking, thinking, and to act like a men (Rice). Boys are reinforced to manifest masculinity, obtain masculine jobs, and act in masculine ways. There are many ways which gender impacts children's development. The gender of both the parent and child make a difference in the type of relationship present between the parent and child (Rice). However, there is little known about what these differences are among parents and how they affect a children's developmental outcome (Rice).

**Research Questions**

Much research has focused on parenting practices and styles, and how these styles affect children's outcomes. Some studies have focused on how parents parent their sons and daughters differently, and some studies have focused on how mothers parent differently than fathers. However, there are still some gaps in our understanding of how differences between the parents affect the children and in how the combination of genders in the parent-child dyad affects the child. The current study is an attempt to fill in some of those gaps.

There are two research questions for this study: 1) How do differing parenting styles between parental figures influence their children's outcomes? 2) How does gender influence caregivers' parenting styles and how parents interact with their children?

# CHAPTER 3. METHODS

## About the Early Risers Program and Participants

The current study used data collected from The Early Risers Program. The Early Risers Program was studied in five elementary schools in the Fargo area whose teachers nominated kindergarteners and first graders who fit the needs of the program. The needs of the program require finding children with and without adjustment difficulties. Three of the five schools received the program and the other two schools served as control schools. The teachers in each school selected 20 children who seemed to be well-adjusted and 20 children who seemed to have adjustment difficulties from each school. The children with difficulties were selected because they had either aggressive or withdrawn behavior.

There were 110 children in the intervention program and 79 children in the control group. There were 74 sets of parents in couple relationships (i.e. 148 individual parents) who returned completed questionnaires during the fourth wave of the Early Risers Program. The children also completed questionnaires throughout the program.

Early Risers data collection was scheduled for five waves. The first wave was during the spring of the child's kindergarten or first grade year. The next waves were the following fall and spring during the program and the last waves were in the fall and spring after the program. The current study used data from wave four. By wave four 113 participants remained. However, out of 113 participants some were single or failed to return both mother and father questionnaires which then brought the participant number to 74 sets of mothers and fathers. The parents and teachers were compensated for their time

filling out questionnaires. Compared to previous waves, an extra $15 was paid to parents for completing the extra questionnaire included just for the current study.

**Participants.** There were 74 participants. The data set used for this study includes mothers', fathers', and their children's responses to various questionnaires. Each parent completed a separate questionnaire. This study included 74 mothers, 74 fathers, 41 girls, and 33 boys. The participants come from middle to lower-middle class neighborhoods and roughly 90% of participants were Caucasian. The participants were 44.6% male and 55.4% female. The intervention group made up 52.7% of the participants and the control group made up 47.3%. The children with adjustment difficulties made up 28.4% of the participants and 71.6% of the participants were without difficulties. This study excluded single parents. The only requirement to participate in this study was to be partnered. The relationship status of participants varied among coupled, married, or divorced. The majority of the participants, 91.3%, were married and 2% were coupled. The median length of these marriages was approximately 13 years.

**Measures**

**Independent variables.** The questionnaires for the parents included 48 items from the Parent Relationship Questionnaire (PRQ) (Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2006). According to Kamphaus and Reynolds, one month test-retest reliability ranges from .72 to .81, and there is substantial evidence of acceptable validity.

The current study used five of the seven scales from the PRQ which include involvement practices, parenting confidence, attachment, relational frustration, and discipline practices. Involvement practices are "defined as the extent to which a parent and

child participate together in a variety of common activities, along with the parent's knowledge of the child's activities" (Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2006, p. ). Items from the involvement scale include, "I teach my child how to play new games" and "My child and I work on projects together." The current study's alpha coefficient for the involvement scale is .98.

The parenting confidence scale measures the amount of comfort, control, and confidence parents have when parenting their children. The scale reviews parents' comfort, control, and confidence by asking the parents about their comfort level when making parental decisions. Items from the scale include, "I am confident in my parenting ability" and "I make good parenting decisions." The current study's alpha coefficient for the parenting confidence scale is .97.

The attachment scale measures the feelings of closeness, understanding, and empathy the parent has towards the child resulting from the cognitive, affective, and behavioral relationship between parent and child. Items from the attachment scale include, "I know when my child will become upset" and "I can sense my child's mood." The current study's alpha coefficient for the attachment scale is .88.

Relational frustration is defined as the level of stress or distress parents have when relating to the affect and behavior of their children and the amount of frustration involved in parenting. Items from the scale include, "I overreact when my child misbehaves" and "I lose my patience with my child." The current study's alpha coefficient for the relational frustration scale is .89.

The discipline practices scale is measured by the consistency with which the parent responds to a child's misbehavior and then applies consequences or punishments to the child in order to send a message to the child that adherence to rules is valued. Examples of items from this scale are, "I punish my child if he or she shows disrespect to an adult" and "It is important for a child to follow family rules." The discipline scale is not a measure of an authoritarian parenting style. The current study's alpha for the discipline scale is .87.

The response options of the PRQ ranged from 0 ("*never*") to 3 ("*almost always*"). Parents who score average or above-average on any of the scales, relative to national norms are likely using an authoritative parenting style. Low scores, relative to national norms, on the discipline practice scale indicate a low level of parental interest and concern, which is permissive parenting (Kamphaus & Reynolds, 2006).

Three questions were used from the Coparental Interaction scale (Perlman & Duck, 1987). These items included "Discuss childrearing problems" and "Discuss coparenting problems." Parents' responses ranged from "*never*" to "*always*." These items were combined to form one scale measuring the degree of parents' interaction with each other. In the current study, the alpha coefficient for this scale was .81.

Parts of the MSI-R measure were used to assess the amount of distress over several dimensions of a couple's relationship. This self-report measure includes 150 "*True*" or "*False*" items. Each partner was assessed via their responses to these items (Snyder, 1997). Twenty-seven items from the MSI-R were included from two scales: Global Distress Scale (17 items) and Conflict over Child Rearing (10 items). An example item from the Global Distress Scale is, "I get pretty discouraged about our relationship sometimes." An example

from the Conflict over Child Rearing includes, "My partner and I rarely argue about the children." Coefficient alphas for these scales were .92 and .73, respectively, in the current study.

**Dependent variables.** Other measures included in the parent questionnaires include scales from the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS2) (Epstein, 2004). Fifty-two items from the BERS2 are included and measure five dimensions: interpersonal strength, family involvement, intrapersonal strength, affective strength, and school functioning. This scale focuses on the children's emotional and behavioral strengths. An interpersonal strength example is "Uses anger management skills." An example of a family involvement question is "Demonstrates a sense of belonging to family." An intrapersonal strength example is "Is self-confident." An affective strength example is "Acknowledges painful feelings." An example of school functioning is "Completes school tasks on time." Responses ranged from 0 (not at all like your child) to 3 (very much like your child). According to Epstein (2004), the alpha coefficients of the above scales range from .79 to .93. Epstein gives evidence of acceptable prediction validity.

Parent discipline survey (McCarty & Doyle, 2001) includes two stem questions. The first stem reads: "If your child does something that he/she is not allowed to do , how often do you..." The parents then rate themselves on how they perceive their parenting discipline practices. The parents rate themselves on a 5-point *almost never* to *almost always* scale (1 = almost never, 2 = once in a while, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, and 5 = almost always). There are two scales measuring appropriate discipline practices and less appropriate practices of discipline. An example of an appropriate discipline practice is,

"Take away a privilege or money or a toy?" and a harsh discipline example is, "Yell or scold?"

The parent discipline survey's (McCarty & Doyle, 2001) second stem reads, "When your child has done something that you approve of, how often do you…" The parents rate themselves again by using the same Likert scale. There are two scales, positive attention and tangible reward. An example from the positive attention scale is, "Give the child a wink or a smile?" and a tangible reward item is, "Give the child some special privilege such as staying up late, watching TV, or doing some special activity?" The alpha coefficient for tangible rewards is (.87). Positive attention did not have an acceptable alpha coefficient and so was not used further.

**Procedure**

The parent questionnaires were sent home from school with all the children in the study. The children gave the questionnaires to parents for each parent to fill out. The parents returned the questionnaires to the school. The child questionnaire was administered individually to each child by Early Risers staff, and completed in a confidential area. The NDSU IRB gave the approval to conduct the current study.

**Data Analysis**

The study used a 2 (parent gender) X 2 (child gender) ANOVA to analyze the effects of gender on parenting practices. The PRQ scales and the appropriate and harsh discipline scales were each tested separately as dependent variables. This ANOVA addressed research question number one, How does gender influence parents' parenting

styles and how they interact with their children? An ANOVA was selected to test for differences in parenting scales by parent and child gender

A multiple regression analysis was used to analyze research question number two, How do differing parenting styles between parental figures influence their child's outcomes? The dependent variables to be run in the analysis are the BERS-2 scales. For the independent variables, difference scores will be computed between the mother's and father's scores on the parenting scales.

Correlations were also conducted in order to examine how differing parenting styles between parental figures influence their children's outcomes. Correlations between child strengths and parenting practices were examined separately within parent and child gender.

# CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The study used a 2 (parent gender) X 2 (child gender) ANOVA to analyze the effects of gender on parenting practices. Parent gender was a within-subjects factor, whereas child gender was a between-subjects factor. The ANOVA addressed the second research question, which was: How does gender influence parents' parenting styles and how they interact with their children?

The means and standard deviations of the parenting variables are shown in Table 1. For Attachment, there was a main effect for parent gender, $F(1, 72) = 5.20, p = .03$. Mothers reported showing greater levels of attachment to their child than fathers. The effect size of this difference was small, $d = 0.269$.

For Parenting Confidence, there was an interaction effect for parent gender and child gender, $F(1,72) = 4.25, p = .04$. Fathers reported showing nearly no difference in their levels of parenting confidence whether parenting a boy or a girl. Fathers were slightly more confident when parenting a boy than a girl. Mothers showed a greater difference in their levels of parenting confidence based on the child's gender. Mothers were more confident when parenting a boy versus a girl. The effect size of the difference between mothers' parenting confidence when parenting boys and girls was moderate, $d = 0.42$. See Figure 1.

For Parent Involvement, there was an interaction effect for parent gender and child gender, $F(1,72) = 5.32, p = .02$. Mothers reported showing greater levels of involvement with their children than fathers. Mothers were more involved in their daughters' lives versus their sons', and fathers were more involved in their sons' lives versus their daughters'. The effect size of the difference between mother's involvement with boys

versus girls was small, $d = 0.30$. The effect size of the difference between father's involvement with boys versus girls was small, $d = 0.38$. See Figure 2. There were no significant effects for Tangible Rewards, Discipline Practices, or Relational Frustration.

Table 1. *Means & SDs for Parenting in Relation to Child and Parent Gender*

| Dependent Variable | Mother | | Father | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Boy | Girl | Boy | Girl |
| Attachment | 53.17 | 51.59 | 50.00 | 48.74 |
| | *12.55* | *10.40* | *11.56* | *10.54* |
| Parent Confidence | 54.10 | 49.87 | 51.87 | 51.73 |
| | *10.68* | *9.53* | *11.02* | *9.12* |
| Parent Involvement | 49.27 | 52.40 | 50.97 | 47.27 |
| | *11.50* | *12.17* | *10.19* | *9.35* |
| Tangible Rewards | 3.43 | 3.33 | 3.69 | 3.34 |
| | *1.16* | *1.01* | *0.88* | *0.90* |
| Discipline Practices | 47.72 | 46.47 | 48.88 | 48.69 |
| | *10.62* | *10.65* | *10.82* | *10.58* |
| Relational Frustration | 49.34 | 48.82 | 51.51 | 47.78 |
| | *8.74* | *9.36* | *8.98* | *10.04* |

**Parenting Confidence**
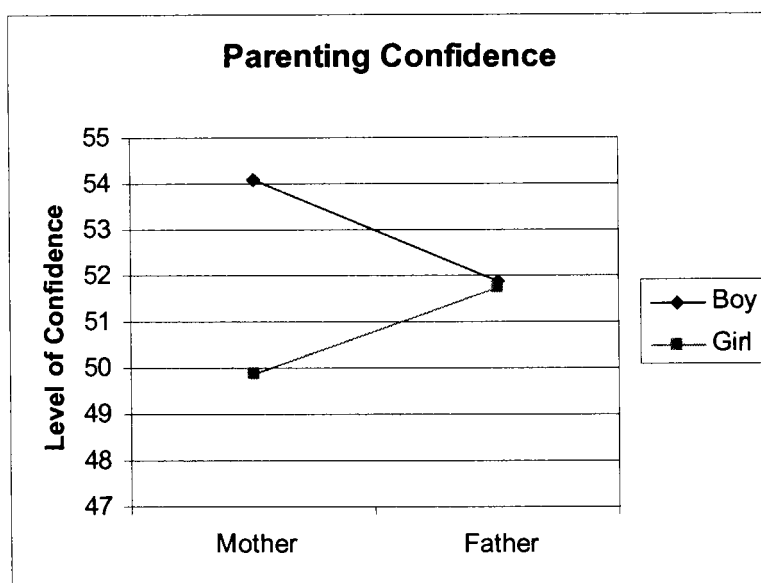
Figure 1. *Parenting Confidence by Gender of the Parent and Child*
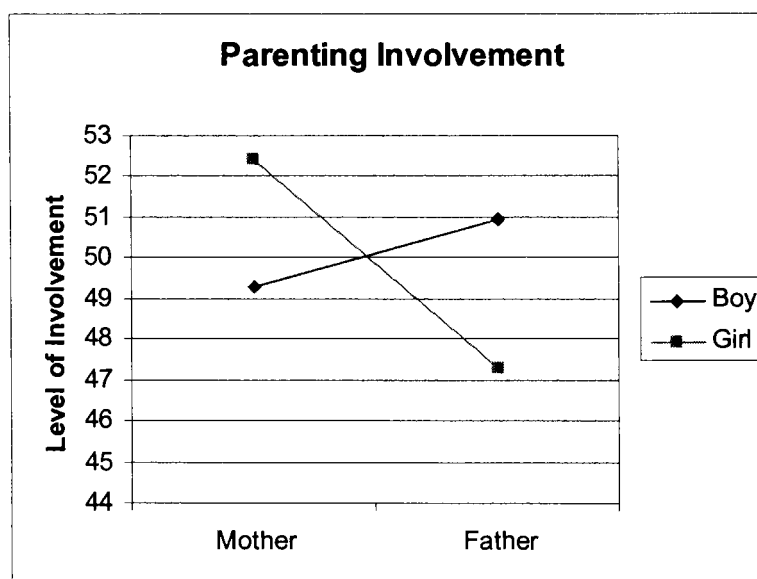
**Parenting Involvement**

Figure 2. *Parenting Involvement by Gender of the Parent and Child*

ANOVAs and correlations were conducted to test parental discord (i.e., conflict

over child rearing, global distress, and co-parental interaction). See Table 2 for means and

standard deviations. For conflict over child rearing, there was a main effect for parent gender, $F(1,70) = 10.75$, $p = .002$. Mothers reported higher conflict over child rearing than fathers. The effect size of this difference was small, $d = 0.34$.

For global distress over child rearing, there was a main effect for parent gender, $F(1,70) = 8.32$, $p = .005$. Mothers reported higher global distress than fathers. The effect size of this difference was small, $d = 0.33$. No effect was found for co-parental interaction. See Table 2.

Table 2. *Means & SDs for Parental Distress in Relation to Child Gender and Parent Gender*

| | Mother | | Father | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dependent Variable | Boy | Girl | Boy | Girl |
| Conflict over child rearing | 1.46 | 1.36 | 0.73 | 1.03 |
| | *1.96* | *1.66* | *1.30* | *1.27* |
| Global distress over child rearing | 1.93 | 2.02 | 1.19 | 1.00 |
| | *3.31* | *3.57* | *2.33* | *1.67* |
| Co-parental interaction | 2.84 | 2.62 | 2.79 | 2.68 |
| | *0.32* | *0.50* | *0.35* | *0.45* |

Significant negative correlations were found between mothers' and fathers' conflict over child rearing and the children's overall strengths. Similarly, there were also negative correlations between the mothers' and fathers' global distress and the children's overall

strengths. The greater the mothers' and/or fathers' report of Conflict and Global distress, the lower the level of children's strengths. See Table 3. Not surprisingly, mothers' and fathers' reports of their conflict and distress were all positively inter-correlated.

Table 3. *Correlations of Parental Distress with Child Strengths*

| Correlations | Mother's Conflict over childrearing | Mother's Global distress | Father's Conflict over Childrearing | Father's Global distress | Child's Strength Quotient BERS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mother's Conflict over Childrearing | | .60** | .64** | .52** | -.38** |
| Mother's Global Distress | | | .31** | .67** | -.31** |
| Father's Conflict over Childrearing | | | | .45** | -.46** |
| Father's Global Distress | | | | | -.36** |

** *p < .01*

To understand how differing parenting styles between parental figures influence their children's outcomes, correlations between child strengths and parenting practices were examined separately within parent and child gender. It was predicted that the mother has more influence over daughters than the fathers do and that fathers have more influence over sons than mothers do. This expectation was marginally supported with regard to parent involvement. The child's overall strength score (the BERS2 Strength Quotient) was most strongly related to the parent involvement of the same-sex parent (Table 4). Similarly, the child's interpersonal strength score was also most strongly correlated with the parent involvement of the same-sex parent. There was a marginal difference between father's and mother's correlations with their sons' BERS2 scores in relation to parent involvement, $p$ =

.08. Fisher's R-to-Z transformations were conducted to test the difference between fathers'

correlations versus mothers' correlations with BERS2. Differences between correlations

were found to be not significant.

Table 4. *Correlations between Parents' Parenting Practices and Child Outcomes*

| | Male Parent | | Female Parent | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Correlation between | Boy | Girl | Boy | Girl |
| BERS Strength Quotient and | | | | |
| Parent Involvement | .50 | .39 | .29 | .51 |
| BERS Interpersonal Strength and | | | | |
| Parent Involvement | .40 | .22 | .12 | .38 |

In another set of analyses, difference scores were computed between the mothers'

and fathers' scores on the parenting scales. Two types of difference scores were tested. One

type subtracted the fathers' scores from the mothers'. The other type used the absolute

value of the difference. However, regression analyses showed that there were no significant

effects of either type of difference scores from any of the parenting scales on the child

outcome variables.

# CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

This study examined how the parents' gender, the parents' relationship, and the differing parenting styles between partners affect children's outcomes. McKinney and Renk (2008) suggest that maternal and paternal parenting necessitate separate examination. "In support of these unique interactions, research has demonstrated that mothers and fathers may adopt different parenting styles on the basis of the sex of their children and adolescents" (McKinney & Renk, p. 807). In this study, mother-daughter and father-son dyads were examined.

It was expected that the same-sex parent of a child would have more influence over the child than the opposite-sex parent, and that mixed parenting styles would negatively affect the development of the child. There was some evidence found in the current study that parents had more influence over their same-sex children versus opposite-sex children. In this sample girls appeared to be influenced both by mothers' and fathers' parenting. Results also suggest girls were more influenced by their mothers' involvement than by their fathers' involvement. Boys seemed more influenced by their fathers' involvement. The results from this study indicate that parents appear to have significant influence on their same-sex children, but that opposite-sex parents also have some influence. These results support role theory which examines how mothers and fathers interact differently with their children due to gender expectations. (McKinney & Renk, 2008).

Role theory explores the idea that mothers and fathers display differing interactions with their children because of the socialized and expected roles of women and men. McKinney and Renk (2008) suggest that fathers are less involved than mothers are with

children. This study's results indicate similar findings. The mothers reported showing greater levels of involvement than fathers. In addition, this study found gender-based themes. Findings suggest mothers to be more involved with their daughters' lives versus their sons', and fathers were more involved in their sons' lives versus their daughters'.

This study examined female parent-child and male parent-child dyads. These findings suggest sex-based differences and that gender plays a role in the interaction of parents and children. Russell and colleagues (1998) also found sex-based differences in the parenting practices of mothers versus fathers. When involvement was analyzed, mothers stated higher levels of involvement than fathers. Mothers reported slightly greater involvement with their daughters than with their sons, and fathers reported slightly greater involvement with their sons than with their daughters.

Furthermore, results of this study show that mothers indicate greater levels of positive attention and attachment to their children than fathers. These findings illustrate parenting differences which contribute to children's outcomes. The differences between parents' amount of involvement given to children affects children's interpersonal strength and overall adjustment. For example, mothers showed higher levels of confidence in their parenting when parenting boys. Fathers reported negligible differences in parenting confidence related to the child's gender. However, when parenting a boy, fathers had slightly more confidence than when parenting a girl.

These findings draw a parallel to Calkins (1994) and Rice (1999), who state that fathers and mothers strive to teach their same-sex children how to be either a man or a woman. This connects the research of Calkins and Rice with this study's findings of fathers

and mothers providing more involvement with their same-sex children and parents having more influence over their same-sex children.

Also, this study's findings are congruent with findings from McKinney and Renk (2008) and Shonkoff and Phillips (2000), which state fathers have become more involved in their children's lives. However, this study suggests fathers are not as involved as mothers are in parenting their children. This study's findings are incongruent with those from Kochanska and colleagues (2008) who found mothers and fathers to be equal parents. Even though changing social structures are guided towards more equal parenting, according to this study, fathers and mothers appear to not be equal parents and not equally responsive when it comes to parenting. This study found slight differences regarding parental involvement. Mothers provide more involvement and responsiveness to their children than fathers.

Regarding conflict over child-rearing and global distress, mothers report greater conflict over child-rearing than fathers do. Findings parallel the findings from Gottman and colleagues (1996, 1997), who found that it is beneficial for children when caregivers are able to express emotions in an appropriate manner. Children are then better able to express themselves, which has multiple positive outcomes as noted in the literature review. In addition, parental discord is negatively correlated with children's adjustment. The greater the parental discord, the greater the likelihood the child will be maladjusted. These findings are also congruent with the findings from Block and colleagues (1981). When parents are able to have less conflict, lower levels of distress, and offer children structure and

consistency, children will have positive outcomes. When parents are in disagreement and discord, children were found to have significant negative developmental outcomes.

When parents disagree with one another about child-rearing practices, this can create couple issues and confusion for the child (Rice, 1990). Block and colleagues (1981) found that when parents are similar in regards to parenting, an environment rich in structure and consistency is created. However, significant effects on children's psychological functioning and ego control were found when parents were in disagreement. The unity or discord of the parental relationship influences a child (Block et al.).

Caregivers who limit expression of discord, frustration, and conflict over how to teach children how to display appropriate expression of emotions and encourage their children to express themselves appropriately, enable the child to be well-adjusted and have positive developmental outcomes. This research along with other studies (Conrade & Ho, 2001; McKinney & Renk, 2008; Russell et al., 1998) demonstrated that mothers and fathers at times take on differing parenting practices based on the sex of their children.

These results propel the literature on parenting, differential parenting, and child well-being by examining how this study's sample of caregivers are parenting and how specific parenting practices influence the strength of children. In order for parents to help children move toward positive developmental outcomes, parents need to decrease the amount of conflict and discord between parents, be involved with every aspect of their children's lives, and provide positive attention to their children.

**Implications for Practice**

Implications from these findings include that the parents' involvement and positive attention are important regardless of gender. Mothers and fathers would benefit from working toward equal levels of involvement, positive attention, and limiting conflict over child rearing. Parents who attempt to limit the level of parental discord are more likely to see positive outcomes for their children. Furthermore, mixed parenting styles appear to have had no effect on child outcomes.

Practitioner implications may include awareness of the impacts of gender and that parenting appears to continue to be not equal. When working with parents, the practitioner's awareness of this imbalance may be beneficial in order to bring awareness to the parents. This may help decrease conflict or distress among parents and ultimately improve children's outcomes.

**Limitations**

The current study has its limitations. The study's sample was primarily White, heterosexual, and middle class parents from a single city in the Midwest. The study includes self report measures by only two-parent families and purposely excluded single parent families. This was an experimental study and included a greater proportion of parents with children with adjustment problems as would be found in the general population. The sample included both control and program families, therefore, we don't know if the program itself had any impact on the parents' practices or the child outcomes. There was a lot of attrition from the original sample to this current sample, meaning the current sample most likely includes a greater proportion of higher functioning and stable families than the original sample. A final limitation of this study is its sample size of 74 is

not very large. With these limitations in mind we are not able to generalize this study's findings to the larger population.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

It may be beneficial for researchers to examine how differential parenting styles, caregivers' relationship, and gender interact in samples from different cultures, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic statuses. As a continuation of the current study, it would be beneficial to focus on the children's perspective of how their parents are parenting and how their perceptions affect their outcomes. A theory that may help guide this continuation of the current study is called Mutually Responsive Orientation which has been mentioned in Chapter 2.

Mutually Responsive Orientation is a theory stating the importance of the parent-child dyad. MRO stresses the importance of bidirectional, mutual, cooperative and reciprocal qualities within the parent-child relationship. Along with the importance of mutual cooperative qualities of the parent-child relationship it is also important for the parent to remember to take most of the responsibility. The parent and child have an internalized sense of willingness to cooperate with each other and an open responsiveness to each other's cues (Kochanska et al., 2008). Further research may benefit from learning how the child's perception and cooperative qualities between the parent and the child impacts child outcomes and parenting practices.

The current study showed parenting as it is impacted by gender (both children's and parents'). The current study suggests caregivers parent their children differently depending on gender. Also, mothers and fathers appear to parent differently, but according to this

study what has greater impact on children's outcomes are gender influences, amount of involvement, and limiting conflict over child rearing. This study helped narrow the gap in our understanding of how gender and differences in mothers' and fathers' parenting impact children's outcomes.

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