Predictors of triadic family interaction patterns at 13 months postpartum

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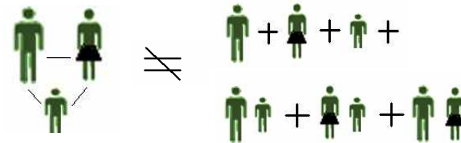Margaret Szewczyk Sokolowski
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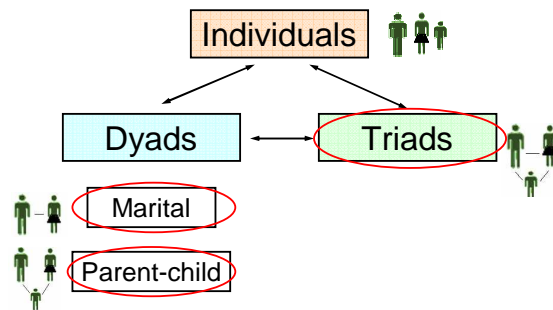
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Family Systems Theory

Wholeness (e.g., Cox & Paley, 1997; Minuchin, 1985, 1988)

☐ "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

Family Systems Theory

Interdependence (e.g., Cox & Paley, 1997; Minuchin, 1985, 1988)

Individuals

Dyads ↔ Triads

Marital

Parent-child

Dyad and Triad

- Considerable research on the association between marital and parent-child relationship qualities
  - ☐ e.g., spillover effects (e.g., Cox, Paley, & Harter, 2001; Crockenberg & Langrock, 2001; Erel & Burman, 1995)
- Not much research on the association between marital and triadic relationship qualities

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Triadic Family Interaction

- Studies on whole families are lacking
- Most studies on triads are often with:
  - ☐ Families with older children (e.g., Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1997)
  - ☐ Clinical samples
    - Eating disorders
    - Mood disorders
    - Externalizing problems etc.

(e.g., Dare & Eisler, 1997; Jones, Sellwood, & McGovern, 2005; Miklowitz, Goldstein, Nuechterlein, Snyder, & Mintz, 1988; Schwartz, Barrett, & Saba, 1983)

Triadic Family Interaction

- We do know that family interaction patterns emerge early on. (Fivaz-Depeursinge, Corboz-Warnery, & Keren, 2004; McHale, 1995)
- But not much known about
  - ☐ HOW whole family interaction patterns emerge early in infancy
  - ☐ HOW STABLE parental behaviors in a triadic context are during the first year of life

Key Questions

Explore the following three questions:

1. How is observed marital quality associated with later family interaction patterns?

2. How is parent-child interaction (in triadic context) associated with later family interaction patterns?

3. How stable are parental behaviors (in triadic context)?

Methods

- Participants
  - 65 families, all married
  - 82% Caucasian
  - >80% with college degree
- Procedure
  - 3.5 months, home observation
    - Triadic family interaction
    - Marital interaction
  - 13 months, lab observation
    - Triadic family interaction

Procedures: 3.5 months

- 3.5-month marital interaction
  - Talk about division of labor as a couple
    - How you think it is
    - How you would like it to be

- 3.5-month family interaction
  - Mother, father, and infant interact
    - Using an infant jungle gym
    - Changing the infant into a bodysuit

Procedures: 13 months

- 13-month family interaction
  - Rings
  - Shape sorter   } 10 mins
  - Blocks
  - A box of new toys – 5 mins
  - Cleaning up – 5 mins

Measures: 3.5 months

- Marital Interaction (in the home)

  - Coded on 7-pt. scales (Frosch & Mangelsdorf, 1998, 2001)
  - 2 composite variables
    - *Positive marital quality*
    = Enjoyment + M's + F's Positive Affect + Balance + Engagement
    - *Negative marital quality*
    = Irritation + M's + F's Negative Affect – Cooperation – Sensitivity – Conflict Resolution – Global rating

Measures: 3.5 months

- Parent-child interaction in the triadic context (in the home)

  - Mother, father coded separately on 5-pt. scales
  - 2 composite variables
    (Goldstein, Diener, & Mangelsdorf, 1996)
    - *Sensitivity*
    = Sensitivity + responsiveness
    - *Expressiveness*
    = Positive Affect + Expressiveness + Vocalization

Measures: 13 months

- Triadic family interaction (in the lab)

    ☐ Each parent coded on 7-pt. scales
    ☐ 3 scales
    (YFICS; Paley, Cox, & Kanoy, 2000; SCIFF, Lindahl & Malik, 2000)
    - M's and F's *Sensitivity*
    - M's and F's *Detachment*
    - M's and F's *Intrusiveness*

Measures: 13 months

- Triadic family interaction (in the lab)

    ☐ The whole family coded on 7-pt. scales on the family level
    ☐ 4 variables
    (YFICS; Paley, Cox, & Kanoy, 2000; SCIFF, Lindahl & Malik, 2000)
    - *Sensitive Engagement*
      = Family Sensitivity + Cohesiveness – Family Detachment
    - *Family Positive Affect*
    - *Family Negative Affect*
    - *Family Intrusiveness*

Preliminary Results

Q1. How is <u>observed marital quality</u> associated with later family interaction patterns?

- Positive marital quality at 3.5 months
    ☐ Higher Sensitive Engagement at 13 months, $r = .37$**
    ☐ Higher Family Positive Affect at 13 months, $r = .38$**

- Negative marital quality at 3.5 months
    ☐ No associations found

*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$

Preliminary Results

Q2. How is <u>parent-child interaction (in triadic context)</u> associated with later family interaction patterns?

- M's Sensitivity at 3.5 months
    ☐ Higher Family Positive Affect at 13 months, $r = .39$**
- M's Expressiveness at 3.5 months
    ☐ Higher Sensitive Engagement at 13 months, $r = .53$***
    ☐ Higher Family Positive Affect at 13 months, $r = .38$*

- F's Sensitivity & Expressiveness at 3.5 months
    ☐ No associations found

*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$

Preliminary Results

Q3. <u>How stable</u> are parental behaviors (in triadic context)?

- M's Sensitivity at 3.5 months
    ☐ No associations found
- M's Expressiveness at 3.5 months
    ☐ M's higher Sensitivity at 13 months, $r = .48$**
    ☐ M's lower Detachment at 13 months, $r = -.60$***

- F's Sensitivity & Expressiveness at 3.5 months
    ☐ No associations found

*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$; ***$p<.001$

Conclusions

1. Positive marital quality was predictive of later family interaction.
    ☐ Smaller variability in negative marital quality

2. Mothers' early behaviors were predictive of later family interaction, but not fathers'.
    ☐ Nature of the tasks?

Conclusions

3. Mothers' behaviors were more stable than fathers'.
    - □ Nature of the tasks?
    - □ Socially scripted, clear roles for mothers, but not for fathers?

Future Directions

Explore the following:

1. Tasks that better highlight individual differences in *paternal* behaviors

2. Continuity/discontinuity of family interaction patterns beyond the first year

3. Implications of early family interaction patterns for child adjustment *in the preschool years*

Thank You!

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