Families With Young Children: A Review of Research in the 1990s.

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Demo, David H., and Martha J. Cox. (2000). Families with young children: A review of research in the 1990s. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 62, 876-895.

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Abstract:
Research conducted in the past decade on families with young chidren concentrated on 5 broad topics: (a) the transition to parenthood,' (b) the importance of maternal sensitivity for children's attachment security and subsequent adjustment and social competence; (c) the effectiveness of particular parenting styles and practices; (d) interparental, familial, and broader societal factors influencing parenting behaviors and child adjustment; and (e) the impact of family structure and household composition on children's well-being. Our review documents substantial diversity in family structures, parenting arrangements, and childrearing values and practices both within and across ethnic and racial groups. Collectively, the evidence suggests that in most families with young children, parents and children seem to be doing well. We conclude that substantial work is required to expand the study of families with young children beyond mother-child dyads in White, middle-class, two-parent, first-marriage families.

Key Words:
child adjustment, family diversity, parent-child relations, parenting.

Article:
Families with young children remained a vital concern of researchers and practitioners in the 1990s. Reflecting the larger society, American families in this category are characterized by rich diversity on several dimensions, including household configuration and family structure, racial and ethnic heritage, socioeconomic resources, and number, gender, ages, and sibling structure of children.

The objective of this review is to summarize, critique, and reflect on research conducted in the 1990s on families with children in the first decade of life. We also include in our review a number of studies employing samples that include age ranges spanning middle or late childhood into early adolescence. Several methods were used to identify relevant journal articles and books, but most of the studies were identified through a systematic analysis of every issue of seven premier journals published in the 1990s: Journal of Marriage and the Family, Child Development, Developmental Psychology, Journal of Family Psychology, Development and Psychopathology, Family Relations, and Journal of Family Issues. We also devote most of our attention to topics receiving the most research attention. In the past decade, there was substantial interest in early childhood attachment relationships and in children's outcomes associated with various parenting practices and family structures. Our review, like most of the research on families with young children in the past decade, is guided by several theoretical frameworks: life-course, family systems, developmental, ecological, and feminist theories.

THE SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT
Families with young children continue to confront many challenges and stressors, including pressures associated with parental employment and working conditions, underemployment, unemployment, economic hardship, and alarming rates of child poverty. Even in more advantaged middle-income families, everyday

economic realities impinge on parents as they work longer hours than ever before and incur the expenses of all-day or part-time child care. Another sobering development is public disinvestment in children. The social and political climate in the United States over the past 3 decades has led to severe cutbacks in federal, local, and private support for services for families with young children. Historian Stephanie Coontz (1997) noted that since the mid-1970s, politicians, employers, and nonparents have grown increasingly indifferent toward the needs of the next generation, as "governments and corporations have transferred more and more of the costs of raising, educating, and training children back onto parents" (p. 142).

High rates of marital dissolution and nonmarital childbearing over the past few decades have led to dramatic decreases in the proportions of White, African American, and Hispanic children living with two parents. From 1970 to 1994, the percentages fell from 90% to less than 80% among White children, from 60% to 33% among African American children, and from 80% to 65% among Hispanic children (Teachman, 2000). Further, because these percentages are based on crosssectional snapshots of the population, they significantly underestimate the proportion of children who spend periods of their childhood in singleparent households. It is also important in understanding the context of children's lives that five of every six single-parent households are headed by a mother (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1998). Women's high investments in child care and other unpaid family labor, wage discrimination against women, and lack of compliance with and enforcement of child support payments contribute to postdivorce economic plight for many single mothers and their children and the feminization of poverty.

The last 2 decades have been characterized by growing inequality in the income of American families, stagnant wages for white men and declining wages for African American men, and very modest gains in family income (Teachman, 2000). Children are more likely than any other age group to experien~ poverty in the United States, comprising 40% of the poor population. In arguably the most affluent nation in the world, one of four American children live in poverty, the highest rate across 17 developed nations (Rank, 2000). Children living in female-headed families, Native American children living on reservations, African American children, and Hispanic children are especially likely both to live in poverty and to suffer the most severe and long-lasting episodes of poverty. At greatest risk are children at the intersection of two or more dimensions of minority status. For example, 70% of African American children under age 6 living in single-parent households have family incomes below the poverty level (Rank). Duration and severity of poverty impair infants' and young children's physical and mental growth, academic ability, and socioemotional well-being (Duncan & Brooks-Gunn, 1997), inhibit effective parenting, and increase the chances that children will attend inferior schools and live in high-risk environments (Rank).

For families with young children, the familial context and ecology typically involves middleaged parents, the children's grandparents, and other relatives, with each member experiencing the family from a unique developmental and historical vantage point. In this context, many families fare quite well. Most parents care deeply about, support, nurture, and appropriately control their children, especially considering their many other obligations (Demo, 1992). Without dismissing legitimate concerns surrounding problematic behavior among many parents and children, research suggests that most children seem to be doing well and that many are remarkably resilient in the face of family misfortune or disruption (Haggerty, Sherrod, Garmezy, & Rutter, 1994).

PARENTING AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONS

The Transition to Parenthood

In the 1990s, there has been continued interest in understanding early family formation and the transition to first-time parenthood. Whereas much of the research in earlier decades was retrospective and self-report, many studies in the past decade are longitudinal, following couples before and after the birth of the first child. Although early writing on the transition to parenthood focused on the "crisis" of parenthood for young couples, recent longitudinal studies have focused on understanding the variability in couples' adjustment to parenthood and the factors associated with that variability. In line with our conclusion that most children seem to be doing

well, it appears that after an initial disruption, most couples also seem to be doing well. Early studies examined couples before and after the transition to parenthood and found that, in the aggregate, marital satisfaction declined precipitously after the birth of a child. Belsky and Rovine (1990) noted the importance of examining variability within groups and found four distinct patterns of change, however: accelerating decline, linear decline, no change, and modest positive increase. Other studies have illuminated factors that are associated with these patterns of change. Wallace and Gotlib (1990) found, not surprisingly, that the best single predictor of postpartum marital adjustment was prenatal marital adjustment. Cox, Paley, Burchinal, and Payne (1999) observed that among couples who showed an increase or no change in marital satisfaction during the 2 years following the birth, neither spouse had high depressive symptoms, at least one of the spouses showed good problem-solving communication before the birth of the child, and the first-born was more likely to be a male child. For most couples, however, significant declines in negativity began about the first year after the child's birth, a finding replicated by Gable, Belsky, & Cmic (1995).

Other investigators observed that adjustment to parenthood was more difficult for women who expected (before parenthood) that things would be better at 1 year after birth than they actually were, and that high expectations regarding child-care assistance from the spouse and the extended family were associated with a more difficult adjustment for women (Kalmuss, Davidson, & Cushman, 1992). This perhaps reflects the fact that parents' activities become more instrumental and child-oriented after the birth of a child and the division of tasks becomes more gender-based (Cowan & Cowan, 2000). Levy-Schiff (1994) found that fathers' positive caregiving behaviors were strong predictors of marital satisfaction among both husbands and wives in the 9 months after the first child's birth.

Belsky and Rovine (1990) proposed that the couple's adjustment to parenthood is influenced by the child's temperament. In turn, the quality of marital adjustment appears to influence parenting practices and the development of the child. Some studies suggest that fathers' parenting behavior, compared with that of mothers, may be more influenced by the coparental relationship (Doherty, Kouneski, & EriCson, 1998), although the findings are mixed and may depend on the specific parenting behaviors observed and the age of the child. Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, and Volling (1991) found that more negative paternal behavior and more negative child behavior were present in families in which marriages were deteriorating in quality. For mothers there was some evidence of a compensatory process such that more negative marriages were associated with slightly more positive maternal behavior. In contrast, Cox, Paley, Payne, and Burchinal (1999) found that mothers who had shown more withdrawal in marital interactions prenatally showed less sensitivity, warmth, and involvement with their 3-month-olds even when controlling for symptoms of depression and the negative mood of the child. For fathers, there was a similar, but less strong, effect of marital withdrawal.

As with many areas of the study of families, we know more about women and their transitions than about men. How men are changed by becoming parents and how their behaviors and attitudes affect their families are still vastly understudied areas. This is also evident in the literature examining young children's early attachments, in which the nearly exclusive focus has been on mothers and their children.

Early Childhood Attachment Relationships

Thompson (1998) claimed that Freud's emphasis on the infant-mother relationship as unique and as the first love object and prototype of all later love objects has led to the general consideration of the child's relationship with the mother as a foundation for personality growth. He further noted that although psychobiological, learning, and psychoanalytic explanations have been influential, research in the last decade on infant-parent attachment relationships has been guided by ethological attachment theory elaborated by Bowlby (1951,1958) and Ainsworth (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). Bowlby argued that the infant's attachment to the caregiver arises from speciestypical behavioral systems, evolved to promote infant survival, thus motivating infants to seek protective proximity of adults, especially when distressed, alarmed, or in danger (Thompson).

The most frequently used assessment of attachment involves the measurement of infant-parent attachment in the Strange Situation (Ainsworth et al., 1978). The assessment is comprised of a series of episodes in which the

baby experiences separations from and reunions with the parent. Infants who are classified as securely attached (Group B, about 65% of infants) use the parent as a secure base during the procedure and respond positively to the parent's return either with smiling or contact and proximity seeking. Infants who are insecureavoidant (Group A, about 20% of infants) avoid the parent on reunions and at other points in the procedure. Infants who are insecure-resistant (Group C, about 15% of infants) show combinations of resistance, anger, and distress.

Attachment theory raises some of the most important questions of the decade, and indeed of earlier decades: How important are early experiences for psychosocial growth? How flexible are social attachment behaviors once learned? Under what conditions is there stability over childhood and into adulthood in social behavior and social relationships, and under what conditions is there instability? In the 1990s, many studies (Cox, Owen, Henderson, & Margand, 1992; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD] Early Child Care Research Network, 1997) and a meta-analysis (DeWolff & VanIjzendoorn, 1997) have demonstrated that, as predicted by theory, maternal sensitivity is associated with infant attachment security. Seifer, Schiller, Sameroff, Resnick, and Riordan (1996), however, who failed to find the association, cautioned that other factors besides maternal sensitivity need to be studied in the explanation of variability in attachment security of 1-year-olds. This sentiment is echoed by DeWolff and Vanljzendoorn, whose meta-analysis of 66 studies finds a moderately strong positive association between maternal sensitivity and attachment security. The authors noted that other influences seem to interact with sensitivity to determine attachment security, and they suggested that further study needs to consider the complex interactions between context and maternal sensitivity in unstable and stressful settings. Much attachment research has been conducted with advantaged middle-class American samples, providing limited understanding of the way in which cultural or socioeconomic context moderates the relationship between maternal sensitivity and security of attachment. Cowan (1997) argued further that the attachment focus on maternal behavior ignores the family system.

In the last decade, the study of attachment security has expanded to the infant-father relationship and the examination of attachment relationships at later ages. Major questions have been whether paternal sensitivity to the infant during the first year predicts infant-father security of attachment and whether maternal sensitivity is related to attachment assessed at ages beyond infancy. Some studies find that paternal sensitivity is associated with infant-father attachment (Cox et al., 1992) and a meta-analysis of the association between paternal sensitivity and infant-father attachment found a significant, but weak, relation (De Wolff & Van Ijzendoorn, 1997). Belsky (1996) considered the broader social context of the infant-father relationship and found that fathers of secure infants were more extraverted and agreeable, tended to have more positive marriages, and experienced more positive spillover between work and family than fathers of insecure infants.

Waters and Deane (1985) developed an alternative measure to the Strange Situation that can be used at 12 months up to 5 years (Vaughn & Waters, 1990). Based on Q-sort methodology, the Attachment Q-Set (AQS) requires observers to describe mother-child interaction in a naturalistic setting, or parents sort cards to describe their child's behavior. Several studies report significant correlations between AQS security scores and attachment classifications from the Strange Situation (Seifer et al., 1996; Vaughn & Waters, 1990), while others do not. Other studies (Seifer et al.; Teti et al., 1991) have reported that Q-sort security scores were related positively to observed sensitive mothering.

In the last decade, new procedures have been developed to evaluate the security of attachment in older children, generally 4.5 to 6 years, using observations of children in extended separation and reunion procedures similar to the Strange Situation (Crittendon, 1992). These procedures, although interesting and promising, have not been as thoroughly validated as the Strange Situation (Thompson, 1998), but some studies show an expected association between attachment classifications and maternal style (e.g., Stevenson-Hinde & Shouldice, 1995).

Additional issues involve the stability of attachment over time and the extent to which children who show early secure attachment also show competent social adaptation at later ages. Thompson (1998) summarized the work on stability of the Strange Situation over the last 2 decades and found wide variety from study to study in terms of the proportions of infants who maintained stable classifications. Generally, secure patterns show far more

stability over time than insecure patterns, and higher income samples show more stability than lower income samples. Investigating the stability of the AQS and separation-reunion paradigms with older children, Youngblade, Park, and Belsky (1993) observed moderate stability between parent-sorted AQS scores at 12 and 36 months. Wartner, Grossman, Fremmer-Bombik, and Suess (1994) reported that more than 80% of children seen in the Strange Situation as infants obtained the same classification from a 6-year-old separation-reunion procedure. Howes and Hamilton (1992) indicated that attachments between preschoolers and their teachers were stable over a 6- to 12-month period using an observer-sorted AQS.

It seems that both stability and change may be lawful, but important questions remain concerning the processes associated with stability and change. Teti, Wolfe Sakin, Kucera, and Corns (1996) suggested that certain events may lead to the reorganization of the mother-child relationship. Using the AQS, they found that security scores of firstborns dropped after the birth of a new sibling, and the most dramatic drop was for those children whose mothers had high scores on depression, anxiety, or hostility.

Other work during the last decade has focused on understanding disorders of attachment (Zeanah, Mammen, & Lieberman, 1993). This work has been stimulated by research on the social behavior of infants reared in conditions not regarded as species-typical, such as infants raised in institutions or in foster care or children subjected to maltreatment. Disorders of attachment then represent more profound and pervasive disturbances in the child's feeling of safety and security than the patterns of attachment discussed earlier. Zeanah et al. proposed five categories of attachment disorders, but there is little research on the utility, etiology, or long-term implications of these diagnostic categories. A disoriented, disorganized pattern of attachment has been identified as occurring with greater frequency among children adopted later in infancy (Chisholm, 1998), maltreated children and children living in extreme poverty (Carlson, 1998), and families in which parents show some form of psychopathology (Teti, Gelfand, Messinget, & Russell, 1995). Thus, increased rates of disordered attachment seem to occur in situations that deviate too far from what are species-typical rearing conditions for young children, and disordered attachment seems to be associated with higher rates of maladjusted behavior in children. Nonetheless, these studies suggest wide variability in outcomes for children who seemingly suffer similarly deprived environments, suggesting that we need much more information concerning the conditions under which these disorders occur and the variety of pathways to outcomes for children.

Parenting in Middle and Late Childhood and Child Adjustment

A large literature before the 1990s established the benefits to children of authoritative parenting-generally characterized by high levels of parental warmth, support, and control--in contrast to permissive or authoritarian parenting. Research conducted in the last decade provides further evidence linking authoritative parenting with positive child adjustment and relating power-assertive techniques to child maladjustment. Recent studies have sought to further specify the dimensions and correlates of authoritative and authoritarian parenting and to assess the generalizability of these constructs beyond White middle-class families in the United States. Dekovic and Gerris (1992), for example, found that, among Dutch parents, higher and more complex parental reasoning predicted home observations of authoritative childrearing, indirect positive control, warmth, acceptance, and support. Studying families in the West Indies, Rohner, Kean, and Cournoyer (1991) found that physical punishment by parents substantially impairs children's psychological adjustment, particularly when the punishment is frequent and severe, in large part because it contributes to children's feelings of being rejected by parents.

Important questions have emerged, however, regarding the desirability and effectiveness of authoritative practices in lower income and minority families. Partly because of chronic financial stress and negative life events, poor mothers in both White and Black families are more likely than their affluent counterparts to value obedience, to issue commands, to be restrictive, and to use physical punishment in disciplining their children (Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif, 1995; McLoyd, 1990). The occurrence and severity of child abuse are also related to low family income, parental unemployment or underemployment, and economic decline (Belsky, 1993; National Research Council, 1993). Although empirical evidence is limited, poor African American parents, and particularly fathers, appear to be less involved and less emotionally expressive than socioeconomically

advantaged parents, but the former feel an important parental responsibility to keep their children "in line" and out of trouble (McLoyd). Similarly, in a study of three racial groups, Leadbeater and Bishop (1994) found that African American mothers were the most protective, strict, and vigilant, followed by Puerto Rican mothers and AngloAmerican mothers.

Clearly, there is substantial variability among low income Black parents in their parenting styles and their attitudes toward physical punishment. Bluestone and Tamis-LeMonda (1999) found that working- and middle-class African American mothers of children aged 5 to 12 were most likely to use reasoning and other child-centered approaches to discipline and least likely to use physical punishment. Kelley, Power, and Wimbush (1992) reported that Black parents who use power-assertive techniques are as likely as other parents to reason with their children and to consider the children's perspectives. Interestingly, Avenevoli, Sessa, and Steinberg (1999) found that among African American adolescents, authoritative parenting is related to higher levels of delinquent behavior. Chao (1994) argued that the concepts authoritative and authoritarian parenting are ethnocentric and that Chinese and other Asian childrearing patterns are better described as emphasizing indigenous Confucian training ideologies that blend parental love, concern, involvement, and physical closeness with firm control, governance, and teaching of the child. Among European American parents, "training" was perceived negatively and associated with strict, rigid, militaristic practices (Chao). Collectively, these findings underscore the sociohistorical and cultural specificity of childrearing values and behaviors and suggest that much greater attention be devoted to the conceptualization, interpretation, and empirical investigation of parenting practices among marginalized and minority families in diverse contexts.

A substantial body of research conducted before the 1990s, predominantly involving White families, demonstrated the importance of socioeconomic resources for effective parenting. Extending Elder's (1974; Elder, Nguyen, & Caspi, 1985) model, McLoyd's (1990) influential review documented systematic evidence that poverty and near-poor living conditions in African American families bear a direct association with children's impaired socioemotional functioning and that much of the adverse effect of chronic economic hardship on children is due to its impact on parents' psychological distress and their behavior toward the child. Persistent poverty and financial distress erode parents' ability to provide consistent involvement, support, nurturance, empathy, and discipline; increase the occurrence of coercive and punitive parental behavior; and weaken marital and other interparental bonds (McLoyd). Social networks lessen the strains on parents by providing valuable interpersonal and economic resources, such as collaborative child care, informational support, and role modeling.

Subsequent research has replicated these patterns among a variety of socioeconomically disadvantaged groups. Among depressed or psychologically distressed African American mothers who currently or formerly received welfare, employment reduced the frequency of spanking (Jackson, Gyamfi, Brooks-Gunn, & Blake, 1998). Other conditions shown to inhibit parents' ability to provide consistent warmth and support and effective discipline include family economic hardship (Bank, Forgatch, Patterson, & Fetrow, 1993; Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1994; McLoyd, 1990), neighborhood poverty (Klebanov, Brooks-Gunn, & Duncan, 1994), marital conflict (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992), and maternal antisocial qualities (Bank et al., 1993; Belsky, 1993). A number of studies involving both White and racial and ethnic minority families suggest that the effects on child and adolescent adjustment of a range of risk factors and stressful conditions, including economic hardship, interparental conflict, and maternal depression, are mediated by consistent parental support and discipline (Dumka, Roosa, & Jackson, 1997; Luster & McAdoo, 1991; McLoyd).

Although researchers have made significant progress in including minority participants in their samples, few studies have explicitly focused on the conceptualization and explanation of parentchild relationships in racial and ethnic minority families (Graham, 1992). Reflecting the pervasive oppression and marginalization of minority families in American society, prominent issues in the scholarship on racial and ethnic minority and immigrant families are (a) the extendedness of such families and their adaptive strategies, (b) biculturalism and acculturation, (c) heterogeneity in family form and process within and across racial and ethnic groups, and (d) the challenges and burdens associated with economic deprivation.

Extended families are highly valued among ethnic minorities. They typically extend across households, geographical boundaries, and multiple generations; they involve relationships among affinal, consanguine, and fictive or chosen kin; and, relative to nuclear families, they are characterized by higher levels of interaction and closeness (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan,& Buriel, 1990; Mott, 1990). Yet there is tremendous diversity both across and within ethnic groups in the form and function of extended family networks. Mexican American extended families become stronger and more elaborate as they become acculturated, actively displaying their familism through ongoing social exchanges, frequent communication and visiting, and family celebrations (Baca Zinn & Wells, 2000). Dumka et al. (1997) found that, among low-income Mexican immigrant and Mexican American families, more highly acculturated mothers were more consistent in disciplining. The authors suggested that more acculturated parents may adopt more restrictive parenting practices to protect their children from the threats of high-risk urban environments.

Among extended as well as nuclear African American families, egalitarian family dynamics are more common than they are in White families. Owing to both cultural factors (e.g., shared values) and historical experiences (notably slavery), role sharing, flexibility, reciprocity, and complementarity are widely observed in African American families, providing adaptive responses to more rigid, gender-based, and patriarchal patterns (Billingsley, 1992; Collins, 1990; Taylor, 2000). Consistent with earlier studies, Tolson and Wilson (1990) characterize the environment of African American families as being higher than average on achievement orientation, moral-religious emphasis, organization, and control, but exhibiting lower levels of expressiveness, conflict, independence, intellectual-cultural orientation, and activerecreational orientation. Although substantially more research is necessary to understand variation in family processes across African American families, there is also evidence of meaningful strains in multigenerational households and diminished parenting effectiveness when economic hardship intersects with early mothering and early grandmothering (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Zamsky, 1994).

Childrearing Values and Practices

Mainstream American culture in the late 20th century placed a strong value on individualism, competition, independence, self-development and selfsatisfaction, and parents' childrearing behaviors generally emphasized the development of children's autonomy (Alwin, 1990). There is consistent evidence, however, that ethnic minority children, in comparison with White children, are more likely to be socialized to value cooperation, sharing, reciprocity, obligation, and interdependence (Harrison et al., 1990). African American parents, in comparison with White parents, tend to be more egalitarian in childrearing, emphasizing traits such as assertiveness, independence, and self-confidence in both boys and girls, although contradictory messages within the family and the larger society become more prevalent and powerful as Black children move into adolescence and young adulthood (Taylor, 2000). From the time they are born, Mexican American children are socialized in a context of "thick" social relations characterized by frequent interaction across extensive kinship networks, and they are taught to value cooperation, family unity, and solidarity over competition and individual achievement (Baca Zinn & Wells, 2000). Asian American children are socialized to value and comply with familial authority to the point of relinquishing personal desires and interests (Ishii-Kuntz, 2000). Chinese and Chinese American children are taught Confucian traditions that emphasize harmonious relations with others, loyalty and respect to elders, and subordination in hierarchical relationships, particularly in father-son, husband-wife, and older brother-younger brother relationships (Chao, 1994). Asian American parents typically exercise control over their children's friendship choices, clothing, and extracurricular activities and retain this control through their children's high school years (Ishii-Kuntz). Japanese American children tend to be closely supervised by their parents, who simultaneously teach them two different but overlapping sets of values--one rooted in Japanese culture and the other facilitating assimilation into mainstream American culture (Ishii-Kuntz).

Within and across ethnic and racial minority groups, there is considerable variation in parents' strategies for transmitting norms, values, and beliefs and in trying to inculcate racial pride and self-respect in their children. Boykin and Toms (1985) discussed a "triple quandry" confronting African American parents who must choose between (a) socializing their children into the mainstream (largely sacrificing their cultural heritage), (b)

stressing their oppressed minority status, or (c) teaching culturally valued behaviors in the black community. Consistent with theories emphasizing the importance of parental socialization and interpersonal relationships in Black families (McAdoo, 1978; Stack, 1974), feelings of closeness to other Blacks and positive evaluations of Blacks as a group are associated with socialization messages promoting racial awareness, integration, and assertiveness (Demo & Hughes, 1990).

Adding to ethnic and racial diversity, family relationships and children's socialization vary by children's gender, although the nature of the differences is a matter of debate and interpretation. Recent reviews (Fagot, 1995; Lytton & Romney, 1991) corroborate earlier conclusions (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) that there are few areas in which parents' behavior toward boys and girls can be differentiated. Parents interact similarly with sons and daughters on such dimensions as amount of time spent together, parental warmth, supervision, disciplining techniques, parental reasoning and communication styles, and encouragement of achievement and independence (Lytton & Romney; Peterson, Bodman, Bush, & Madden-Derdich, 2000). However, parents tend to encourage gender-typed clothing, activities, toys, and environments (Crouter, Manke, & McHale, 1995; Fagot). Parents' rules and expectations for household labor also vary by children's gender. Across diverse single-parent, two-parent, single-earner, and dual-earner family structures, daughters, especially teenage daughters, perform significantly more housework than sons (Demo & Acock, 1993; Goldscheider & Waite, 1991), and the tasks they are assigned tend to correspond with stereotypical definitions of gender-appropriate responsibilities (Benin & Edwards, 1990; Blair, 1992). As a consequence, fundamentally gendered aspects of family relationships are transmitted from one generation to the next.

Family Relationships Over Time

More longitudinal studies and more studies guided by life span and life course frameworks were positive developments in the 1990s. Clarifying earlier findings based largely on cross-sectional studies of married couples with children living in the United States, Stattin and Klackenberg (1992) employed a prospective design to chart the trajectories of marital, mother-child, and father-child relations in Swedish families over the years from the child's birth to age 18. They found that, at any one point in time, the vast majority of parents describe their marriages, as well as mother-child and father-child relationships, in favorable terms. Following families over time, however, it is clear that disharmonious marital and parent-child relationships increase gradually but steadily as children get older, peaking at ages 10 to 12. Discord in father-child relations exhibits a similar pattern, but the downward trajectory continues in an almost linear form throughout adolescence. Marked stabilities were observed over time, with parent-child discord when the child was aged 4 to 6 significantly predicting discord when the child was 13 to 15.

Research indicates substantial stability in parenting behaviors, values, and interparental conflict from middle childhood through adolescence (Acock & Demo, 1999; McNally, Eisenberg, & Harris, 1991). Among both mothers and fathers, parenting satisfaction is highly stable over time, is strongly associated with perceived marital quality, and is predictive of increases in marital quality (Rogers & White, 1998). Fathers report significantly lower satisfaction with parenting than do mothers, and parents of stepchildren report much less satisfaction than those with only biological children (Rogers & White, 1998).

Marital Relationships and Child Development

Before the 1990s, a considerable body of research documented the association between marital relationships, particularly marital conflict, and emotional and behavioral problems in children. These studies defined marital discord in a variety of ways, from overall self-report of marital quality to overt .conflict, with most studies simply documenting an association between such constructs and child adjustment, without proposing mechanisms that may account for the association. Recent research has established critical differences between "constructive" and "destructive" conflict, raising some important questions: What kinds of conflict are associated with what child outcome, under what conditions and through what processes does conflict undermine child development, and when is conflict more benign or even facilitative of healthy development in families (Cox & B rooks-Gunn, 1999) ?

In the 1990s, a "second generation" of research advanced this literature by beginning to clarify when and why this linkage exists between marital conflict and children's behavior problems (Fincham, 1994). This research suggests that overt marital conflict is more strongly related to disrupted parenting and child adjustment than is overall marital satisfaction or quality (Coiro & Emery, 1998). Katz and Gottman (1993) found that mutually hostile marital patterns when children were 5 years old predicted externalizing behavior problems when children were age 8, whereas husbands' angry and withdrawn behavior predicted later internalizing behavior problems. Marital satisfaction and child temperament were unrelated to behavior problem outcomes, however.

Studies suggest that for children who are old enough to understand and interpret the conflict, intense verbal conflicts that are child-related and poorly resolved have more direct negative effects than do conflicts that do not concern children and are resolved constructively and nonaggressively (Fincham, Grych, & Osborne, 1994). Jouriles, Norwood, McDonald, Vincent, and Mahoney (1996) empirically link physical marital violence and other forms of marital aggression with externalizing and internalizing problems in children. Long-term effects are suggested by McNeal and Amato (1998), who find that parents' reports of marital violence when children were in adolescence or preadolescence predicted offsprings' later reports of negative outcomes in early adulthood. When conflicts are resolved or dealt with constructively, however, they are not necessarily negative for children (Easterbrooks, Cummings, & Emde, 1994). In fact, constructive conflict can help children learn appropriate ways to handle interpersonal difficulties (Cummings & Wilson, 1999).

Much of the theorizing about the processes through which marital conflict affects children assumes that one route may be through the effect of conflict on parenting. Again, interparental conflict may not always result in more negative parenting. Because conflict can be a way to work out differences that may cause resentment, anger, or withdrawal (Gottman, 1994), parents who engage in constructive conflict may actually be better able to parent than those who withdraw from conflict (Cox, Paley, Payne, et al., 1999). There is evidence, however, that hostile, angry affect experienced in the marital relationship can "spill over" into the parent-child relationship (Coiro & Emery, 1998; Erel & Burman, 1995). Parents who are angry, exhausted, or demoralized from marital conflict may simply be less emotionally available or attuned to their children and experience more tension in their interactions with their children (Margolin, Christensen, & John, 1996). The anger and withdrawal engendered by marital conflict may lead parents to be actively rejecting, hostile, or physically aggressive with their children, and this may be particularly true for fathers (Crockenberg & Covey, 1991). Clearly, marital conflict can lead to parent-child conflict, and vice-versa, but parentchild conflict appears to be a more proximate and stronger influence on children's adjustment than interparental conflict, particularly in adolescence (Acock & Demo, 1999).

Recent research has also considered the importance of children's individual appraisals of the marital conflict and their own coping strategies (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Grych & Fincham, 1990). These models emphasize that children do not just react to the conflict itself, but to its meaning for them. Cummings and his colleagues (Cummings & Wilson, 1999; Davies & Cummings) have advanced the "emotional security hypothesis," suggesting that the emotional impact of marital conflict on the child varies depending on the appraisal the child makes of the implications of the conflict for herself and for her family. Longterm exposure to unresolved and highly negative conflict seems to sensitize children to the occurrence of conflict, and their appraisals of the conflict tend to be more negative. Variations in children's coping strategies also have been investigated. O'Brien, Margolin, and John (1995) found that children who used coping strategies that involved them in their parents' conflict had higher levels of maladjustment, whereas children who distanced themselves from parents' conflict or who had coping strategies that activated social support had lower levels of maladjustment.

Siblings and Sibling Relations

Relations among siblings traditionally have received little attention in the family and developmental literatures, but in the 1990s, there was an increase in sibling research. This research has focused on a wide array of issues including sibling conflict, the impact on a child of a sibling's birth, differential treatment of siblings in families, age changes in sibling relationships, and the effects of sibling relationships on development.

Research suggests striking differences in sibling relationships across families (Dunn, 1993). A number of factors related to family functioning appear to influence the quality of sibling relationships and, as family systems theories posit, parentchild dyads influence sibling dyads. Equal treatment by fathers, family harmony during family discussions, and parents' perceptions of family cohesiveness are related to levels of sibling conflict (Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand, 1992). Volling and Belsky (1992) also implicated father's treatment in finding that facilitative and affectionate fathering was associated with more prosocial sibling interaction. In that study, higher sibling conflict and aggression were related to higher levels of conflict between the mother and the two children at 6 years, intrusive and overcontrolling mothering at 3 years, and insecure infant-mother attachments. Brody, Stoneman, and McCoy (1994) documented that interparental conflict, children's difficult temperament, and differential negativity in parent-sibling relationships also predict low sibling relationship quality.

Other studies indicate that differential parental treatment of siblings is related to the quality of sibling relationships. McHale et al. (1995) find that differential treatment in which one parent reports being closer to one child and the other parent reports being equally close to the children is associated with poorer marital relationships. Erel et al. (1998) found that an older sibling's negative behavior in sibling interaction is linked to negative dimensions of marital and mother-child relationships; this link seems to be mediated by the mother's power assertion with the older sibling.

Burmester and Furman (1990) noted that information about age changes in sibling relations is scarce. From their study of children in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12, they suggested that relationships become progressively more egalitarian and less intense with age. Other research suggests that the assumption that warmer, closer, and less conflicted sibling relationships are better may not be warranted. Raffaelli (1992) considered sibling conflict among preadolescents and early adolescents and suggested that sibling conflict may provide a context in which age appropriate issues of individuation and differentiation are played out. Positive effects of conflict may only occur when the conflict is moderate, however. Stormshak, Bellanti, and Bierman (1996) identified 3 types of sibling dyads among aggressive first and second grade children: conflictual (high conflict, low warmth), involved (moderate conflict and warmth), and supportive (low conflict, high warmth). Children in involved sibling relationships showed better adjustment than did children in conflictual relationships.

Siblings may be important for development on many levels. Perner, Ruffman, and Leekam (1994) found that 3- to 4-year-old children from larger families, when compared with children from smaller families, were better able to predict a story character's mistaken, false-belief-based action. They suggested that sibling interaction provides a rich database for building a "theory of mind." Youngblade and Dunn (1995) supported this contention, finding that child-sibling pretense play was related to the child's performance on an affective understanding task. The authors interpreted their findings as supporting the importance of children's interactions with their siblings for the development of understanding of "other minds.

In some respects, however, the birth of a sibling may place some children at a disadvantage, at least initially. Baydar, Greek, and Brooks-Gunn (1997) found that the younger child's birth results in fewer positive interactions between the mother and the older child, especially if the birth interval is short and if the mother adopts a controlling style. These changes result in lower verbal ability in the older child and, about 2.5 years after the birth of the sibling, negative effects are seen on achievement and socioemotional adjustment. Although some positive effects attributable to the birth of a sibling are evident in peer relations, Baydar, Hyle, and Brooks-Gunn (1997) reported temporary increases in behavior problems of older children, lower reading recognition scores, and lower self-perceptions, especially among the children of economically disadvantaged families.

The presence of siblings changes the context of an older child's development in the family. It appears that some aspects of those changes are beneficial for development, whereas other aspects may be deleterious, especially in families with few financial resources to divide among children.

FAMILY STRUCTURE, HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION, AND CHILDREN'S LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Research in the 1990s demonstrated substantial diversity and fluidity in children's living arrangements, and numerous studies examined children's adjustment in different family structures. Investigators typically define family structure as number of parents present in the household, parents' marital status, and more recently, parents' sexual orientation. Most commonly, children living in "intact" families with two biological parents in their first marriage are considered the benchmark and compared to children living in some other arrangement. This body of research has yielded a great deal of valuable information. But a major limitation of this work has been a tendency to combine all single-parent families into one category (and all two-parent families in a second category), obscuring variability in resources and outcomes within family types. A related limitation is an overreliance on comparisons of mean ratings across groups. Furthermore, most of the research linking family structure and child well-being continues to rely on one-point-in-time classifications of parents' marital status as the central explanatory variable. Such measures typically ignore the sequencing, duration, and quality of involvement of parents, stepparents, grandparents, and other kin, thus minimizing the influence of a variety of parental and nonparental family members on child development.

Although much work in this area is atheoretical, the implicit reasoning in most studies involves socialization and family stress arguments. From a socialization viewpoint, it is typically assumed that children are advantaged if they live with two heterosexual parents in their first marriage because (a) the parents provide both same-sex and other-sex role models, and (b) the children should benefit from the social, emotional, and economic resources of two parents. A family stress explanation posits that changes in living arrangements (e.g., parents exiting the household and changes in neighborhood, school, and peer groups) are disruptive and stressful for children and weaken parent-child bonds.

Researchers have been energetic in studying family structure and attempting to identify family environments that facilitate or inhibit children's development and well-being. The consistent pattern, however, is that family structure per se tells us little about children's adjustment. Amato and Keith's (1991) meta-analysis of 92 (mostly North American) studies found a small advantage favoring children in two-parent families over their peers in divorced single-parent families, with a median effect size of .14 of a standard deviation. A comprehensive review of studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand (Rodgers & Pryor, 1998) documents similarly small differences across children living in various family structures. Examining data from the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households, Acock and Demo (1994) found few statistically significant differences in mothers' reports of children's well-being across first-married, divorced, remarried, and continuously single-parent families. Where differences existed, children in first married families tended to fare slightly better on measures of socioemotional adjustment and academic performance. Similarly, Hawkins and Eggebeen (1991) found no differences in the verbal and intellectual functioning of children in intact families and that of children living in five types of maritally disrupted family structures.

One reason that family structure alone does not explain much is that even careful classifications of parents' marital status do not tell us much about family relationships, histories, and trajectories. Illustrating the limitations of classifications made at any single point in time, Wojtkiewicz (1992) found that most children who are classified as living in a "nonintact" family at age 15 have lived in a variety of single-parent and two-parent households for intervals during their childhood and adolescence. Aquilino's (1996) analysis of a nationally representative sample of children born to unmarried mothers demonstrates that the household configurations and life trajectories of such children are characterized by tremendous diversity. Only one in five lived exclusively in singleparent households throughout their childhood, and nearly half had other relatives who lived with them for periods during their childhood. Importantly, variations in kin involvement and in the timing and sequencing of changes in children's living arrangements had profound consequences for educational attainment, home-leaving, and employment outcomes. For example, children experiencing multiple transitions, experiencing them later in childhood, and those living in stepfamilies fired poorly in comparison with those living their entire childhood in stable single-parent families or moving into two-parent families with biological or adoptive parents. Other studies show benefits of stable single-parent living arrangements for children's

socioemotional adjustment and global wellbeing (Acock & Demo, 1994), and deleterious effects of multiple transitions (Capaldi & Patterson, 1991; Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995), supporting a life-stress perspective.

A second limitation of relying on family structure as a predictor of children's adjustment is that there are many similarities in the dynamics of parent-child relationships across diverse household configurations. Parents have similar roles and expectations for their children across first married, divorced, continuously single, and remarried family structures, with most parents strongly endorsing culturally valued guidelines for their children's behavior (Acock & Demo, 1994). Mothers in all of these family types reported having enjoyable times with their children almost daily, and there were no differences in the frequency of their reading or homework activities with children or in their own or their husbands' difficulties with children. Studies also document consistency in maternal control and high levels of maternal support across family types (Acock & Demo; Simons & Associates, 1996). There are, however, some small but noteworthy differences, with mothers in first married families reporting somewhat more pleasant and less stressful relationships with their children, less yelling at and spanking of their children, and higher levels of involvement in various school-related, religious, and community activities (Acock & Demo). Relative to differences in parent-child interaction by family type, there are much larger differences by parents' gender, with many fathers minimally involved in their children's lives, regardless of the father's residential status (Parke & Stems, 1993). In postdivorce families, although there is wide variation in fathers' involvement, contact tends to be infrequent, diminishes over time (King, 1994; Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992), and decreases further as a stepfather enters the children's lives (Seltzer, 1991).

Important differences across and within racial groups represent further diversity in children's experience of family structure. African American children are much more likely than White children to live in and benefit from extended family arrangements. Recent analyses indicate that one in five African American families are extended, compared with 1 in 10 White families (Glick, 1997). Clearly, Black families are not a homogeneous group, and variations in their structural configuration are associated with variations in family climate. For example, Tolson and Wilson (1990) reported higher levels of organization and lower levels of moral-religious emphasis in families headed by one adult caregiver than in those headed by two adults. Charting the evolution of African American children's living arrangements from first grade through adolescence, Hunter and Ensminger (1992) observed substantial diversity and fluidity in family structure over time, with both parents and nonparents moving in and out of the household and in and out of central childrearing roles. Studying the Woodlawn community in Chicago, they distinguished 86 different combinations of adults living in households with first graders, and 35 different extended family configurations, illustrating the limitations of conventional classifications of children's family living arrangements and leading the researchers to conclude that the term "female-headed household" is inadequate for understanding the realities and complexities of urban African American families. Indeed, parenting, in the true sense of the word, is being done by more than one adult family member in most of these households, often involving members of multiple generations and most often including close, supportive relations between children, their mothers, and coresidential grandmothers.

Although aggregate analyses show that fathers tend to be less involved in children's lives than are mothers, a common assumption is that fatherabsent residential arrangements translate into infrequent paternal contact with children. This assumption reflects an ideology that privileges two-parent families and pathologizes single-parent families. Careful demographic analyses reveal that many nonresidential fathers maintain routine interaction with their children, however (King & Heard, 1999; Mott, 1990), and Maccoby and Mnookin's (1992) repeated observations of families over several years illustrate that many children move from one household to another to live with a different parent. Fathers also report more frequent paternal contact than mothers report (Braver, 1998; Manning & Smock, 1999).

There are some encouraging developments in this line of research. Over the past decade, greater attention has been devoted to identifying family formation, dissolution, and reformation trajectories and how they relate to children's adjustment. Second, research conducted in the 1990s on children's development in diverse family structures has paid much more careful attention to the dynamics of parent-child and interparental relationships.

Few researchers, however, have employed more sophisticated person-process-context-time models to the study of family structure and child well-being.

Children's Experience of Parental Divorce

Evaluating the results of 180 studies on children's adjustment to divorce, Amato (1993) concluded that empirical evidence strongly suggests that interparental conflict is a risk factor in the life course of children. Accumulating evidence indicates that many children in first-married families endure high levels of interparental conflict and marital unhappiness throughout their childhood, with prolonged exposure directly and indirectly impairing their well-being. Some informative longitudinal and prospective studies of divorce and parent-child relationships illustrate that problems in parent-child relationships are elevated as early as 8 to 12 years before parental divorce and that poor marital relationships and high marital discord account for many of the problems in postdivorce parent-child relationships, including reduced parent-child affection (Amato & Booth, 1996). Kline, Johnston, and Tschann (1991) found that clinical ratings of marital conflict at the time of filing for divorce were directly related to children's problematic emotional and behavioral adjustment 2 years later; marital conflict also had indirect effects through poor mother-child relationships and heightened postdivorce hostilities between parents. In addition to interparental conflict, there are strong indications that other factors that predate divorce, such as ineffective and inconsistent parenting, parent-child conflict, and child adjustment problems (Cherlin et al., 1991) contribute to problems experienced by children of divorce.

Following divorce, there is considerable variability both in children's residential arrangements and in the nature of coparenting relationships (Maccoby & Mnookin, 1992). In the second year postseparation, one fourth of divorced couples have a cooperative coparenting relationship, one third are conflicted, nearly one third are disengaged, and a smaller, fourth group is "mixed" in that they are somewhat cooperative but also conflicted. Residential arrangements are unrelated to coparenting conflict, but preseparation interparental hostility is a strong predictor of subsequent coparenting conflict.

Divorce appears to weaken fathers', but not mothers' affection for their children (Amato & Booth, 1996) and inhibits paternal contact. Seltzer's (1991) analysis of the National Survey of Families and Households, and King's (1994) analysis of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth yield remarkably similar estimates of paternal involvement among fathers living apart from their children: more than one fourth of such children did not see their fathers at all in the previous year, only 27% saw their fathers at least weekly, and less than one third of children who see their nonresident fathers had the opportunity to spend extended periods of time with them. More than half of fathers exerted no influence in childreadng decisions, and just under half paid any child support in the previous year (Seltzer, 1991). Fathers who are more involved with their children postdivorce tend to be those who were closer to their children prior to divorce, live near their children, and have joint custody (Arditti & Keith, 1993).

Undesirable life events that commonly occur to children of divorce have been linked with children's postdivorce adjustment in both cross-sectional (Sandier, Wolchik, Braver, & Fogas, 1991) and prospective longitudinal studies (Sandier, Tein, & West, 1994). Studying a sample of 7- to 13-year-olds whose parents had divorced within the past 2 years, the researchers found that children use a variety of coping strategies, including active coping (problem solving and cognitive restructuring), avoidance, support seeking, and distraction, and that using these techniques reduces children's postdivorce internalizing and conduct problems.

Children in Stepfamilies

Throughout the 1990s, a small group of researchers continued to trace the influence of stepfamily structure on children's adjustment. These studies consistently report that children in stepfamilies, in comparison with those in first-married families, are more likely to experience a broad range of adjustment problems. Comparisons of mean adjustment levels across groups typically yield modest differences, including poorer academic achievement, lower socioemotional adjustment, and more behavioral problems (Acock & Demo, 1994; Capaldi & Patterson, 1991; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan, 2000). Considering the demographic growth of children in stepfamilies, it is encouraging that the adjustment problems they experience appear to diminish with time since

transition and that more recent studies, and studies using stronger methodologies, suggest smaller disadvantages (Amato & Keith, 1991; Hetherington & Stanley-Hagan). Thus, children may be most vulnerable during the family dissolution and reformation periods, but most children are quite resilient, adapting to their new living arrangements and exhibiting normal ranges of adjustment within 2 or 3 years of stepfamily formation (Emery & Forehand, 1994). Children's resilience is likely to be related to the stabilization in stepfamily relationships that occurs within 2 years following stepfamily formation, by which time there are few differences in parent-child relationships and family functioning between stepfamilies and first-marriage families (Ganong & Coleman, 1994; Hetherington & Clingempeel, 1992). African American stepfamilies have received little empirical attention, perhaps partly because African Americans are substantially less likely than Whites to remarry (Staples & Johnson, 1993). One study using a national sample indicates that both child and adult adjustment in African American stepfather families is similar to that in African American first married families and White stepfather families (Fine, McKenry, Donnelly, & Voydanoff, 1992).

CONCLUSIONS

Research in the past decade substantiates and clarifies earlier evidence indicating the importance of family relationships and resources for children's development and well-being. Although investigators devoted far greater attention to children and their adjustment than to the experience of parenthood and parents' adjustment, researchers in the 1990s were much more diligent than earlier scholars in studying the influence of parents' emotional well-being in shaping children's development. Across families of diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds, it is clear that parents' emotional well-being, positive interparental relations, and consistent parental support, sensitivity, and discipline facilitate children's well-being, often to the point of compensating for economic hardship, family disruption, and other adverse life circumstances. Within and across racial groups, however, there are notable differences in parenting practices and values, urging caution in generalizing about the desirability and effectiveness of particular parenting strategies.

We know more about the early experience of parenthood than about later stages or trajectories. For many adults, the initial transition to parenthood is disruptive, but among those who are married, marital negativity appears to subside during the second year. Evidence also documents variability across groups of parents during the first few years, but longer term trajectories spanning the first decade of children's lives remain unexplored. Similarly, in the 1990s, studies of attachment relationships extended later into childhood, providing glimpses of parents' attachments with their children as late as ages 5 and 6. It will be important to replicate and extend these studies to chart the course of mother-child and father-child relationship trajectories through childhood, to observe multiple children and their relationships within a family system, and to examine how these behaviors correlate with children's and parents' adjustment. Other studies suggest considerable stability in parent-child relations, parenting behaviors, and parenting values through late childhood and adolescence.

Family researchers and child developmentalists need to move beyond a preoccupation with conventional classifications of family structure to explore the rich variety of family members, kin support networks, and neighborhood resources impacting on children's development. Living with grandparents or other relatives as supplemental parents provides socialization benefits through enhanced attention to and supervision of children and is associated with better transitions to school, work habits, and educational attainment (Aquilino, 1996; Entwisle & Alexander, 2000). Grandmothers' coresidence may be far more beneficial when mothers are very young (i.e., early or middle adolescents), however, and thus burdened by developmental challenges (Chase-Lansdale et al., 1994). There is also evidence that having grandparents and other relatives serve as custodial, adoptive, or substitute parents diminishes the chances of high school completion and accelerates home-leaving (Aquilino, 1996). Beyond the household, characteristics of the neighborhood context influence the quality of family relationships. Even after controlling for family poverty and other family conditions, neighborhood poverty is associated with less maternal warmth and responsiveness and worse home environments for children (Klebanov et al., 1994). Klebanov and colleagues speculated that living in a socially isolated and impoverished neighborhood depletes mothers of their personal warmth, but much further study is required. Future research should examine family structure in combination with family interaction and over time, examining the effects of

timing (child's age at parenting transition), time since transition (Amato, 1993), and the patterning of transitions involving nonparent family members (Hunter & Ensminger, 1992). We also need to redouble our efforts to understand childrearing in its ethnic and cultural context and investigate the likely consequences for parents and children of the diminishing availability of kin among African Americans, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans (Dilworth-Anderson, 1999; Rochelle, 1997).

Some important issues are emerging in the study of families with children. One relatively new line of inquiry is the development and adjustment of children living in families headed by lesbian, gay, or bisexual parents. Several careful reviews (Patterson, 1992; Savin-Williams & Esterberg, 2000) and a recent meta-analysis (Allen & Burrell, 1996) demonstrate no significant differences between children reared by heterosexual parents and those reared by lesbian or gay parents regarding gender identity, self-concept, intelligence, personality characteristics, emotional adjustment, behavioral problems, or peer relations. A persistent limitation of these studies, however, is that most rely on small samples of White, middle-class, previously married lesbians and their children. As a result, we cannot be confident concerning the generalizability of many of the findings, particularly with regard to children who have multiple risk factors (e.g., poor, ethnic or racial minority children who have experienced parental divorce) or children of other rarely studied household configurations (e.g., children living with gay fathers). Many scholars question the usefulness of a deficit-comparison approach and the accompanying focus on documenting differences in children's adjustment as a function of parents' sexual orientation, however (Savin-Williams & Esterberg; Stacey, 1996).

Something researchers have yet to determine, and that in our opinion offers a very important and timely area for study, is how multiple dimensions of stratification or family diversity intersect with one another. For example, as indicated earlier, there is evidence that children reared in lesbian and gay households fare very well and in some cases better than children in two-heterosexual-parent households. An important question is how children fare when parents' sexual minority status, parental divorce, and other "social addresses" interact with risk factors such as economic hardship, preexisting behavior problems, or highcrime neighborhoods. We suggest that little will be gained from further examination of family structure differences without sufficient attention to important variation within such classifications, including critical information on family processes and the larger contexts within which children live.

A number of important methodological and theoretical challenges confront researchers studying families with young children in the new millennium. Through the 1990s, the conventional practice was to focus on a specific dyad within the family, typically the mother and a target child, ignoring the presence of and dynamics among, other family members. As a result, we know little about how families function as a whole or as a system (e.g., alliances). Further, the conceptualization and analytic strategy underlying most studies involves an assumption that parental behaviors bear a linear relationship with child outcomes, such that more parental support, control, supervision, time spent with child, and other desirable behaviors, are posited to be associated with higher child well-being. This is not always the case, however Kurdek and Fine (1994), for example, show that although family acceptance and control are positively related to children's adjustment, a curvilinear relationship better explains the association between control and adjustment. Interpretations of biological parents' influence on children's behavior also tend to be exaggerated and need to be much more sensitive to genotype-environment correlations or to the tendency for similarities in parental and child behavior to be due in part to their sharing both heredity and environment (Plomin, 1994). Finally, much of what we know about families continues to be based on mothers' perceptions of family relations. What does the family look like from the father's perspective, the daughter's perspective, and the son's perspective? How do men experience the transition to parenthood, early attachment, and subsequent involvement with their daughters and sons? We will need to accept and confront these challenges if we are to understand the rich diversity of families with young children.

NOTE

We thank Leigh Ann Carr, Roger Goodman, Sheryl Scrimsher, and Robbyn Wood for their bibliographic assistance.

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