

Remembered Parental Rejection and Postpartum Declines in Marital Satisfaction: Moderated Dyadic Links

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Abstract:

Utilizing a sample of 80 married couples, the current study employed a dyadic approach to examine links between remembered parental rejection during childhood and change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood. Partner remembered parental rejection, parenting efficacy, and infant temperamental reactivity (frustration and fear reactivity) were examined as moderator variables. Spouses' own remembered parental rejection was linked with declines in marital satisfaction among spouses whose partners recalled more rejection from their parents in childhood, among spouses who felt less efficacious in the parenting role, and among spouses who reported high infant frustration. Partner remembered parental rejection was linked with declines in marital satisfaction among spouses who reported that they were less efficacious in the parenting role. Results support the perspective that family-of-origin experiences are best understood in conjunction with other domains of family life. Applied implications are discussed.

Keywords: dyadic data analysis | marital satisfaction | parenting efficacy | remembered parental rejection | transition to parenthood

Article:

In the process of integrating a firstborn child into the family system, spouses often experience heightened stress in the marital relationship, which contributes to declines in marital satisfaction (Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, Rothman, & Bradbury, 2008). Spouses' family-of-origin experiences have long been recognized as important sources of influence in the marital relationship, particularly when spouses are faced with stressors in other domains of family life (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Yet few studies have examined spouses' childhood relationships with primary caregivers as predictors of decline in marital satisfaction during spouses' own transition to parenthood. We considered the extent to which

husbands' and wives' remembered parental rejection predicted change in their own and their partner's marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood. Partner-remembered parental rejection, parenting efficacy, and infant temperamental reactivity (fear and frustration) were examined as moderator variables.

Remembered parental rejection is conceptualized as spouses' memories of parental behavior, specifically memories of parental disapproval, emotional unavailability, and indifference in childhood (Rohner, 2004). Indicators include husbands' and wives' recollections of whether their own parents were emotionally cold to them, whether they felt as if their parents did not want them, and whether their parents ignored them. Remembered parental rejection is conceptually distinct from adult attachment security, which is determined by the manner in which adults make meaning of their childhood experiences, rather than actual parental behavior (Hesse, 2008). The experience of rejection in childhood may contribute to an insecure attachment style, although not all adults who recall rejection from their parents in childhood are less secure in their attachment representations of parental figures (Crowell, Treboux, & Waters, 1999). Therefore, remembered parental rejection and attachment security are distinct constructs.

Previous research examining links between remembered parental rejection and change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood has primarily considered these associations within the individual (e.g., Belsky & Isabella, 1985). It has, however, long been recognized that spouses are interdependent, and each spouse's experiences have the capacity to influence the other (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). The current study makes an important contribution to the family literature by examining change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood utilizing a *dyadic approach*. We considered both actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection simultaneously. Actor effects are intra-individual processes that occur when one aspect of the individual influences his or her own relationship functioning (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Spouses' own reports of remembered parental rejection were expected to contribute to spouses' own reports of change in marital satisfaction. Partner effects are inter-individual processes that occur when one aspect of an individual influences his or her partner's relationship functioning. Partner-remembered parental rejection was expected to contribute to spouses' own reports of change in marital satisfaction

Remembered Parental Rejection and Marital Satisfaction

The five-domain model of marital and family adaptation across the transition to parenthood (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988) draws attention to the importance of considering family-of-origin influences on marital satisfaction, both independently and in conjunction with other factors during this time. The five domains posited to influence family and marital functioning are (a) characteristics of the spousal relationship and established patterns of spousal communication; (b) individual characteristics of each spouse, including feelings of self-efficacy in the parenting role; (c) characteristics of each spouse's relationship with the infant as well as the role of infant temperament; (d) stressors and supports from external sources of

influence, such as careers; and (e) family-of-origin characteristics, including each spouse's relationship with his or her own parents during childhood. We considered three of the five domains in the current study, including family-of-origin characteristics (remembered parental rejection), individual spousal characteristics (parenting efficacy), and infant temperament (frustration and fear reactivity).

P. A. Cowan and Cowan (1988), C. P. Cowan and Cowan (2000), and others (Rohner, 2004; Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer, 2007) posited that childhood experiences with parents shape expectations and beliefs about close relationships that individuals carry forward into adulthood. Individuals who experienced parental rejection are thought to believe that they are unworthy of love and satisfaction in their close relationships because of impaired self-esteem and are thought to interpret the actions of others in a negative light to confirm a negative worldview that others are untrustworthy (Rohner, 2004; Rohner et al., 2007). Indeed, retrospective reports of rejection from parents in childhood are negatively correlated with spouses' self-reports of marital quality (Truant, Herscovitch, & Lohrenz, 1987), and observed nurturant-involved parenting in adolescence, an antithesis of rejection, is associated with more positive evaluations of romantic relationships in young adulthood (Donnellan, Larsen-Rife, & Conger, 2005). Although family-of-origin experiences are thought to exert influence on marital relations throughout adulthood (Bowen, 1978; Framo, 1992), the experience of parental rejection in childhood is thought to become more salient across the transition to parenthood as spouses become parents themselves (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Thus, both actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection may contribute to change marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood.

Evidence supporting the potential for an actor effect of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood is mixed. Women who recall more rejection from their parents during childhood experience greater declines in marital satisfaction following the birth of a new baby than women who recalled less rejection from their parents (Belsky & Isabella, 1985); however, this association is not significant among men (Belsky & Isabella, 1985) and has not been consistently replicated across samples (e.g., Wallace & Gotlib, 1990). Evidence supporting a partner effect of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood is limited; no previous studies have specifically examined partner effects of remembered parental rejection across this transition. Among adolescent primiparous couples, partners' prenatal appraisals of the parent-child relationship (a composite score for appraisals of relationships with mothers and father combined) exerted an effect on the adolescent's own appraisals of the romantic relationship (Florsheim et al., 2003). Men's positive appraisals of their relationships with their parents were positively associated with women's positive prenatal appraisals of the romantic relationship. Similarly, women's positive appraisals of their relationships with their parents were positively associated with positive change in men's appraisals of the romantic relationship from the prenatal period to 13 months postpartum. These effects, although focused on positive appraisals of the parent-child

relationship, offer support for the possibility that remembered parental rejection exerts a partner effect on marital satisfaction among married adult couples. Collectively, this prior research underscores the need for additional research to clarify seemingly contradictory findings in the literature regarding the actor effect and additional research to specifically examine the partner effect of remembered parental rejection.

It is possible that remembered parental rejection exerts actor and partner effects under the conditions of other factors during this time. Indeed, the five-factor model posits that family-of-origin experiences impact marital satisfaction in conjunction with the other four domains, including the two other domains of interest in the present study, feelings of efficacy in the parenting role and infant temperament (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Partner-remembered parental rejection, low parenting efficacy, and high infant temperamental reactivity (frustration and fear reactivity) may exacerbate actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood. Therefore, we consider the interconnection of each of the three domains (family-of-origin characteristics, individual spousal characteristics, and infant temperament) in our examination of remembered parental rejection.

First, the interconnection of each individual spouse's family-of-origin characteristics should be considered (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000). Actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection may interact to predict change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood. Couples in which both spouses recall high levels of rejection from their parents in childhood may experience greater declines in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood than when only one spouse recalls high levels of parental rejection (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000). The collective experience of rejection in childhood may be particularly detrimental for marital satisfaction as spouses undergo the transition to parenthood. No previous research has considered the interaction of actor- and partner-remembered parental rejection as a predictor of change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood.

Second, the interconnection of family-of-origin characteristics and individual spousal characteristics should be considered (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Parenting efficacy, which is defined as an individual's confidence in him- or herself as a parent (Teti & Gelfand, 1991) may moderate links between remembered parental rejection and change in marital satisfaction (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000). Among spouses who are less efficacious in the parenting role, memories of rejection from parents in childhood may become more salient to current experiences as they rely on conceptualizations of themselves in domains outside of parenting as a coping strategy. Spouses who are less efficacious in the parenting role may also be more likely to draw upon their own childhood experiences as they strive to develop parenting practices that bolster their feelings of efficacy. Although no previous studies have tested the potential moderating effect of parenting efficacy in the association of remembered parental rejection and change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood, spouses with low parenting efficacy have more difficulty coping with postpartum

stressors, including low social support and a difficult infant temperament (Cutrona & Troutman, 1986; Leerkes & Crockenberg, 2002).

Third, the interconnection of family-of-origin characteristics and infant temperament should be considered (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Infant temperamental reactivity, specifically, infant frustration and fear reactivity, may moderate links between remembered parental rejection and change in marital satisfaction. Infants who are easily frustrated and reactive to fearful contexts may require more care than infants low on frustration and fear reactivity, and couples whose infants require more care may experience greater changes in family routines and shared couple time. This may contribute to sharper declines in marital satisfaction as partners attempt to maintain homeostasis in the face of these changes (Papousek & von Hofacker, 1998). Consequently, high infant frustration and fear reactivity may exacerbate actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction. Although no previous research has examined infant temperament as a moderator of actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction, remembered paternal rejection was associated with postpartum depressive symptoms only among women whose infants were high on infant temperamental reactivity (Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2003).

The Current Study

In sum, we hypothesized that spouses who recalled more rejection from their parents during childhood would experience greater declines in marital satisfaction than spouses who recalled less rejection and that spouses whose partners recalled more rejection would experience greater declines in marital satisfaction than spouses whose partners recalled less rejection. Furthermore, consistent with the five-domain model (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988), we hypothesized that effects of remembered parental rejection would be best understood in conjunction with other domains of family life. Partner-remembered parental rejection was hypothesized to exacerbate the actor effect of spouses' own remembered rejection on their marital satisfaction. Low parenting efficacy and high infant temperamental reactivity (frustration and fear reactivity) were expected to exacerbate actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection. Given that depressive symptoms are associated with both remembered parental rejection and marital satisfaction in the postpartum period (Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2003; O'Hara & Swain, 1996), we treated spouses' depressive symptoms as a covariate in all analyses.

To our knowledge the current study is the first to examine actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection utilizing a dyadic approach while also considering the potential moderating effects of other domains of family life. Understanding potential moderating effects of partner-remembered parental rejection, parenting efficacy, and infant temperamental reactivity (frustration and fear reactivity) has the potential to inform clinical practice with spouses undergoing the transition to parenthood. For example, bolstering parenting efficacy may buffer spouses against declines in marital satisfaction in the context of remembered parental rejection.

Finally, results of the current study have the potential to contribute to a greater understanding of the mechanisms that underlie the success of preventative interventions for spouses undergoing the transition to parenthood (e.g., Schultz, Cowan, & Cowan, 2006).

Method

Sample

Data were drawn from a study of the antecedents of maternal sensitivity. One hundred thirty-four primiparous women and 95 of their romantic partners participated in the larger study. Wives whose husbands participated ($n = 95$) were more likely to be White, $\chi^2(1) = 13.37, p < .01$, reported more marital satisfaction in the prenatal period, $t(32.77) = -2.94, p < .01$, reported fewer prenatal depressive symptoms, $t(132) = 2.00, p < .05$, were older, $t(54.48) = -4.05, p < .01$, and had more years of education, $t(53.80) = -4.61, p < .01$, and higher family incomes, $t(132) = -2.79, p < .01$, than wives whose husbands did not participate ($n = 39$). Importantly, however, there were no differences between wives whose husbands did and did not participate based on wives' marital satisfaction in the postpartum period, $t(132) = -1.80, ns$, or wives' remembered rejection from parents, $t(132) = 0.48, ns$, in childhood. Of the 95 couples who participated, 8 had children from a previous relationship, and 7 were cohabiting or dating. Thus, the sample for the current study was composed of 80 married couples in which both partners were currently undergoing the transition to parenthood. Wives ranged in age from 22 to 40 ($M = 29.61$) and were predominantly White (88%) or African American (9%), and the majority had at least a Bachelor's degree (81%). Husbands ranged in age from 22 to 43 ($M = 30.79$) and were predominantly White (88%) or African American (9%), and the majority also had at least a Bachelor's degree (71%). Family income ranged from \$20,000 to \$190,000 (median = \$75,000). Sixty-two percent of infants were male.

Procedure

Procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. First-time expectant couples were recruited from childbirth education classes in the surrounding county. Research assistants visited the childbirth classes, gave a short presentation about the study, and collected contact information from interested parties. Wives were screened over the telephone to determine if they met the inclusion criteria of primiparity. Eligible couples were mailed two questionnaire packets to be completed separately by each spouse, which included consent forms, a demographic questionnaire, and questionnaires to assess remembered parental rejection, satisfaction in the current romantic relationship, and depressive symptoms. Wives returned their own and their partner's sealed questionnaire packet when they visited the family observation laboratory for an interview related to the larger study. At 6 months postpartum, participants completed a second questionnaire packet that included measures of parenting efficacy, infant temperament, and marital satisfaction.

Measurement

Remembered parental rejection

The Parental Bonding Inventory-Care Subscale (PBI-Care; Parker, Tupling, & Brown, 1979) was completed by both spouses prenatally to assess recollections of rejection from mothers and fathers in childhood. Participants were asked to think back to the first 16 years of their lives and to indicate how well 12 items (e.g., “made me feel as if I wasn't wanted”) described their mother and father on a 4-point scale from 1 (*very unlike*) to 4 (*very like*). Adult children's reports on the PBI-Care subscale correlate at .44 with parents' reports of their own behavior (Parker, 1981), the subscale has a test-retest reliability of .76 across 3 weeks, and reports on the PBI-Care subscale are stable between 3 days and 30 months postpartum (Gotlib, Mount, Cordy, & Whiffen, 1988). Items on the mother and father scales were averaged after reverse scoring appropriate items to compute scores for remembered maternal rejection ($\alpha = .94$ for wives, .90 for husbands) and remembered paternal rejection ($\alpha = .95$ for wives, .94 for husbands). Given the perspective that relationships with both mothers and fathers in childhood creates a socialization context for offspring development (Jessor, 1998) and that there were no specific hypotheses regarding remembered rejection from mothers versus fathers, scores for remembered maternal and paternal rejection were averaged to compute scores for each partner for remembered rejection from parents during childhood. This allowed us to maintain an appropriate subject-to-predictor ratio. Correlations between remembered maternal and paternal rejection were significant ($r = .36$ and .62 for wives and husbands, respectively, both $p < .01$).

Depressive symptoms

The Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977) was completed by both partners in the prenatal period to assess depressive symptoms. Participants were asked to indicate how often they experienced 20 moods and feelings (e.g., “I felt depressed”) during the past week on a 4-point scale from 0 (*never*) to 3 (*always*). Scores on the CES-D converge with the Beck Depression Inventory (Spitzer, Endicott, & Robins, 1978). Items on this scale were summed, after reverse scoring appropriate items, to compute scores for prenatal depressive symptoms ($\alpha = .85$ for wives, .82 for husbands). Although the continuous measure was used for data analyses, 15 wives (19%) and 11 husbands (14%) had depression scores that were above the clinical cutoff (\geq a score of 16).

Parenting efficacy

A revised version of the Parenting Efficacy Scale (Teti & Gelfand, 1991) was completed by both partners at 6 months postpartum to assess parenting efficacy. Participants were asked to rate how good they felt they were at nine child-care activities (e.g., feeding an infant) and one global evaluation of parenting, on a 4-point scale from 1 (*not good at all*) to 4 (*very good*). The original version of this scale has demonstrated concurrent validity with the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale, $r = .75$ (Teti & Gelfand, 1991). Items were averaged to compute scores for parenting efficacy ($\alpha = .80$ for wives, .73 for husbands).

Infant temperamental reactivity

The Infant Behavior Questionnaire-Revised (IBQ-R; Gartstein & Rothbart, 2003) was completed by both partners at 6 months postpartum to assess perceptions of infant reactivity in frustrating and fearful contexts. Participants were asked to rate the frequency of 191 infant behaviors (e.g., “cried”) on a 7-point scale from 1 (*never*) to 7 (*always*). Interrater reliability between mother and father reports on the IBQ-R and convergent validity with observed indices of temperament have been demonstrated (Gartstein & Rothbart, 2003; Parade & Leerkes, 2008). Items from the distress to limitations (16 items) and fear (16 items) subscales was averaged to compute scores for wives' ($\alpha = .76$ and $.87$) and husbands' ($\alpha = .71$ and $.88$) perceptions of infant frustration and fear reactivity, respectively. Given the perspective that perceptions of reality may be more salient than reality itself (Blumer, 1986), spouses' reports were maintained as separate indicators rather than combined to form a composite.

Marital satisfaction

The Aspects of Married Life Questionnaire (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986) was completed by each partner in the prenatal period and at 6 months postpartum to assess satisfaction with various aspects of marriage. Participants were asked to indicate their level of satisfaction in eight domains of their relationship (e.g., “Marital Communication: How satisfied are you with how well the two of you talk over important and unimportant issues?”) on a 7-point scale from 1 (*extremely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*extremely satisfied*). Items on these scales were averaged to compute scores for marital satisfaction in the prenatal period ($\alpha = .83$ for wives, $.72$ for husbands) and at 6 months postpartum ($\alpha = .86$ for wives, $.90$ for husbands).

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Missing data were imputed using the NORM (Schafer, 1999) software program. Predictor variables, dependent variables, and demographics were included in the imputation model to maintain associations between the variables of interest. Less than 5% of data was missing overall; however, 6 wives and 11 husbands did not complete measures of marital satisfaction and parenting efficacy at the postpartum assessment. Little's Missing Completely at Random test (Little, 1988) demonstrated that the data were missing completely at random, $\chi^2(324) = 347.88, ns$; therefore, we used multiple imputation to replace missing values. Descriptive statistics and correlations between the variables of interest were calculated and are displayed in Table 1. Means for study variables were consistent with previous research examining the transition to parenthood (Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2003; Lawrence et al., 2008); spouses were generally more satisfied than dissatisfied in their marriages and generally reported low levels of rejection from their parents in childhood. Paired *t* tests were used to compare wives' and husbands' scores on the same measures. There were no differences between husbands and wives on their reports of remembered parental rejection, prenatal depressive symptoms, prenatal

marital satisfaction, and postnatal marital satisfaction, $t(79) = 0.16$, $t(79) = 1.38$, $t(79) = 1.08$, and $t(79) = -0.00$, respectively, all *ns*. In contrast, mothers reported greater parenting efficacy than did fathers, $t(79) = 4.83$, $p < .01$ (means are displayed in Table 1). Age, education, infant gender, and prenatal depressive symptoms were examined as possible covariates. Neither husbands' nor wives' age or education nor infant gender were associated with remembered parental rejection or with postpartum marital satisfaction. In contrast and consistent with previous research, prenatal depressive symptoms were associated with both marital satisfaction at 6 month postpartum and remembered parental rejection, offering further support for its treatment as a covariate.

[Table 1 Omitted]

Remembered Parental Rejection and Marital Satisfaction

To examine actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction, we used the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) and multilevel modeling in SPSS (see Kenny et al., 2006, for a detailed explanation of dyadic data analyses, including the APIM). The APIM is an appropriate method to use for the current study because it allows for adjustment of dependencies that are associated with dyadic data. In all APIM models, spouses were nested within dyads; therefore, the dyad was the unit of analysis. Moderation effects were tested using the APIM method as well; variables were mean-centered prior to the construction of interaction terms and prior to testing the APIM model. Both actor and partner effects were tested simultaneously. When using the APIM in SPSS, the Satterthwaite (1946) method is used to compute the degrees of freedom (Kenny et al., 2006); degrees of freedom for intercepts and slopes vary across models and range between the number of couples ($n = 80$) and the number of spouses ($n = 160$) in each analysis. For example, degrees of freedom for the actor effect of remembered parental rejection was 137 in the main effects model. To capture change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood, we controlled for each spouse's prenatal marital satisfaction in each APIM model predicting his or her own marital satisfaction at 6 months postpartum. We also controlled for each spouse's prenatal depressive symptoms predicting his or her own marital satisfaction at 6 months. Estimates provided from the APIM results are unstandardized regression coefficients. Power to detect two-way interactions in the APIM models exceeded .80 for medium and large effect sizes assuming an alpha level of .05. Significant interaction terms were probed using procedures outlined by Aiken and West (1991). To probe interactions with partner-remembered parental rejection, simple slopes were calculated at low (a score of 2 on the 1 – 4 scale) and high (a score of 4 on the 1 – 4 scale) levels of partners' remembered parental rejection. To probe interactions with parenting efficacy, simple slopes were calculated at low (a score of 2 on the 1 – 4 scale) and high (a score of 4 on the 1 – 4 scale) levels of parenting efficacy. To probe interactions with infant temperament, simple slopes were calculated at low (a score of 2 on the 1 – 7 scale) and high (a score of 6 on the 1 – 7 scale) levels of infant frustration and low (a score of 2 on the 1 – 7 scale) and high (a score of 6 on the 1 – 7 scale) levels of infant fear reactivity.

Although husbands and wives are conceptually distinguishable based upon gender, it was possible that the spouses in the current study were not empirically distinguishable (Kenny et al., 2006). Therefore, we tested the distinguishability of the data using procedures outlined by Kashy and Donnellan (2012). A model in which the means, variances, and covariances were set to be equal between husbands and wives (indistinguishable dyads) was compared to a model in which the parameters were free to vary (distinguishable dyads) and a chi-square difference test was used to determine whether there was a significant difference in model fit. The chi-square difference test was not significant, $\chi^2(4) = 2.18, ns$; therefore, the APIM for indistinguishable dyads was used to maximize power to detect significant effects (Kenny et al., 2006). Because the dyads were indistinguishable, the intraclass correlation was used to examine nonindependence or the proportion of variance in marital satisfaction that was due to the dyad (Kenny et al., 2006).

In the first model, we tested the actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction as main effects. Controlling for spouses' prenatal marital satisfaction and depressive symptoms and as illustrated in Model 1 in Table 2, neither actor- nor partner-remembered parental rejection predicted change in marital satisfaction.

[Table 2 Omitted]

In the second model we tested partner-remembered parental rejection as a moderator of the actor effect of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction. As illustrated in Model 2 of Table 2, there was a significant interaction between spouses' own remembered parental rejection and their partners' remembered parental rejection. As illustrated in Panel 1 of Figure 1, the actor effect of remembered parental rejection predicted declines in marital satisfaction among spouses whose partners recalled high levels of parental rejection in childhood ($B = -.41, SE = .16, p < .05$), but not among spouses whose partners recalled low levels of parental rejection ($B = .07, SE = .15, ns$).

[Figure 1 Omitted]

In the third model, we tested parenting efficacy as a moderator of the actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection. As illustrated in Model 3 of Table 2, the interaction between partner-remembered parental rejection and actor reports of parenting efficacy was significant, and the interaction between actor-remembered parental rejection and actor reports of parenting efficacy approached significance ($p = .06$). Given difficulties detecting interaction effects in nonexperimental designs (Whisman & McClelland, 2005), both interaction terms were interpreted. As illustrated in Panel 2 of Figure 1, the actor effect of remembered parental rejection predicted declines in marital satisfaction among spouses who reported low levels of parenting efficacy ($B = -.52, SE = .27, p < .05$), but not among spouses who reported high levels of parenting efficacy ($B = .09, SE = .13, ns$). Likewise, as illustrated in Panel 3 of Figure 1, the partner effect of remembered parental rejection predicted declines in marital satisfaction among

spouses who reported low levels of parenting efficacy ($B = -.60, SE = .26, p < .05$), but not among spouses who reported high levels of parenting efficacy ($B = .22, SE = .13, ns$).

In the fourth and fifth models, two indicators of infant temperamental reactivity (frustration and fear) were tested as moderators of the actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction. As illustrated in Model 4 of Table 2, the interaction between actor-remembered parental rejection and actor perceptions of infant frustration was significant. As illustrated in Panel 4 of Figure 1, the actor effect of remembered parental rejection predicted declines in marital satisfaction among spouses who perceived high infant frustration ($B = -.34, SE = .15, p < .05$), but not among spouses who perceived low infant frustration ($B = .14, SE = .09, ns$). In contrast, the interaction between partner-remembered parental rejection and partner perceptions of infant frustration was nonsignificant, and, as illustrated in Model 5 of Table 2, the interaction of actor-remembered parental rejection and actor perceptions of infant fear reactivity and the interaction of partner-remembered parental rejection and actor perceptions of infant fear reactivity were both nonsignificant.

In sum, neither actor- nor partner-remembered parental rejection predicted change in marital satisfaction as main effects. Rather, remembered parental rejection predicted change in marital satisfaction in conjunction with risk factors in other domains of family life. There was a significant actor effect of remembered parental rejection only when partner-remembered parental rejection was high and spouses' own perceptions of infant frustration were high. There was a significant partner effect of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction only when spouses' own parenting efficacy was low. Infant fear reactivity did not moderate links.

Discussion

Spouses tend to experience declines in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood (Lawrence et al., 2008); however, there is substantial variability in spouses' trajectories of change in marital satisfaction during this time (Belsky & Kelley, 1994; Lawrence et al., 2008). Drawing upon the five-domain model of marital and family adaptation across the transition to parenthood (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988), the current study examined the possibility that experiences in the family of origin exert an influence on marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood while utilizing a dyadic approach. The experience of parental rejection in childhood is thought to become more salient as spouses become parents themselves (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988); therefore, both actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection were considered as predictors of change in marital satisfaction. Partner-remembered rejection, low parenting efficacy, and high infant temperamental reactivity (frustration and fear reactivity) were tested as moderators of the actor effect. Low parenting efficacy and high infant temperamental reactivity (frustration and fear reactivity) were tested as moderators of the partner effect. Consistent with the five-domain model of marital and family adaptation across the transition to parenthood (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988), results demonstrated that actor- and partner-

remembered parental rejection predicted change in marital satisfaction, but only in the presence high partner-remembered parental rejection, low parenting efficacy, and high infant frustration.

Consistent with theoretical assertions that spouses' collective family-of-origin experiences have the potential to influence marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988), partner-remembered parental rejection moderated the actor effect of remembered parental rejection. The current study was the first to demonstrate this moderation effect for remembered parental rejection as well as to examine this interaction as a predictor of change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood. In the current study, spouses experienced sharper declines in marital satisfaction when both they and their partner recalled more childhood rejection, suggesting that the transition to parenthood poses unique marital challenges for couples in which both spouses' experienced parental rejection.

Supporting the perspective that family-of-origin influences are better understood in conjunction with individual spousal characteristics (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988), parenting efficacy emerged as a moderator of the actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood. Among spouses who were less efficacious in the parenting role, memories of parental rejection in childhood were associated with sharper declines in marital satisfaction, whereas remembered parental rejection was unrelated to change in marital satisfaction for spouses who reported high parenting efficacy. Spouses who were less efficacious in the parenting role may have drawn upon their experiences in childhood as they strived to develop their own parenting practices, contributing to the actor effect of remembered parental rejection. A similar pattern of results was found for the partner effect of remembered parental rejection. Among spouses who reported low parenting efficacy, their partners' remembered parental rejection was linked with declines in their own marital satisfaction. No link was found for partners' remembered rejection and spouses' marital satisfaction when spouses reported high levels of parenting efficacy. Individuals who experience parental rejection are postulated to be less emotionally responsive in their interpersonal relationships (Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner et al., 2007). Perhaps spouses who felt less efficacious in the parenting role felt as if they were unable to rely on their partners who recalled more childhood rejection for support as they dealt with low parenting efficacy, contributing to the moderated partner effect. Taken together, these findings suggest that marital satisfaction is protected from the potential negative effects of their own and their spouses' experiences of rejection in childhood when spouses feel competent and effective in their role as new parents.

In examination of the interconnection of family-of-origin characteristics and infant temperament (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988), we found that infant frustration, but not fear reactivity, moderated the actor effect of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction. Among highly frustrated infants, caretaking routines commonly elicit a distress response when infants are placed in limiting situations (e.g., immobility during a diaper change or while being secured in an infant seat). Couples who are faced with a highly frustrated

infant may feel unsuccessful at managing caregiving tasks (Leerkes & Burney, 2007) and may be more likely to draw upon childhood experiences as they develop their own parenting practices (P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988). These family-of-origin memories, in turn, are more likely to be linked to spouses' marital satisfaction in the context of parenting a highly frustrated infant. In contrast, infants who are highly fearful exhibit distress in situations where parents may be more likely to expect a distress response (e.g., confrontation of a novel stimulus or loud noise); therefore, infant fear reactivity may be less likely to be associated with the link between spouses' remembered parental rejection and change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood.

That remembered parental rejection was linked with change in marital satisfaction as an actor and partner effect only in the presence of high partner-remembered parental rejection, low parenting efficacy, and high infant frustration supports the perspective that family-of-origin experiences impact marital satisfaction in conjunction with risk factors in other domains of family life (C. P. Cowan & Cowan, 2000; P. A. Cowan & Cowan, 1988). Furthermore, the pattern of moderation rather than main effects clarifies seemingly contradictory findings in prior literature regarding the actor effect of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction in the postpartum period (e.g., Belsky & Isabella, 1985; Wallace & Gotlib, 1990).

The present study examined actor and partner effects of remembered parental rejection on change in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood. Although the study was characterized by a variety of strengths, including a longitudinal dyadic research design, there were a number of limitations that highlight the need for future research in this area. First, the current sample of marital partners was predominantly White and highly educated, limiting generalizability of the findings to more diverse populations. Future research should reexamine links between family-of-origin experiences and marital satisfaction across this transition utilizing a more diverse sample of first-time parents. Second, the use of adult children's retrospective reports of childhood experiences is a methodological limitation, given that retrospective reports of parenting behavior are generally regarded as being biased by current emotional dispositions and states of mind regarding childhood experiences (Brewin, Andrews, & Gotlib, 1993). In an effort to address this limitation, we controlled for spouses' depressive symptoms in the APIM models. From an applied perspective, however, that self-reports of family-of-origin experiences predicted marital satisfaction across the transition despite this measurement error is critically important, given the perspective that meaning making and perceptions of reality may have more important implications for personal well-being than does reality itself (Blumer, 1986). Third, future research should examine the mechanisms by which remembered parental rejection exerts a partner effect on change in marital satisfaction. Individuals who experience parental rejection are postulated to have difficulty managing anger and aggression and are thought to be less emotionally responsive in their interpersonal relationships (Rohner & Britner, 2002; Rohner et al., 2007). Future research should examine this potential behavioral mechanism. Finally, that marital satisfaction was evaluated at two points in time limited the ability to examine links

between remembered parental rejection and change in marital satisfaction into later parenthood as well as to examine curvilinear patterns of change in marital satisfaction across the transition. Previous research has revealed that there is a “honeymoon period” immediately following childbirth during which the excitement of the new baby overshadows stressors and strains in the marriage (Wallace & Gotlib, 1990). An additional assessment of marital satisfaction in the weeks immediately following childbirth would allow for the examination of this possibility.

Despite limitations, the current study has important applied implications. Results suggest that remembered parental rejection undermines marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood, but only in the context of specific individual and family characteristics. First, clinicians should be aware that the transition to parenthood poses unique challenges for couples in which both spouses recall rejection from their parents in childhood. The collective experience of childhood rejection appears to contribute to sharper declines in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood whereas only one spouse's experience of childhood rejection does not contribute to declines in marital satisfaction. Second, results suggest that bolstering parenting efficacy would help to buffer against declines in marital satisfaction among spouses who experienced childhood rejection. The relevance of parenting efficacy for the development of maternal behavior in the postpartum period has been demonstrated (Leerkes & Crockenberg, 2002; Teti & Gelfand, 1991), and intervention and prevention programs to promote infant health and development have demonstrated effectiveness enhancing parenting efficacy (e.g., Healthy Families America; Caldera et al., 2007). Results of the current study suggest that efforts to bolster parenting efficacy would also be advantageous for the marital dyad and that these these interventions have the potential to protect new parents' marriages from effects of remembered parental rejection (i.e., a factor that may be less malleable) in the context of low parenting efficacy. Third, clinicians should be aware that parents who recall childhood rejection and also have an infant who is easily frustrated may experience sharper declines in marital satisfaction than parents who recall childhood rejection but whose infant is less easily frustrated. These spouses may benefit from establishing strategies to cope with the needs of an infant who is easily frustrated. Finally, results help to elucidate the processes that underlie success of preventative interventions for spouses undergoing the transition to parenthood (e.g., Schultz et al., 2006) by demonstrating the joint influence of various domains of family life for marital adaptation across the transition.

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