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ABSTRACT

One recently developed parenting research model hypothesizes that parenting behavior and child adjustment are influenced by a number of divergent variables that operate through the component of the parent's personality that is related to the parenting role. In this model, the level of stress experienced by each parent results from a series of appraisals made by each parent in the context of his or her level of commitment to the parenting role. Parenting stress is viewed as a motivational variable that encourages parents to use parenting support resources available to them. The richness or paucity of resources available naturally plays a key role in the ultimate parenting behavior. A measure of one of the important conceptual variables in the model has been developed: The Parenting Alliance Inventory (PAI), a self-report measure that focuses on aspects of the marital relationship that bear directly on parenting. Recent research has demonstrated that narrow band personality measures consisting of questions that are directly tied to a specific belief system can predict and define determinants of parenting behaviors. It is believed that the PAI will contribute significantly to the prediction of parenting behaviors because the PAI is based on the recognition that both parents can function well in the parenting role even when they are dissatisfied with the marital relationship. (RH)

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APA Section 1 Child Clinical Psychology
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The Determinants of Parenting: What Variables Do We Need to Look At?

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The role of Parent and the acts of Parenting have been of interest to philosophers, religious leaders, and society-in-general since ancient times. Empirical investigation of the role and functioning of parents, on the other hand, has a history of less than a hundred years, with most studies being of recent vintage. During the past two decades the interest of psychologists and society in understanding the factors which influence parenting behavior has intensified given the widespread publicity surrounding the phenomenon of child abuse and concerns regarding the outcome of child development in the face of reduced mother-care and increased other-care.

In the area of child abuse researchers such as Garbarino (1980), Elder (1974; 1987), and Gottfried (1988) have demonstrated that negative child outcomes and dysfunctional parenting are associated with a large number of sociological and environmental variables. A number of behaviorally-oriented investigators have documented the relationship between certain specific parenting behaviors to cognitive deficiencies in children and child abuse.

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More recently, researchers such as Sameroff (1987) and others building upon the work of behaviorally-oriented psychologists, and those who study parent/child interactions, such as Bowlby (1969), Bell & Harper (1977), and Ainsworth (1978), have developed transactional models which represent a bridge between the sociological, environmental, and behavioral perspectives. What appears to be missing at this point is a strong commitment of researchers to a consideration of parental belief and motivational systems as an equally important set of variables to those previously described.

I would like to present to you an analogy which I think illustrates the deficit in our current perspective. Imagine, if you will, that our task as psychologists is to define the determinants of the behavior of a ship, in the same sense that psychologists are trying to define the determinants of parenting behavior. Assuming further, that we are alien researchers and know nothing about these ships, we begin our study by observing ships, and we note that a ship leaves Port A and crosses the ocean and reaches Port B. Some other ships leave Port A and wind up at Port C, while others break up or sink in transit. We suspect that the determinants of these behaviors or outcomes are many. As researchers we must decide which variables to study.

The environment seems a good choice: we check the weather, look for icebergs, and assess a large number of other environmental variables. We correlate these variables to the outcome of the ship's voyage, in the same way sociological environmental variables have proven to have some utility as predictors and as possible determinants of parenting behavior.

We may also choose to observe the ships' behavior while in transit. From this behavioral perspective we notice that when a ship faces strong winds blowing from the north that the bow of the ship turns toward the north -- at least it does in those ships that make it across the ocean. We observe that in those ships that do not point their bow to the north that many capsize in rough weather. From these observations we have a clear picture of a significant behavior of the ship as it attempts to cross the ocean. Thus, the behavioral perspective of studying the relation of the ship's behavior to external stressors/events reveals a strong relationship between behaviors and outcomes. Clearly, the behavioral approach has demonstrated that it is a u ful way to understand the behavior of ships.

However, I would like to suggest to you, that if we are going to fully understand what the determinants of the ship's crossing the ocean successfully are, it will be necessary for us to examine

what goes on inside the ship. We need to examine the internal mechanics, the reasoning, the beliefs, and the motives of whatever exists inside the ship.

In psychology, we have developed some theories and models regarding parenting, which have demonstrated heuristic value, but which need refinement. And this refinement is, of course, taking place. For example, my first slide (see figure #1) presents Patterson's model (Patterson & Bank, 1989) regarding the determinants of antisocial and aggressive behavior in children. Clearly, this model describes and fits observations made regarding relationships between parent and child's behaviors. What it doesn't do is inform us as to why the behaviors occur. What determines or causes the behaviors? One must ask, "Why do some parents respond inappropriately at various points in Patterson's model, while others don't? Why do some disengage from the process of increasing escalation while others don't?"

Remember my "ship" analogy? We observed that, usually, ships turn into the wind in a storm. We know that if they don't, they usually capsize. We have an orderly and predictable behavioral theory. With increasing bad weather the ships which reach port are the ships which turn into the wind, and those which don't reach port or sink do not turn into the wind. Is our behavioral

theory of ships useful? Certainly, it is. Theories and models of parenting behavior, however, need to be developed which go beyond the stimulus/response behavioral perspective, and which integrate sociological and cognitive/psychological approaches with behavioral approaches.

The recent research of Ed Tronick (1989), and that of Tiffany Field (1989) illustrates that we can identify some of the processes by which parent/child interactions are regulated by the beliefs and expectations of both parties during the child's infancy. These studies are providing the information needed to build better models of the determinants of parenting.

In 1976, while developing the Parenting Stress Index, I made an initial attempt at developing a model which integrated a range of variables that I believed to be central to the role of parenting. The components of that model can be seen in Figure #2.

In my 1976 model stress was presented as the central construct, with stress leading to dysfunctional parenting. At that time I believed higher levels of parenting stress led to increased dysfunctional parenting. Subsequently, both my research (Abidin, 1982) and that of others demonstrated that a simple linear relationship did not exist between stress level and dysfunctional

parenting. I found that very low levels of parenting stress were associated with dysfunctional parenting due to the disengagement of the parent and the subsequent low level of vigilant parental behaviors.

More recently there have been more elegant attempts at model-building designed to illuminate the paths of the "determinants of parenting". In 1984 Jay Belsky presented his model (see Figure #?) of the determinants of parenting in relation to child abuse. His model attempted to define the major global sociological and personality characteristics which related to parenting behaviors. In 1986 Belsky, et al., reported the results of an initial test of that model using some rather sophisticated statistical analyses. The model, which included personal historical, sociological, behavioral, and self-report data, produced challenges to some of Belsky's previously held beliefs and to the conventional wisdom of the scientific community regarding some of the global family variables which were thought to have predictive utility in relation to parenting behavior. For example, the assumed importance of marital adjustment to parenting and child outcomes was challenged, while the importance of parental developmental history was increased as a direct predictor of parenting behavior. Belsky's work has helped to expand the variables now considered important in models of parenting

behavior, and his work helps focus us more on the interior of the parent. It does not, however, fully capture the parent as a thinking, planning, goal-oriented individual.

What I believe is needed at this time is the development of more comprehensive and integrative models designed to incorporate sociological, behavioral and personality characteristics of the parent. These models should suggest what measures need to be developed to assess the conceptual components of the model. I would like to now briefly present to you a model with which my students and I are working. I will briefly explain the model, and I will provide you with a brief description of one of the measures we are developing to assess one of the conceptual components of the model.

This model (see Figure #4) is built upon the work of many others, and represents a distillation of the many variables which are either known or suspected to be related to parenting behaviors. The variables we have included are those that our reading of the literature suggest are the best bets for predicting parenting behavior.

The model which we have developed hypothesizes that parenting behavior and child adjustment are influenced by a number of

sociological, environmental, behavioral and developmental variables which have previously been investigated and demonstrated to have relationships to parenting behavior or child outcome. Our current model attempts to capitalize on those relationships, but suggests that the path of influence of those variables is through that component of the parent's personality which relates to the parenting role.

The Parenting Role variable (commitment to Parental Role) in our model represents a set of beliefs and self-expectations which serves as a moderator or buffer of more distal influences. Each parent is seen as having an internal working model of him-/herself as a parent. This model of "self as parent" is created out of the individual's attachment history (Crittendon, 1989), and includes the individuals' goals for themselves, and their internalized expectations of others. Through this working model of self as parent (i.e., Parenting Role), parents assess the harm or benefit which confronts them in the role of parent. The result of that appraisal produces the level of stress the parent experiences.

Parenting stress is, thus, the result of a series of appraisals made by each parent in the context of their level of commitment to the parenting role. Conceptually, we view parenting stress as

a motivational variable which energizes and encourages parents to utilize the resources available to them to support their parenting. The richness or paucity of resources available naturally plays a key role in the ultimate parenting behavior. Some of you may recognize that the dynamics of this model are quite similar to those of Richard Lazarus' (1966) Transactional Model of Stress. And we would like to acknowledge our debt to he and his colleagues.

I would like to briefly comment on our work to develop a self report measure of one of the important conceptual variables in our model. The Parenting Alliance variable in our model replaces the Marital Satisfaction variable included in Belsky's model (1984). This decision was based on the research of Belsky (1986), Emery (1988), and others who have researched the effects of conflict in marriage on child outcomes. The Parenting Alliance Inventory is a self-report measure which we have developed to focus on those aspects of the marital relationship which bear directly upon parenting. It is our belief that a global measurement of marital satisfaction or adjustment (Belsky, 1984, 1986, 1988), as is often used in Family and Child Development research, introduces considerable error variance in relation to the prediction of parenting behavior. I believe that this more specific measure will make a significant contribution

to the prediction of parenting behaviors, since it recognizes that both parents can be involved, and function well, in the parenting role, and yet not be very satisfied with their personal relationship with each other.

My reading of the research literature in recent years has convinced me that an unfortunate mistake was made during the past 25 years when many researchers, rushing to embrace behavioral methodologies, devalued and gave up on or ignored self-report and personality measures designed to assess parental belief systems. Mischel's 1968 position that "situational" rather than personality factors by and large determine behavior was constructive; however, it oversimplified the case.

Clearly, self-report methodology has had many problems associated with it, not the least of which is the use of global measures of personality characteristics to predict specific behaviors. (For an excellent review of methodological and conceptual issues related to self-report measures, I would refer you to Holden & Edwards' 1989 Psychological Bulletin article.) In the old tradition of personality measurement it was assumed that from a limited number of global personality traits one could predict specific behaviors, and attempts were made to do just that. The failure to demonstrate significant and substantial correlations

between global attributes and specific (often micro) behaviors was seen as demonstrating the invalidity of personality assessment, and by implication, self-report methodology.

More recent research has demonstrated that narrow band personality measures consisting of questions which are directly tied to a specific belief system can predict and define the determinants of parenting behaviors. In this regard, I would refer you to the volume edited by Irving E. Siegel (1985) entitled "Parental Belief Systems" and to the recent work of Kochanska, Kucynski, and Radke-Yarrow (1989 which, in a more fine-grained assessment of parenting belief systems, demonstrated major and significant relationships to parenting behavior.

I would like to emphasize both the importance of parental belief systems and their paths of influence. Parent belief systems as measured by self-report have both direct and indirect influences on parenting behavior and child outcomes. The indirect path is mediated by the dyadic interaction, thus the parent engages in interactions with his child based on his/her belief system, and child outcomes follow from these interactions. The direct path relates to the environment the parent creates or involves the child in and by the inferences the child makes about the parent's belief system (expectations). This direct influence cannot be

understood by observation of a particular behavior, but only over a long history of the interactions of the parent and child in a large variety of contexts. Thus, behavioral observations are an inefficient and somewhat ineffective method of assessing some of the direct influences of the impact of parental belief systems on their children. I believe direct assessment of parental belief systems by self report will be a more effective methodology.

As clinicians and researchers we need to overcome the prejudices against personality assessment in general, and self-report methodology, in particular. What is needed is the development of models of the determinants of parenting which will allow for and support the incorporation of various data sources to facilitate the prediction and understanding of parenting behavior. It is my intention to continue to pursue such a line of investigation, and I welcome suggestions or collaborations either in relation to our attempts at model-building and/or the development of self-report or other measures of parental belief systems.

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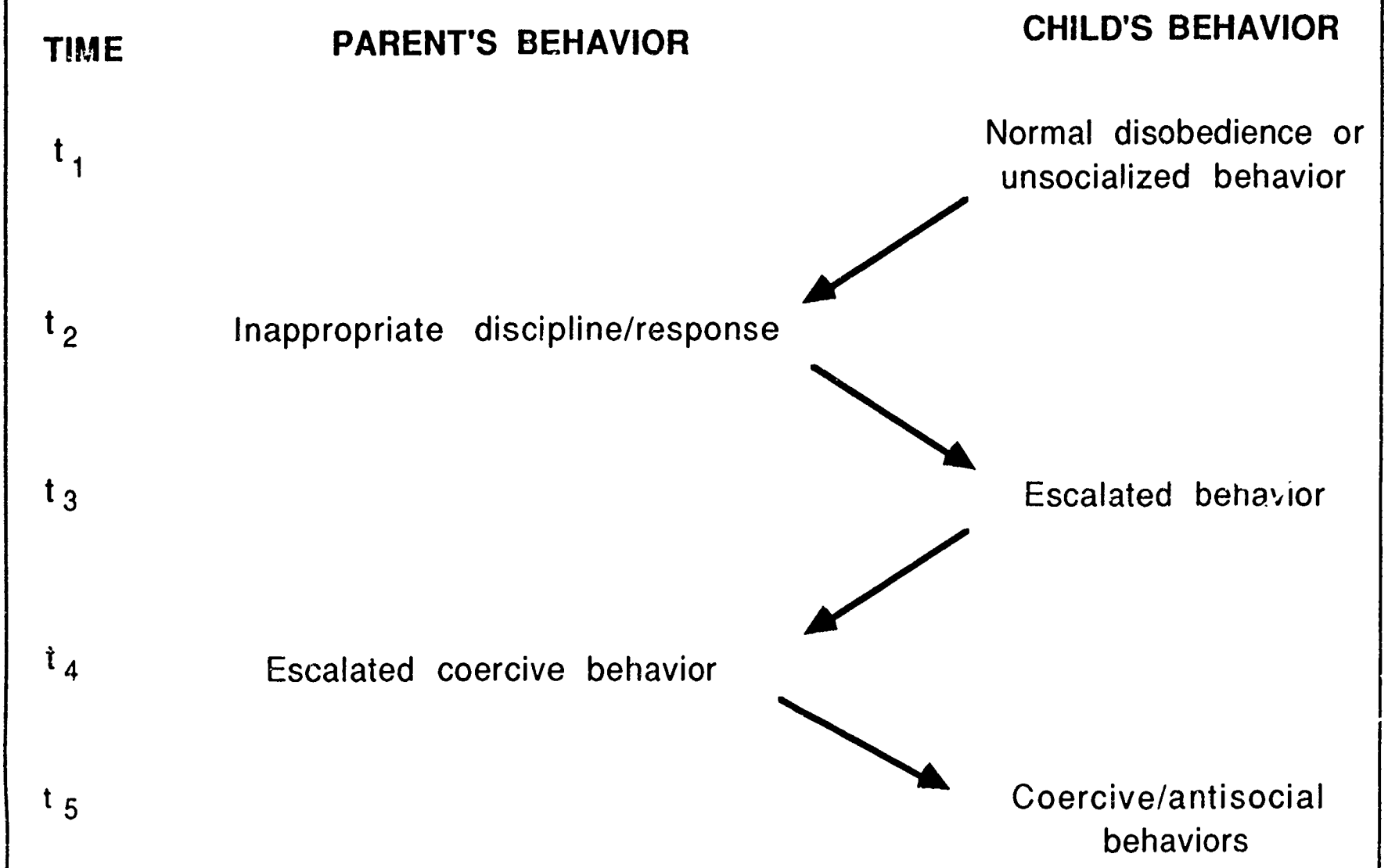
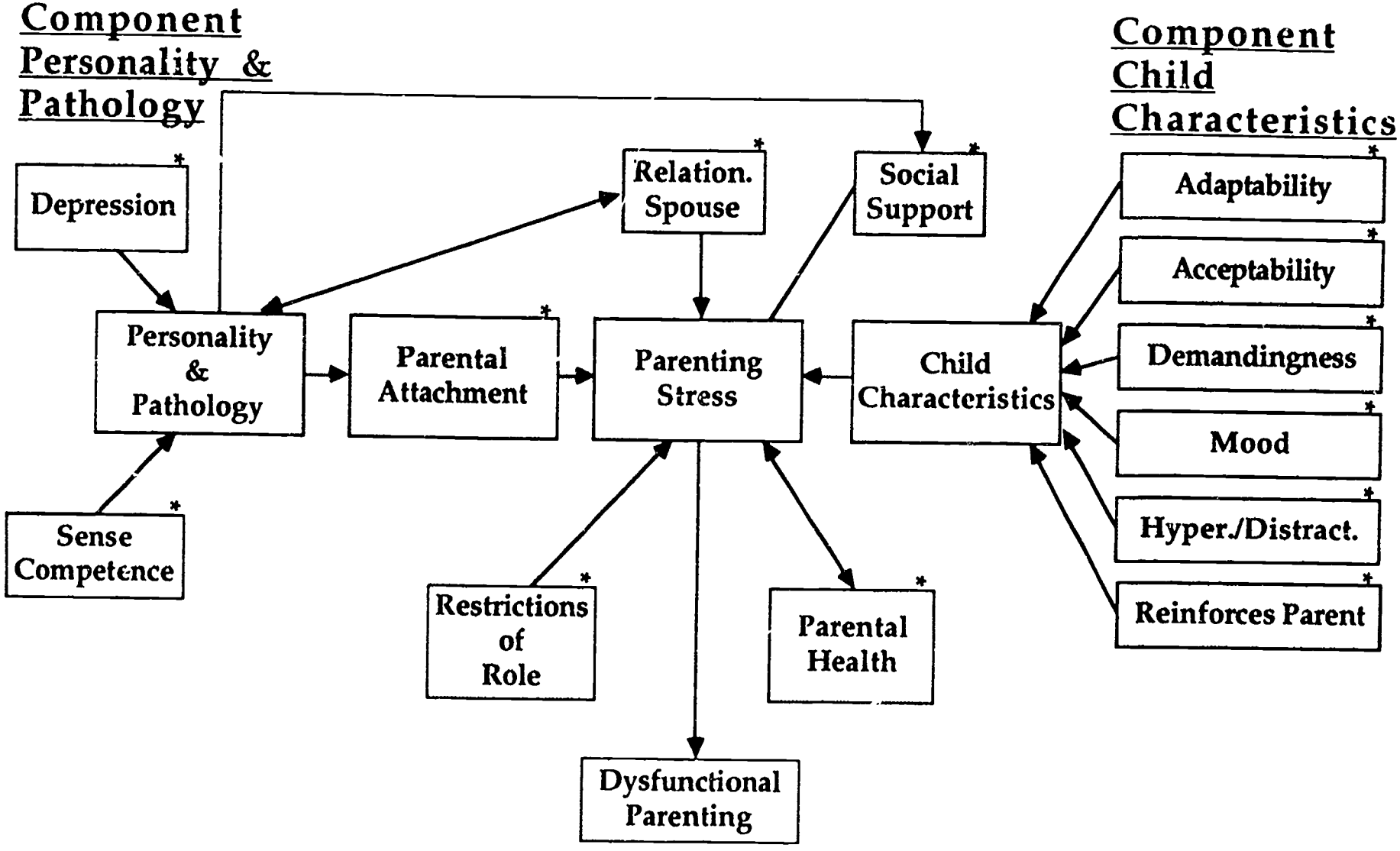
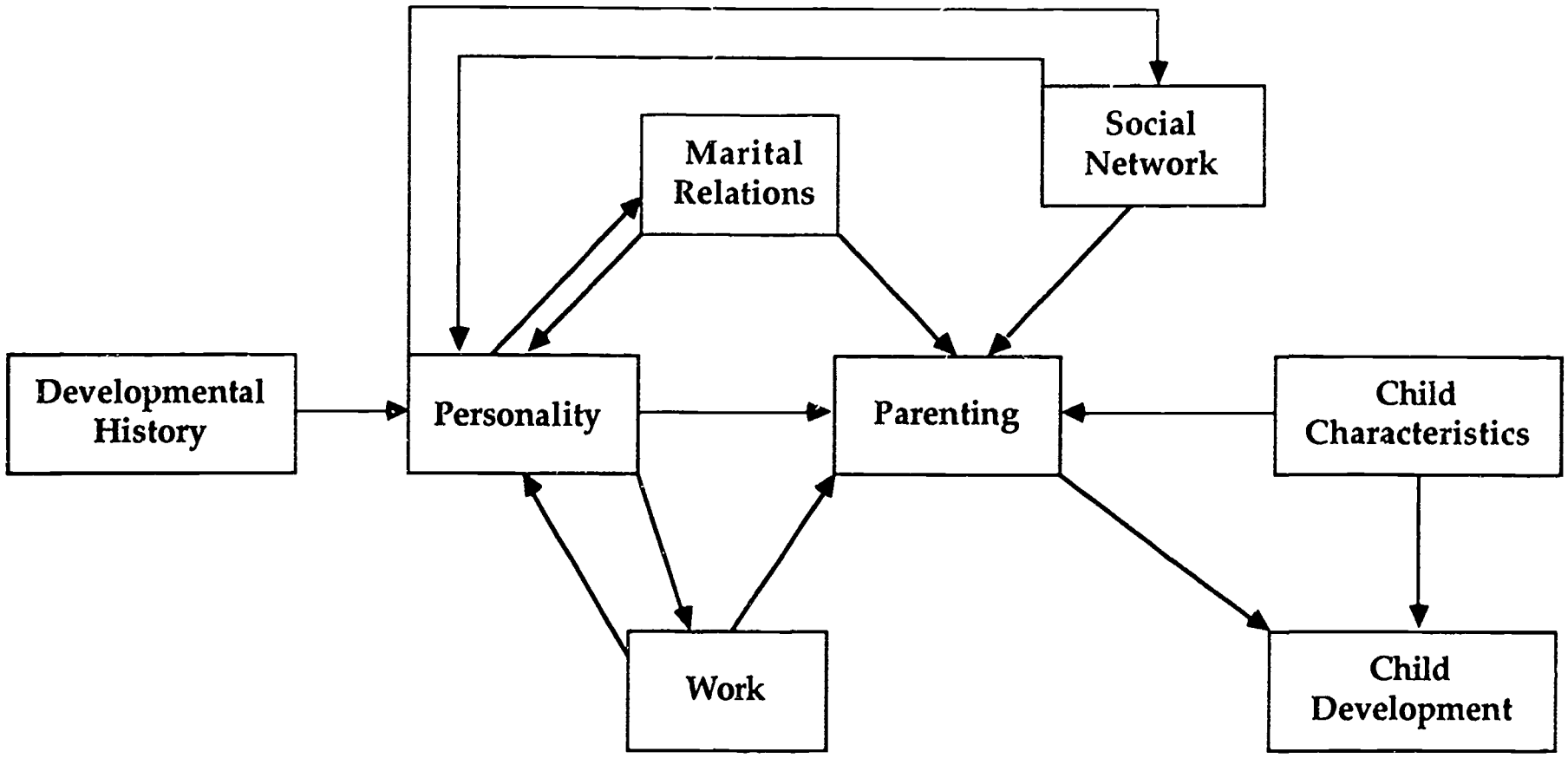
PATTERSON'S TRANSACTIONAL MODEL of the Determinants of Antisocial Behavior



PARENTING STRESS MODEL ABIDIN (1976)



* Subscales on the Parenting Stress Index

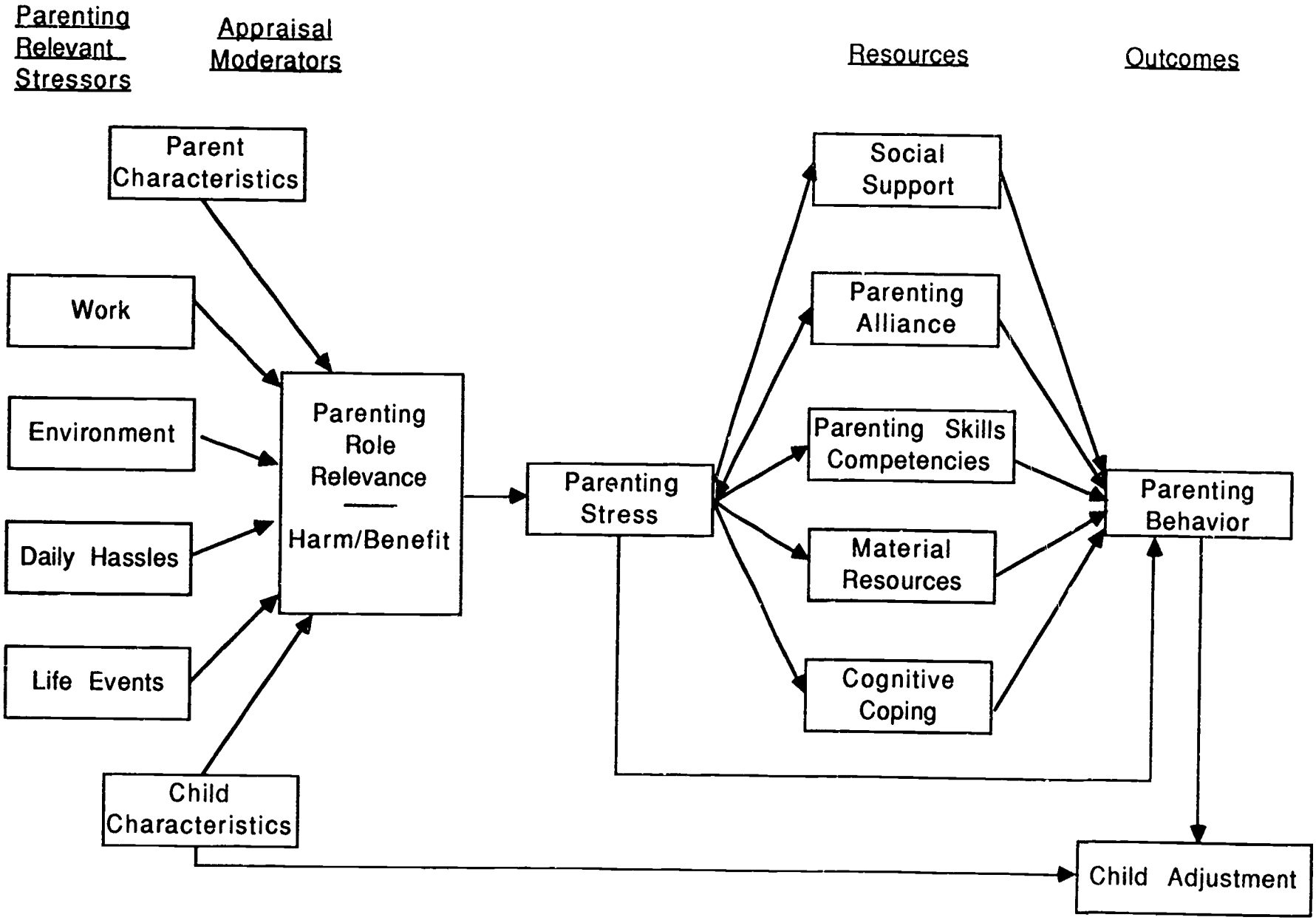


A Process Model of the Determinants of Parenting

Jay Belsky, The Determinants of Parenting: Process Model.
Child Development 1984, 55, 83-96.

PARENTING STRESS & PARENTING BEHAVIOR -- 11/28/88

R.R. Abidin - University of Virginia



PARENTING ROLE

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DIRECTIONS: The questions listed below ask about you as a parent. While you may not find an answer which exactly describes what you think, please circle the answer that comes closest to what you think. YOUR FIRST REACTION SHOULD BE YOUR ANSWER.

Example:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoy going to the movies. (If you sometimes go to the movies, you would circle #2.)	1	(2)	3	4	5

THE QUESTIONS:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Being a parent is my greatest responsibility.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Being a parent is not as important as being a good provider for the family.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Children's behavior is caused as much by what others do to and for the child as it is by their parents.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Parents should be held responsible for what their children do.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Being a parent is a job I enjoy.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Being a parent is not as important as being a good husband/wife.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Children's behavior is a reflection of the kind of parents they have.	1	2	3	4	5
8. When I do something which makes my child happy, I feel as happy as my child.	1	2	3	4	5
9. It is very important to me that my child feel close to me.	1	2	3	4	5

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	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10. Being a parent is something I want to be good at.	1	2	3	4	5
11. If my child gets angry with me, it upsets me more than if my boss gets angry with me.	1	2	3	4	5
12. My children are my greatest source of pride.	1	2	3	4	5
13. All persons must be responsible for themselves and this includes children.	1	2	3	4	5
14. No matter where I am or what I am doing, I think of my children at least every couple of hours.	1	2	3	4	5
15. My children are my greatest source of frustration.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I avoid taking care of my child when I can.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Most of the sounds children make annoy me.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Being good at your work is more important than being good as a parent.	1	2	3	4	5
19. My child's other parent's concern for our child is greater than mine.	1	2	3	4	5
20. It would have been best for my relationship with my child's other parent if we did not have a child.	1	2	3	4	5
21. I do not think I have the interest in children to make a good parent.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Playing with my child is enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5
23. I feel good when I think about myself as a parent.	1	2	3	4	5
24. While I love my child, if I had it to do over, I would not be a parent.	1	2	3	4	5
25. If my child turns out well or is a behavior problem, it is not a reflection on me.	1	2	3	4	5
26. The truth is I do not find children interesting.	1	2	3	4	5
27. My child will accomplish more than I did.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Being a parent makes me feel important.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Being a parent has reduced my chances to do something important in life.	1	2	3	4	5
30. I enjoy being alone with my children.	1	2	3	4	5

PARENTAL COPING: Things That I Do

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DIRECTIONS: The questions listed below ask about you as a parent. Answer the questions by thinking about what you do when you have a problem with your child. While you may not find an answer which exactly describes what you think, please circle the answer that comes closest to what you think. YOUR FIRST REACTION SHOULD BE YOUR ANSWER.

Example:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I enjoy going to the movies. (If you sometimes go to the movies, you would circle #2.)	1	(2)	3	4	5

WHEN I HAVE PROBLEMS WITH MY CHILD, I:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Ask for help from my child's other parent.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Ask for help from my parents or in-laws.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Ask for help from friends.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Think out a plan of what to do.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Try something that worked before.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Try to ignore things and hope they get better.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Do nothing and hope he/she grows out of it.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Ask for ideas from a professional.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Read a book to get ideas of what to do.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Go to a class or a meeting about my concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Pray for guidance.	1	2	3	4	5

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	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. Talk with my child to get ideas about what to do.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Punish my child.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Encourage myself to keep trying.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Cry.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Get angry so everyone knows I am upset.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Blame or lecture myself.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Try to make myself feel better.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Eat, smoke, or take drugs to relax.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Avoid the issue.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Try to forget it. Make believe it did not happen.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Walk away or go to my room.	1	2	3	4	5
23. Avoid my child.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Decide on how to reward and punish my child.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Show him/her what I expect.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Smile/laugh it off.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Be patient.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Think problems are to be expected; just do your best.	1	2	3	4	5
29. Recognize that there will be good times and bad times.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Hire someone to help out.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Trust in God.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Try to figure out what caused the problem.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Try to understand what my child was thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Observe my child to get ideas about what he wants.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Listen to my child to understand what he needs.	1	2	3	4	5

PARENTING ALLIANCE INVENTORY

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DIRECTIONS: The questions listed below concern what happens between you and your child's other parent, or the other adult most involved in the care of your child. While you may not find an answer which exactly describes what you think, please circle the answer that comes closest to describing what you think. YOUR FIRST REACTION SHOULD BE YOUR ANSWER.

Example:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My child's other parent and I go to the movies. (If you sometimes go to the movies, you would circle #2.)	1	2	3	4	5

THE QUESTIONS:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. During pregnancy, my child's other parent liked to talk about our child.	1	2	3	4	5
2. During pregnancy, my child's other parent expressed confidence in my ability to be a good parent.	1	2	3	4	5
3. My child's other parent believes I am a good parent.	1	2	3	4	5
4. My child's other parent tells me I am a good parent.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My child's other parent sees our child in the same way I do.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My child's other parent and I would basically describe our child in the same way.	1	2	3	4	5
7. My child's other parent and I have the same goals for our child.	1	2	3	4	5
8. If our child needs to be punished, my child's other parent and I usually agree on the type of punishment.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My child's other parent and I agree on what our child should and should not be permitted to do.	1	2	3	4	5
10. When I see my child's other parent interact with our child, I feel good about it.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I feel close to my child's other parent when I see him/her play with our child.	1	2	3	4	5
12. When there is a problem with our child, we work out a good solution together.	1	2	3	4	5

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	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
13. I believe my child's other parent is a good parent.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I learn how to better manage my child by watching his/her other parent manage him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I believe my child's other parent cares deeply about our child.	1	2	3	4	5
16. I believe my child's other parent has confidence in what I do with our child.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Even if my child's other parent and I have problems in our relationship, we can work together for our child.	1	2	3	4	5
18. When my child's other parent helps out with our child, I feel good about it.	1	2	3	4	5
19. My child's other parent cares about our child.	1	2	3	4	5
20. I feel good about my child's other parent's judgment about what is right for our child.	1	2	3	4	5
21. My child's other parent makes my job of being a parent easier.	1	2	3	4	5
22. I know my child's other parent and I will always be together as parents, even if our relationship ends.	1	2	3	4	5
23. My child's other parent and I communicate well about our child.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Talking to my child's other parent about our child is something I look forward to.	1	2	3	4	5
25. My child's other parent and I are a good team.	1	2	3	4	5
26. My child's other parent is willing to make personal sacrifices to help take care of our child.	1	2	3	4	5
27. My child's other parent enjoys being alone with our child.	1	2	3	4	5
28. My child's other parent pays a great deal of attention to our child.	1	2	3	4	5
29. My child's other parent knows how to manage children well.	1	2	3	4	5
30. When my child's other parent thinks our child is doing something wrong, I often think the same thing.	1	2	3	4	5