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The longitudinal association between couples' coparental disagreement and coparental support and wives' and husbands' individual divorce proneness was examined in a sample of 416 families. Both dimensions of coparenting were completed when the couples' children were in sixth grade (wave 1, W1). Divorce proneness, conceptualized as the consideration or taking of steps towards divorce (Moore & Buehler, 2011; Whitton, Stanly, Markman, & Johnson, 2013), was measured both when children were in sixth and ninth grade (wave 4, W4). The present study also examined how W1 spousal negative marital communication moderated the association between W1 coparental disagreement and support with changes in wives' and husbands' W4 divorce proneness.

Controlling for initial levels of divorce proneness and couples' education, the present study examined three hypotheses. The first hypothesis postulated that W1 coparental disagreement and W1 coparental support each uniquely predicted changes in both wives' and husbands' perceptions of divorce proneness three years later (at wave 4, W4). Hypothesis 1 also predicted that W1 coparental disagreement was associated with increases in both wives' and husbands' W4 divorce proneness, whereas W1 coparental support was associated with decreases in both wives' and husbands' W4 divorce proneness.

The second hypothesis postulated that W1 husbands' negative marital communication moderated the associations between both W1 coparental disagreement and W1 coparental support with changes in W4 wives' divorce proneness. Hypothesis 2

also predicted that W1 husbands' negative marital communication exacerbated the unique association between W1 coparental disagreement and increases in W4 wives' divorce proneness, whereas W1 husbands' negative marital communication mitigated the unique association between W1 coparental support and decreases in W4 wives' divorce proneness.

The third hypothesis postulated that W1 wives' negative marital communication moderated the associations between both W1 coparental disagreement and W1 coparental support with changes in W4 husbands' divorce proneness. Hypothesis 3 also predicted that W1 wives' negative marital communication exacerbated the unique association between W1 coparental disagreement and increases in W4 husbands' divorce proneness, whereas W1 wives' negative marital communication mitigated the unique association between W1 coparental support and decreases in W4 husbands' divorce proneness.

The study found evidence of a main effect for W1 coparental disagreement on increases in husbands' W4 divorce proneness. W1 wives' negative marital communication was also found to significantly moderate the association between coparental disagreement and increases in W4 husbands' divorce proneness.

PREDICTING DIVORCE IN PARENTS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
COPARENTING AND DIVORCE PRONENESS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
Theoretical Foundations.....	5
Purpose Statement.....	13
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15
Coparenting.....	16
Divorce Proneness.....	27
Negative Marital Communication.....	28
Control Variables	31
Literature Limitations	31
Statement of Hypotheses.....	32
III. METHODOLOGY	35
Sample Characteristics	36
Procedure.....	37
Measures	38
Analytic Procedures	40
IV. RESULTS	45
Hypotheses	45
V. DISCUSSION	49
Interpretation of Results.....	49
Study Strengths.....	55
Study Limitations.....	58
Conclusion	59

REFERENCES	61
APPENDIX A. MEASURE ITEMS.....	82
APPENDIX B. TABLES AND FIGURES.....	85

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations between Variables.....	85
Table 2. Hypothesis 1 Latent Variables and Factor Loadings	86
Table 3. Correlations between Hypothesis 1 Exogenous Variables	88
Table 4. Hypothesis 2 Regression Estimates	89
Table 5. Correlations between Hypothesis 2 Exogenous Variables	91
Table 6. Conditional Effect of CD1 on WDP4 at Values of HNMC1.....	92
Table 7. Hypothesis 3 Regression Estimates	93
Table 8. Correlations between Hypothesis 3 Exogenous Variables	95
Table 9. Conditional Effect of CD1 on HDP4 at Values of WNMC1.....	96

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model for Examining the Moderating Effects of Spouses' Negative Marital Communication on the Positive Association between W1 Coparental Disagreement and W4 Wives' Husbands' and Divorce Proneness and on the Negative Association between W1 Coparental Support and W4 Wives' and Husbands' Divorce Proneness.....	14
Figure 2. Direct Coparental Disagreement and Support Model Predicting Changes in Wives' and Husbands' Divorce Proneness.....	87
Figure 3. Moderated Coparental Disagreement and Support Model Predicting Changes in Wives' Divorce Proneness	90
Figure 4. Moderated Coparental Disagreement and Support Model Predicting Changes in Husbands' Divorce Proneness	94
Figure 5. Wives' Negative Marital Communication as a Moderator of the Associations between Coparental Disagreement and Husbands' Divorce Proneness	97

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Scholars have devoted a great deal of attention to how dimensions of coparenting, or the degree to which parents work together in raising their children, affects various elements of their children's well-being and behavior (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Couple's greater differences in beliefs or practices related to parenting with their partners, or *coparental disagreement*, have been linked with more negative outcomes for children (Feinberg, 2003; Petren, Ferraro, Davis, & Pasley, 2017). Couples experiencing higher levels of feeling assisted and encouraged in their parenting roles by their partners, or *coparental support*, on the other hand, has been linked with more positive outcomes for children (Van Egeren, 2004).

Less empirical research has been devoted to understanding how the two dimensions of coparenting affect marital outcomes. Research in this area has primarily focused on marital functioning, specifically marital quality, rather than marital outcomes, such as divorce proneness (Cui & Donnellan, 2009; Don, Biehle, & Mickelson, 2012). Although there are numerous different definitions of marital quality, it is commonly conceptualized as an individual's happiness or satisfaction with their marriage. It is often measured by having individuals report how satisfied they are with dimensions of their relationships, such as daily interactions with their partners or their sexual relationship,

and by having individuals report how happy they are with their overall relationship (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). In the cascade model of marital dissolution, Gottman (1993) described how individuals who experienced decreases in marital quality were at higher risk of considering or taking steps towards divorce, a process known as divorce proneness. Gottman further explained that when individuals who experienced higher levels of divorce proneness, their marriages had a higher probability of ending in divorce. However, given that not all couples who experience decreases in marital quality will consider or pursue divorce, the lack of literature examining how coparenting potentially influences divorce proneness represents a significant gap that the present study hopes to address (Broman, 2002). The present study utilizes the cascade model of marital dissolution to justify the examination of whether similar associations can be found between coparenting and divorce proneness as between coparenting and changes in marital quality.

Drawing on past research that has linked high levels of coparental disagreement with decreases in marital quality (Christopher, Umemura, Mann, Jacobvitz, & Hazen, 2015), the present study hypothesizes that a positive association exists between higher levels of coparental disagreement and higher levels of divorce proneness. Every couple experiences differences in opinions and beliefs. For couples with children, issues related to childrearing or parenting are often primary sources of disagreement (Don et al., 2012). For some couples these differences lead to negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, and arguments. When disagreements continuously lead to these negative outcomes, it can color how individuals evaluate their relationships and influence them to

consider ending their relationship (Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, & McIlvane, 2010). The present study uses family systems theory as a foundation to examine the association between coparental disagreement and divorce proneness.

Past research has indicated that higher levels of coparental support serves as a barrier against decreases in marital quality (Dew & Wilcox, 2010; Durtschi, Soloski, & Kimmes, 2017; Galovan, Holmes, Schramm, & Lee, 2014). This research is used to inform the present study's hypothesis that a negative association exists between higher levels of coparental support and higher levels of divorce proneness. Individuals report feeling less stress, experiencing more egalitarian divisions of household labor, and having less marital conflict when they feel more supported in their parenting roles by their spouses (McClain & Brown, 2017). This influences individuals to feel more positively towards their marital relationships because they feel like they are on the same team as their fellow parent (Feinberg, 2003). The present study also draws on family systems theory to justify the examination of the association between coparental support and divorce proneness. A family systems perspective suggests that the functioning of couples when coparenting may have a direct impact on their perceptions of the marital relationship (Brown, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, & Neff, 2010).

The lack of research looking at associations between coparenting and divorce proneness has also led to a lack of insight into whether there are salient variables within marriages that may moderate associations between dimensions of coparenting and divorce proneness. The present study examines how the negative marital communication of one's spouse moderates the association between coparental disagreement and support

and one's own divorce proneness. Negative marital communication includes verbal aggression (such as yelling, sarcasm, and name-calling); failure to accept responsibility and assignment of blame; and refusal to communicate (Barton, Futris, & Nielsen, 2015; Birditt et al., 2010; Carroll, Hill, Yorgason, Larson, & Sandberg, 2013; Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, & Christensen, 2007; Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). A rich body of research has demonstrated a positive association between negative communication and divorce proneness (Gottman & Gottman, 2017; Lavner & Bradbury, 2012; Woszidlo & Segin, 2013). Empirical research has demonstrated that when an individual uses negative communication, his or her partner is less likely to believe in their ability to improve their relationship and less likely to be willing to put effort into improving the relationship (Kliem, Weusthoff, Hahlwg, Baucom, & Baucom, 2015; Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). Drawing on the emergent-distress model, the present study postulates that, over time, the positive association between coparental disagreement and divorce proneness, for both wives and husbands, is stronger when their spouse's negative marital communication is high. When individuals, who are suffering from the negative outcomes of coparental disagreement, also experience negative communication with their spouses, they are more likely to consider ending their relationships as a possible solution to the marital problems (Kliem et al.). Similarly, a partner's use of negative marital communication can reduce the trust between partners, reducing the benefits of coparental support. Building on the emergent-distress model, the present study hypothesizes that, despite feeling supported in their parenting roles, individuals whose partners use negative marital communication

may begin to feel less positive towards their marital relationships over time, weakening the association between coparental support and decreases in divorce proneness (Durtschi et al., 2017).

Theoretical Foundations

Gottman's (1993) cascade model of marital dissolution is used to support the current study's argument that past research linking coparenting and marital quality can be used to justify the hypothesized link between coparenting and divorce proneness. Family systems theory is used to explain the interaction between different dimensions of family functioning, specifically coparenting and the marital relationship (Cox & Paley, 1997). Finally, the identification of partner's negative marital communication as a potential moderator comes from the emergent-distress model (Solomon & Jackson, 2014).

Cascade Model of Marital Dissolution

In his explanation of the cascade model of marital dissolution, Gottman (1993) described divorce as a continuous and ongoing process which could be divided into four phases. The first phase of the divorce process begins with couples experiencing declines in marital quality. If couples remain unhappy over time, they may enter into the second phase, divorce proneness, in which one or both individuals consider or take steps towards divorce. This may lead to the third phase, separation, in which the couple decides to spend some time living apart. Depending on the outcome of the separation, the couple may enter the fourth, and final, phase and legally divorce. The cascade model of marital dissolution assumes that as couple's progress through each stage, they become more likely to divorce (Gottman, 1994).

The decision to divorce is rarely spontaneous. It is unlikely that an individual would consider divorce without first experiencing unhappiness in his or her marriage (Broman, 2002). In a thirteen-year study, Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, and George (2001) found, for example, that individuals whose marriages ended in divorce reported lower marital quality during their relationships than couples who did not end up divorcing. However, it is also common for individuals to experience declines in their marital quality without considering divorce. There are many explanations for why an individual unhappy in her or his relationship may never consider divorce, including personal commitment to the relationship, negative beliefs about divorce, economic concerns, or a belief that their marital quality will improve over time (Stanley, Rhoades, & Whitton, 2010). Furthermore, many individuals may experience increases in marital quality following declines due to numerous personal or contextual changes or stressors (James, 2014).

In a longitudinal study of 3,500 participants, Broman (2002) found a significant relationship between higher levels of divorce proneness and divorce three years later. Empirical evidence has led researchers to conclude that, although both declines in marital quality and increases in divorce proneness have been individually linked to divorce, marital quality and divorce proneness should be considered connected but distinct constructs (Booth & White, 1980; Broman, 2002; Clements, Stanley, & Markman, 2004; Don, Biehle, & Mickelson, 2013; Gottman, 1994; McClain & Brown, 2017). Factors such as financial problems, disillusionment with married life and negative communication may

contribute independently to declines in marital quality, or to subsequent increases in divorce proneness (Dew, Britt, & Huston, 2012; Huston et al.; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005).

Gottman's (1993) cascade model of marital dissolution theorizes that decreases in marital quality increase divorce proneness. The present study uses this model to justify examining whether the association previously found between dimensions of coparenting and marital quality is present between coparenting and divorce proneness. This examination is important given that Gottman described increases in divorce proneness as resulting from ongoing decreases in marital quality or long-lasting low marital quality. Many of the studies which have looked at how coparenting affects marital relationships have focused on newlyweds or the parents of young children. This has resulted in a gap in the literature that the present study hopes to address on how changes in families over time, such as children's transition to adolescence, may influence the relationship between coparenting and divorce proneness (Cui & Donnellan, 2009).

Family Systems Theory

The present study uses family systems theory as the framework to look at the association between the coparental relationship and the marital relationship (Christopher et al., 2015). Family systems theory states that families are organized systems in which family members are interdependent and affect one another's psychological well-being, emotions and behavior. Most families have implicit or explicit rules about how different family members should behave, different roles assigned to or created by family members, and family goals (Bigner & Gerhardt, 2014). When individuals within the family break

these rules, or fail to fulfill the obligations associated with their roles, or act in ways that are contrary to accomplishing the goals, it affects other members of the family and the relationships within the family. For example, a father may become upset after his adolescent son rudely responds to the father's chastisement for breaking a rule about how to behave. The father, internalizing his son's response as demonstrating poor parenting on his own part, may later respond to a normal request from his wife to start dinner by snapping at her. The wife may be unaware of the reason for her husband's behavior, or may not find his frustration with their child an acceptable excuse for her husband's behavior. This may result in the wife feeling frustrated with her spouse and experiencing negative feelings towards their relationship (Broderick, 1993; Cox & Paley, 1997; Cui & Donnellan, 2009; Fitzpatrick, Gareau, Lafontaine, & Gaudreau, 2016).

Numerous variables, such as individual developmental changes of family members, internal or external crises, or conflict between members of the family, can prompt family change over time. The rules, family roles, and goals developed within the family system can help families face new challenges and achieve stability over time. Within the general family system, a number of subsystems, which are both interconnected and interdependent, exist. Subsystems describe the individual relationships between two or more members of the family. Members of families can be members of numerous subsystems. For example, in a family with children, a woman may be in a subsystem with her husband and in other subsystems with each of her children. The relationships within the subsystems also are structured around rules, roles and goals that drive the functioning of the larger family system (Bigner & Gerhardt, 2014).

The present study focuses on two specific subsystems: the marital subsystem and the coparenting subsystem. In the current study, the marital subsystem is composed of a wife and husband and centers around their daily and on-going interactions, their individual perceptions of the relationship, and the perceived marital well-being (Caldera & Lindsey, 2006). A married couple with children also is part of a coparenting subsystem, but at least one of their children is also included. Rather than centering around concerns regarding their intimate relationship, within the coparenting subsystem context, husbands and wives are focused on the well-being of their child, concerns around childrearing, and parenting issues. The relationship between parents and children is understood to be bidirectional in the coparenting subsystem; the actions of the parents affect children, and the actions of the children affect their parents. For example, as children age, parents might have to change the rules within the family to adjust for their children's developmental changes (Bigner & Gerhardt, 2014). Guided by past research and family systems theory, the present study proposes that dynamics within the coparenting subsystem, specifically experiencing higher levels of coparental disagreement or coparental support, affect the relationship with the marital subsystem, specifically higher or lower levels of divorce proneness (Berryhill, Soloski, Durtschi, & Adams, 2016; Holland & McElwain, 2013; Mangelsdorf, Laxman, & Jessee, 2011).

The present study draws on two possible processes for explaining how interactions within the coparenting subsystem affect the relationship in the marital subsystem; the spillover hypothesis and the crossover hypothesis (Zvara, Mills-Koonce, Heilbron, Clincy, & Cox, 2015). The spillover hypothesis proposes that an individual's

actions and emotions in one area of family functioning “spillover” to influence his or her actions and emotions in a different area of family functioning. To use the previous example, the father’s frustration at his son’s rudeness could be seen as spilling over to influence his interactions with his wife over chores unrelated to their child (Kouros, Goeke-Morey, Papp, & Cummings, 2014). The crossover hypothesis, on the other hand, proposes that an individual’s actions and emotions in one area of family functioning “crossover” to influence the individual’s partner’s actions and emotions in a different area of family functioning. To return once again to the previous example, the father taking out his frustration about his child’s behavior can be seen as crossing over to affect the wife’s feelings towards her intimate relationship (Zvara et al.). Previous work has demonstrated that, although both processes may independently influence family functioning, spillover and crossover may also function simultaneously (Lee, Zarit, Rovine, Birditt, & Fingerman, 2016). In a longitudinal study of 92 newlyweds, Chong and Mickelson (2016) drew on family systems theory to test whether spillover or crossover from coparenting interactions influenced the marital relationship. Specifically, the authors examined whether wives’ perceptions of the fairness of the distribution of childcare tasks with their husbands, an interaction within the coparenting subsystem, affected their relationship satisfaction, a component of the marital subsystem. Chong and Mickelson’s findings supported subsystem ideas from family systems theory. The authors found that when wives perceived the distribution of childcare tasks as more fair, they were more likely to report having less conflict with, and less stress related to, their partners. This not only led to wives’ reporting higher levels of relationship satisfaction, as

a result of spillover, but also influenced husbands to evaluate their relationships more positively, demonstrating crossover patterns. The present study uses family systems theory to postulate that couples' evaluations of coparental disagreement and support influence wives' and husbands' reports of their own (i.e., spillover effects) and their partner's (i.e., crossover effects) divorce proneness.

Emergent-Distress Model

The present study uses the emergent-distress model to understand the way that partners' negative marital communication moderates the relationship between the dimensions of coparenting and wives' and husbands' divorce proneness over time (Don et al., 2013; Feinberg, 2003). The emergent-distress model proposes that the pressure put on relationships by internal or external stressors can increase the probability of individuals becoming less satisfied with their relationships over time (Huston et al., 2001; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007; Williamson, Nguyen, Bradbury, & Karney, 2016). According to the cascade model of marital dissolution (Gottman, 1993), experiencing decreases in marital quality can subsequently influence individuals to consider, or take steps towards, dissolution.

Research has demonstrated that children moving into adolescence can result in significant changes in the relationship between parents (Cui & Donnellan, 2009). Couples may have to navigate new family dynamics such as increases in parent-child difficulties or differences in beliefs about how older children should be parented (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Lavner & Bradbury, 2012). The ways in which couples communicate during conversations regarding childrearing can be critical for their marital well-being

(Lavner & Bradbury). Developmental changes in children may lead to the emergence of or increases in spousal negative communication (Cui & Donnellan). In a summary of forty-five years of research on marital relationships and divorce proneness, Gottman and Gottman (2017) highlighted negative communication during conflict as a primary predictor of divorce proneness.

Coparental disagreement has been shown to negatively impact relationships by making individuals feel as if they are not part of the same team as their spouses (Feinberg, 2003). Experiencing spousal negative marital communication increases the probability of individuals feeling like they are not compatible with their partners (Huston et al., 2001; Solomon & Jackson, 2014). Under these circumstances, women and men may be more willing to consider, or take steps towards, marital dissolution (Broman, 2002; Kliem et al., 2015). The present study hypothesizes that spousal negative marital communication increases the positive association between coparental disagreement and divorce proneness.

Experiencing coparental support decreases parental stress and increases the likelihood of individuals perceiving their partners as appreciating and respecting them. Consequently, individuals are more likely to report higher marital quality and less likely to be divorce prone (Durtzchi et al., 2017). The emergence of spousal negative marital communication, however, may decrease feelings of intimacy and trust. Husbands and wives may experience decreases in their feeling of romantic friendship with their partner. They may also feel less willing, or have a lower belief in their ability, to work with their partners to improve their relationship (Don et al., 2013; Huston et al., 2001; Solomon &

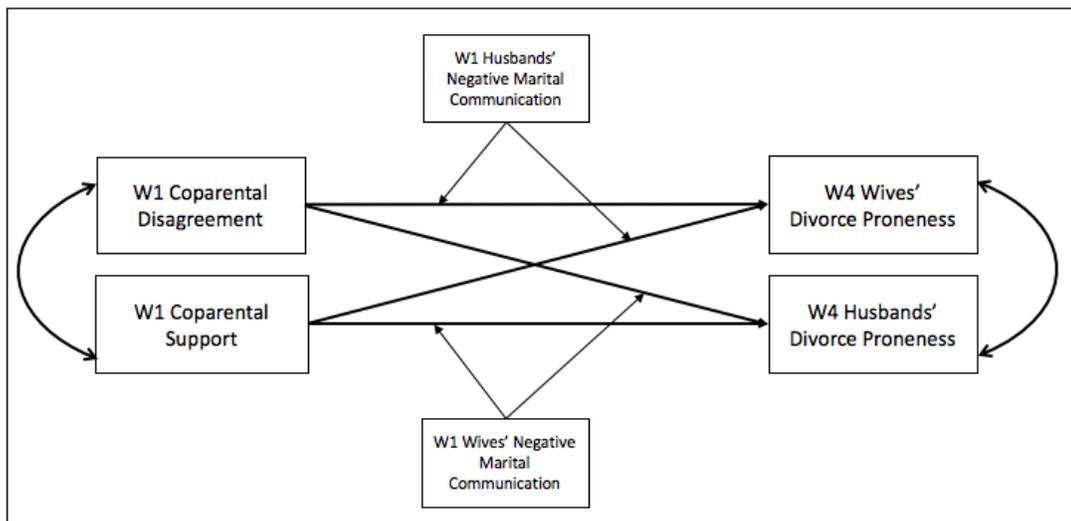
Jackson, 2014). Under these circumstances, coparental support may not be enough to protect against divorce proneness (Gottman & Levenson, 2002; Woszidlo & Segrin, 2013). The present study hypothesizes that spousal negative marital communication decreases the strength of the negative association between coparental support and divorce proneness.

Purpose Statement

Previous research has indicated that coparenting disagreement and coparenting support influence family functioning. The goal of the present study is to fill in some of the gaps that are currently present regarding how different dimensions of coparenting influence marital outcomes. A small body of work has looked at the association between dimensions of coparenting and marital quality. In some of these studies, conceptualizations of marital quality occasionally included divorce proneness (Cui & Donnellan, 2009; Durtschi et al., 2017; McClain & Brown, 2017). However, there are no known studies that have looked directly at the association between coparenting and divorce proneness. This distinction is significant because, although marital quality and divorce proneness are interconnected, they are also potentially unique antecedents of divorce (Gottman, 1993, 1994). Given the extensive evidence of the distinct outcomes that divorce may have on the members of the couple, their children, and society, it is important to understand the potential correlates or predictors of distinct relationship variables, such as divorce proneness (Amato, 2010; Kliem et al., 2015). To accomplish this goal, the present study also examines spousal negative marital communication as a potential moderator of wives' and husbands' divorce proneness. Numerous studies have

shown that negative marital communication is uniquely associated with decreases in marital quality and increases in divorce proneness and divorce (Carroll et al., 2013; Gottman & Gottman, 2017; Kamp Dush & Taylor, 2012). The present study is the first work in this area, however, to hypothesize that spousal negative marital communication is a moderator of the associations between dimensions of coparenting and divorce proneness.

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model for Examining the Moderating Effects of Spouses' Negative Marital Communication on the Positive Association between W1 Coparental Disagreement and W4 Wives' Husbands' and Divorce Proneness and on the Negative Association between W1 Coparental Support and W4 Wives' and Husbands' Divorce Proneness. W1 = wave 1; W4 = wave 4. Control variables are not shown.



CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing literature has identified associations between two dimensions of coparenting, coparental disagreement and coparental support (inversely), and declines in marital quality, the first stage described by Gottman (1993) in the cascade model of marital dissolution (Feinberg, 2003). Very few studies, however, have examined the associations between coparenting and divorce proneness, the next stage in the cascade model of marital dissolution. As a result, existing literature has also been limited in its examination of how specific marital interactions, such as communication, may potentially lead to changes in the association between coparenting and men and women's divorce proneness. Furthermore, the majority of studies looking at coparenting have focused on the parents of young children (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). This has led to a limited understanding of how the transition of children to early adolescence may result in changes in these marital interactions, increasing or decreasing divorce proneness over time. The present study builds on existing research to examine how spousal negative marital communication contributes, for parents of adolescents, to changes in associations between coparental disagreement and coparental support and wives' and husbands' divorce proneness. More specifically, the present study examines how spousal negative marital communication exacerbates the positive association between coparenting

disagreement and changes in divorce proneness and buffers the negative association between coparenting support and changes in divorce proneness. The literature on the key constructs and proposed associations are examined in the following sections.

Coparenting

Coparenting is defined as the ways that parents work together to raise their children, face parenting challenges and coordinate parenting responsibilities. Coparenting has been shown to significantly impact family dynamics (Chen & Johnston, 2012). The coparenting relationship includes the sharing or distribution of responsibilities, making and carrying out rules and discipline, and supporting one another in the parenting role (Mangelsdorf, Laxman , & Jessee, 2011). Research on coparenting has demonstrated that when parents work together and feel like members of the same “team,” it is more likely to have positive outcomes for family functioning (Feinberg, 2003). Historically, work on coparenting has been primarily interested in child-related outcomes. In a meta-analysis of the relationship between coparenting and child outcomes, Teubert and Pinquart (2010) found that when couples cooperate more in their parenting roles, their children are less likely to demonstrate negative internalizing and externalizing behaviors. More recently, work has begun to explore the relationship between coparenting and the marital relationship (McClain & Brown, 2017). Although this research has failed to examine the effect of coparenting on divorce proneness as an outcome, the majority of studies have focused on the preceding stage in the cascade model of marital dissolution, declines in marital quality (Gottman, 1994).

Coparenting and marital quality are two distinct, but related dimensions of marital functioning (Mangelsdorf et al., 2011; Pudasainee-Kapri & Razza, 2015). Marital quality, generally conceptualized as an individual's assessment of satisfaction or happiness with their relationship (Woszidlo & Segrin, 2013), is affected by numerous factors such as finances, their intimate and sexual relationship with their partner, and familial histories (Don et al., 2013). For parents, the coparenting relationship often plays a significant role in how individuals evaluate the quality of their relationship (Feinberg, Kan, & Hetherington, 2007). Many couples experience declines in marital quality following the birth of a child (Kluwer, 2010). In a longitudinal study lasting over forty years, Gottman and Gottman (2017) reported that 67% of their participants experienced declines in marital quality following the birth of a child. Although having children may be a very joyful experience for couples, it may also mean higher levels of stress for individuals as they grapple with new roles, distribution of parenting responsibilities, and changes within their relationship dynamics (Fillo, Simpson, Rholes, & Kohn, 2015). The changes in family structure, roles, and stress often result in individuals reporting having more conflict with their partners following the birth of their child (Kluwer).

The majority of work on coparenting in still-married couples has looked at parents of newborns or young children (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). It is important to expand the research to consider how couples may face new sources of tension as they navigate changes in their parenting roles as their children move through adolescence. Teenagers often challenge their parents' authority as they begin to spend less time with their families and more time with their peers. The marital relationship may become strained as

parents struggle with creating appropriate boundaries for their children, questions of discipline, and concerns about alcohol and drug use (Guan & Fuligni, 2016). The present study expands on past research by using the parents of adolescents to look at the relationship between two dimensions of coparenting; coparental disagreement and support, and changes in divorce proneness for both wives and husbands.

Coparental Disagreement

Coparental disagreement refers to the extent to which parents disagree on issues related to childrearing (Petren et al., 2017). Coparental disagreement has been conceptualized and measured in numerous ways across different studies. It has been conceptualized in ways as distinct as differences in beliefs about how children should be taught to behave to differences in expectations for how parenting responsibilities should be distributed (Feinberg, 2003). Measures have included questionnaires, observations, and self-reports from either one or both parents (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). These differences have produced significantly different results across studies. A study by Block, Block, and Morrison (1981) found a positive relationship between coparental disagreement and behavioral problems in children. In the study, coparental disagreement was operationalized as differences in child-rearing values and measured through questionnaire responses from both wives and husbands. Deal, Halverson, and Wampler (1989), however, did not find any evidence of a relationship between coparental disagreement and child behavioral outcomes. In their study, coparental disagreement was operationalized as differences in parenting behaviors and measured from observations of both parents interacting with their child.

The significance of using different measures of coparental disagreement was also illustrated in a study conducted by Chen and Johnston (2012). The authors looked at the relationship between two different conceptualizations of coparental disagreement and child outcomes. The authors first measured coparental disagreement as differences in beliefs about discipline. Parents were asked to read short vignettes about a misbehaving child. They then answered questions about what they believed was an appropriate punishment. The authors next measured coparental disagreement as differences in parenting goals. Parents were asked to rate the importance of six parenting goals. Chen and Johnston found a significant association between coparental disagreement about appropriate parental discipline and externalizing problem behaviors in children, but did not find any association between coparental disagreement on parenting goals and children's externalizing problem behaviors.

The majority of research has focused on the associations between coparental disagreement and child outcomes (Block et al., 1981; Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006). However, in a study of 77 opposite-sex couples drawn from the Baby Transitions in Marital Exchanges Study, Don et al. (2013) found evidence of a relationship between coparental disagreement and the marital relationship in the first-time parents of newborns. Wives and husbands both provided information, online, about their coparental disagreements during pregnancy and four months postpartum. Coparental disagreement was measured as "Parental Agreement" and indicated by parents' perceptions of their shared parenting feelings, philosophies, and practices. Participants were asked to choose between eight images of two circles (one representing one's own

parenting and one representing her or his partners' parenting) in different proximities to one another. The images ranged from the circles not touching one another (given a score of 1 and representing no overlap in parenting agreement), to the two circles being completely overlaid on one another (given a score of 8 and representing complete overlap in parenting agreement). Both members of the couple provided information about marital outcomes, specifically relationship satisfaction, in telephone interviews both during pregnancy and nine months postpartum. Participants provided mean scores for relationship satisfaction by using a seven-point scale to rate six items from the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988), with higher scores representing more relationship satisfaction.

Guided by the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM), Don et al. (2013) used dyadic structural path models to look at how coparental agreement affected both wives' and husbands' perceptions of marital quality over time. Coparental agreement is considered to be part of the same construct, although on the opposite side of the scale, as coparental disagreement (Feinberg, 2003). Don et al. found that the wives' perceptions of more coparental agreement at four months postpartum significantly predicted higher ratings of marital quality at 9-months postpartum ($r = .21$). No significant association was found between husbands' perceptions of coparental agreement and marital quality ($r = .16$). Although the difference in significance could be due to an issue of power, rather than a significant difference between wives and husbands, the authors believed that gender played a significant role in determining how parenting agreement impacted marital quality. Don et al. explained that, given that women tend to be more responsible

for childcare and childrearing, they may place more importance on their parenting role, when evaluating their marriages. As a result, wives may be more affected by disagreements related to coparenting than their husbands.

Don et al.'s (2013) sample, like the majority of studies on coparenting in married parents, consisted of the parents of young children. Coparental disagreement over adolescent children can also lead to declines in marital quality (Whiteman, McHale, & Crouter, 2007). For many children, the beginning of adolescence is a time of cognitive and psychological change and they begin to test their independence by spending less time with their parents and more time with their peers. Parents may face new disagreements over how to cope with the changes within their family dynamics (Cui & Donnellan, 2009; Jenkins, Simpson, Dunn, Rasbash, & O'Conner, 2005). For example, in a study of 451 families drawn from the Iowa Youth and Families Project (IYEP), Cui, Donnellan, and Conger (2007) found that coparental disagreement over how to confront their adolescent children's maladjustment predicted lower marital quality. Using Gottman's (1994) postulation, illustrated in the Cascade Model of Marital Dissolution, that as marital quality decreases divorce proneness increases, I hypothesize that coparental disagreement is associated with increases in divorce proneness, for both wives and husbands.

Coparental Support

Coparental support is conceptualized as how encouraged and included individuals feel by their partner in their parenting role (Van Egeren, 2004). Parents may lend their support to their partners through expressing their admiration of, and belief in, their spouse's ability to be a good parent; listening and supporting their partner's opinions and

decisions regarding their offspring; or working together to come up with strategies and solutions to any problems that arise in childrearing (Brown et al., 2010). Guided by family systems theory, coparental support has been linked with both positive child and marital outcomes (Bouchard, Lee, Asgary, & Pelletier, 2007).

Coparental support indirectly affects children by influencing parental involvement and parenting behaviors (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012; Brown et al., 2010). In a study of 205 fathers, for example, Bouchard et al. (2007) found that fathers who reported more coparental support from their wives also reported being more motivated to be involved with their children. Coparental support was conceptualized as fathers feeling that their partners were confident in their parenting ability. Husbands reported feeling more willing to take on active parenting roles when they felt like their wives trusted their parenting abilities (Deutsch, 1999). Martire, Stephens, and Townsend (1998) reported similar results for wives, finding a positive association between wives' reports of husbands' coparental support and wives' perceptions of parental self-efficacy. In a longitudinal study of an at-risk sample of 1371 mothers, Pudasainee-Kapri and Razza (2015) found that coparental support was linked with more secure mother-child attachments. The authors suggested in families with coparental support, husbands take on more active parenting roles. This allows wives to spend more time and energy positively interacting with their children. Mother-child attachment has been shown to influence socioemotional outcomes for children. Coparental support has also been linked with parental warmth and sensitivity. Coparental support can help alleviate stress, allowing parents to devote more time and energy to their children's needs (Caldera & Lindsey, 2006).

Coparental support is also linked with the marital relationship, serving as a potential barrier against declines in marital quality following childbirth (Brown et al., 2010). Although childbirth is often perceived as a positive event, it is also often associated with declines in marital quality (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009; Gottman & Gottman, 2017; Gottman & Notarius, 2000). New parents have to navigate changes in the amount of time, and quality of time, they are able to spend together. They often have less time to spend with one another or spend their time together focused on their child (Kluwer, 2010). Couples may also have less time or energy for engaging in physical or emotional intimacy (Claxton & Perry-Jenkins, 2008; Pacey, 2004). If couples are unprepared for the realities of parenthood, they may become disillusioned with their relationships and experience declines in marital quality (Curran, Utley, & Muraco, 2009).

Women are especially at risk for declines in marital quality following childbirth due to the expectations for them to transition to traditional gender roles. Regardless of previous relationship dynamics and expectations, many women face societal and personal pressure to step into the traditional role of primary caregiver after giving birth (Baxter, Hewitt, & Haynes, 2008; McClain & Brown, 2017; Van Egeren, 2004). In the past, this parental gender dynamic was generally accepted as the norm. Many modern women, however, expect more egalitarian divisions of parental labor and are frustrated when their expectations are not met (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012). When women perceive their coparental relationship as being unfair, or their expectations as not being met, they are at higher risk for feeling unsatisfied with their relationships and reporting lower marital quality (Chong & Mickelson, 2016; Kluwer, 2010; Lavee, Sharlin, & Katz, 1996).

Although men are taking on more active parenting roles than they have in the past, women continue to spend up to twice the amount of time as their husbands on childcare and child-related tasks (Biehle & Mickelson, 2012). Although these patterns begin at childbirth, they often persist over time, resulting in women continuing to shoulder the majority of child-related and household tasks (Mattingly & Bianchi, 2003).

In a five-year longitudinal study of 1,275 different-sex couples drawn from the Fragile Families and Child Well-being Study, McClain and Brown (2017) looked at how fathers' coparental support disrupted the impact of role traditionalization on relationship quality, in a sample of mostly-unmarried couples. Coparental support was measured through mothers' reports of their partners' coparental support. Mothers and fathers both reported on relationship quality at three time points by responding to a single question asking them to rate the quality of their relationship. The authors found that fathers' coparental support impacted the marital quality for both members of the couple, but more significantly for mothers than fathers. The coefficient for the positive association between coparental support and relationship quality was larger for mothers (.19, $p < .001$) than for fathers (.07, $p < .001$). Although there may be differences between married and non-married couples, the results of this study still provide significant information about gendered relationships between coparental support and relationship outcomes. Given the influence of coparental support on the reduction of parenting stress, coparental stress appears to have a stronger positive impact on the way mothers, compared to fathers, evaluate relationship quality. Women, in both married and non-married couples, are seen

as being more vulnerable to parenting stress as a result of its association with the pressure put on women to maintain the traditional maternal role (McClain & Brown, 2017).

The increase in responsibilities for women following the birth of a child can also result in higher levels of depression and stress (Adamsons, 2013). Wives' stress has been linked with more relationship conflict and less positive perceptions of marital quality for couples (Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly, & Robinson, 2002). When husbands are more involved in their parenting roles and more supportive of their wives' parenting, women report more well-being and satisfaction with their relationships (Agache, Leyndeckr, Schäfermeier, & Schölmerich, 2014).

In a three-year longitudinal study of 848 first-time parents (60.3% White, 27.2% Black) drawn from The Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study (FFCWS), Durtschi et al. (2017) provided evidence for a relationship between coparental support and relationship quality. The authors were specifically interested in whether coparental support provided a buffer to parental stress and prevented decreases in relationship quality. Coparental support was measured when children were one-year-old. Both mothers and fathers were asked to respond to five questions that related to the couples' trust, support, respect and coordination regarding parenting responsibilities. Relationship quality was measured when children were three-years-old. Mothers and fathers were both asked to respond to six questions measuring their perceptions of the quality of their marriage. The authors found that, for both mothers and fathers, coparental support predicted higher relationship quality. However, mothers' reports of their partners' coparental support were more closely linked with mothers' relationship quality ($b = .94, p$

< .001), when compared with fathers' reports of their partners' coparental support ($b = .52, p < .001$). The interaction between mothers' reports of fathers' coparental support and mothers' stress on mothers' relationship was significant quality ($b = -.20, p < .01$). The interaction between fathers' reports of mothers' coparental support and mothers' stress on mothers' marital quality ($b = .17, p < .05$) was also significant. The findings were consistent with the literature showing that, given that they often have more parenting responsibilities than fathers, women without support, in both married and non-married couples, are more likely to experience declines in relationship quality (Baxter et al., 2008).

The majority of studies on coparental support, in both married and non-married couples, have focused on the parents of newborns or young children. However, coparental support is also important for the parents of adolescents. Many parents may feel unsure of how to navigate the changes in their relationships with adolescent children or insecure about their parenting when their children misbehave inside or outside of the home (Cui & Donnellan, 2009). Coparental support is linked with parents feeling more competent in their parenting role and more satisfied with their parenting, which is linked with having higher levels of marital quality (Bouchard et al., 2007; Don, Chong, Biehle, Gordon, & Mickelson, 2014). Using family systems theory, the present study expands on past research to look at whether there is a negative relationship between coparental support and divorce proneness.

The cascade model of marital dissolution (Gottman, 1994) can be used to support the present study's inclusion of divorce proneness as the dependent variable. Partners that

report coparental support are less likely to experience decreases in marital quality. When partners in couples report high marital quality, they are less likely to consider divorce. Therefore, I hypothesize that coparental support is associated with decreases in divorce proneness, for both husbands and wives.

Divorce Proneness

Divorce proneness is defined as an individual either considering or taking steps towards divorce (Gottman, 1994). Indicators of divorce proneness may include worrying that one's marriage is in trouble, discussing divorce with either one's spouse or friends, or seeking the advice of a divorce lawyer (Moore & Buehler, 2011; Whitton et al., 2013). Using empirical evidence from longitudinal studies, Gottman (1994) described how divorce proneness fit into the cascade model of marital dissolution. The model laid out the stages that couples are most likely to move through before legal dissolution. In the first stage, one or both, members of a relationship experience declines in marital quality. For some individuals, experiencing declines in happiness or satisfaction with their marriage leads to divorce proneness, the second stage in the model. Considering or taking steps towards divorce may prompt the couple to separate, the third stage of the model. After separating, some couples will move on to the final stage and legally end their marriage.

The majority of past research on coparenting has looked at marital quality, rather than divorce proneness, as an outcome (Christopher et al., 2015). Although marital quality and divorce proneness are unique constructs, the inclusion of both in Gottman's (1994) cascade model of marital dissolution, demonstrates that they are also related to

one another. Gottman explained that individuals were unlikely to consider divorce unless they had already experienced declines in marital quality. However, declines in marital quality do not necessarily lead to divorce proneness or divorce. For some couples, divorce, regardless of how unhappy they are with their relationship, is never considered as an option. Beliefs about the benefits of having married parents for raising children, religious beliefs, or financial concerns may all contribute to why an individual may not contemplate leaving an unhappy marriage (Previti & Amato, 2002). In some cases, thinking about divorce may also not be indicative of a higher likelihood of divorce, rather indicating an outlet for marital frustration or wishful thinking (Browman, 2002). However, there is also evidence that individuals with higher levels of divorce proneness also more strongly believe in the acceptability of divorce and are more likely to consider divorce as a solution to marital problems (Whitton et al., 2013). Using the cascade model of marital dissolution as a foundation, I hypothesize that, given the evidence of the association between coparenting and decreases in marital quality, an association also exists between coparenting and changes in divorce proneness.

Negative Marital Communication

Certain marital features, such as spousal negative marital communication, may weaken or strengthen the proposed link between coparental disagreement and support and divorce proneness (Eldridge et al., 2007; Punyanunt-Carter, 2004; Stanley et al., 2002; Woodin, 2011). Gottman and Gottman (2017) defined negative communication as four attack-defend communication behaviors (criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling), known as “the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.” The presence of

negative marital communication makes it more challenging for couples to resolve their disagreements (Barton et al., 2015; Birditt et al., 2010; Carroll et al., 2013; Gottman, 1994; Kliem et al., 2015), experience emotional and physical intimacy (Stanley et al., 2002) and put effort into maintaining or improving their relationships (Lavner & Bradbury, 2012).

As a main effect, spousal negative communication in the early stages of a marriage has been shown to predict decreases in marital quality over the next five years (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998; Markman, 1981; Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan, & Whitton, 2010). Negative marital communication has also been positively linked with divorce. In a longitudinal study of 136 newlywed couples, Lavner and Bradbury (2012) found significant differences in the ways that couples who did and did not go on to divorce communicated. Relationships in which spouses used negative marital communication (anger, contempt, complaining, insults, threats, and unkindness) during discussions were more likely to end in divorce. Exposure to partners using negative marital communication can result in lower commitment to relationships, lower levels of intimacy, and decreases in marital quality.

As a moderating effect, when a wife or husband uses negative marital communication during disagreements about coparenting concerns, it can increase the risk for their spouse's divorce proneness. Partner communication increases individuals' negative evaluations of their relationships, potentially leading to declines in marital quality, and increases in divorce proneness (Birditt et al., 2010). When couples disagree on parenting issues and neither partner uses negative communication, the couple is more

likely to try to settle their differences through compromise. However, when one, or both, partners use negative communication during conversations about parenting, their husband or wife is less likely to put effort into compromising to find a solution (Feinberg, 2003). Issues related to children transitioning into adolescence may bring up new parenting concerns, which can potentially lead to new levels of coparenting disagreement (Cui & Donnellan, 2009). The couples in the current study are the parents of new adolescents and, therefore, may face new sources of coparental disagreement. The emergent-distress model suggests that this may potentially lead to the emergence of spousal negative marital communication. I hypothesize that the addition of spousal negative communication exacerbates the association between coparenting disagreement and increases in both wives' and husbands' divorce proneness.

Negative marital communication about coparenting concerns may also mitigate the relationship between increases in coparental support and decreases in divorce proneness. Coparental support acts as a buffer against declines in marital quality following childbirth by promoting couple closeness and mitigating stress (Durtschi et al., 2017). Experiencing spousal negative marital communication, however, may lessen the positive effects of coparental support on evaluations of marriages. The use of negative communication can lead to husbands or wives having less idealistic views of their partners and an increased focus on their partners' limitations and the weaknesses within their marital relationship (Kluwer & Johnson, 2007). Therefore, I hypothesize that spousal negative communication mitigates the strength of the association between coparental support and decreases in both husbands' and wives' divorce proneness.

Control Variables

The present study controlled for education, an indicator of socioeconomic status (SES), which has been linked with divorce in previous studies. In a ten-year review of the link between socioeconomic status and family processes, including marital outcomes, Conger, Conger, and Martin (2010) defined SES as a “construct that captures various dimensions of social position, including prestige, power, and economic well-being” (p. 687). Conger et al. found that couples with higher SES are less likely to experience declines in marital quality, and are more likely to experience increases in both divorce proneness and in actual divorce. Couples who face more economic hardship are at higher risk for financial disagreements, more interpersonal difficulties, and less emotional support for their partners. Lower SES puts more pressure on relationships and increase the possibilities of the couples considering or taking steps towards divorce (Amato & Previti, 2003). Compared with income, researchers have argued that education is often the most reliable marker of SES, given that husbands’ and wives’ salaries often differ (Helms, Walls, Crouter, & McHale, 2010). In relationships where both partners have higher education, the couples often have more opportunities and encounter fewer negative stressors on their marital relationship, lowering the probability of either partner considering divorce (Choi & Marks, 2013; Lyngstad & Jalovaara, 2010). This study, therefore, focuses on education as one key marker of SES.

Literature Limitations

Family systems theory suggests that different relationships within the family, such as the coparental relationship and marital relationship, influence one another (Cox &

Paley, 1997). Yet, with a few exceptions, there has been very little research done in this area (Durtschi et al., 2017). Furthermore, none of the research that has looked at the relationship between coparenting and the marital relationship has considered divorce proneness. The present study addresses this gap in the literature by looking at the relationship between two dimensions of coparenting and divorce proneness.

Although there is some research demonstrating the importance of the coparenting relationship for parents of adolescent children, the majority of the research in all three fields has been done on newlyweds or the parents of young children (Cui & Donnellan, 2009; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). The present study addresses this limitation by looking at the parents of adolescent children. It is important to look at whether the association between the coparenting relationship and marital outcomes is the same for parents of older children as the parents of young children.

Statement of Hypotheses

Using a family systems approach, the present study postulates that the coparental relationship, specifically the dimensions of coparental disagreement and coparental support, is associated with divorce proneness. The present study uses the Cascade Model of Marital Dissolution (Gottman, 1994) to justify building on past research, linking coparenting with marital quality, to examine associations between coparenting and divorce proneness. The emergent-distress model is used to explain the use of spousal negative marital communication as a moderator between the two dimensions of coparenting and increases in both wives' and husbands' divorce proneness.

It is hypothesized that coparental disagreement has a positive relationship with both husband and wives' divorce proneness, whereas coparental support has a negative relationship with wives' and husbands' divorce proneness. It is also hypothesized that these relationships are both moderated by spouses' negative marital communication. The following hypotheses will be examined:

Hypothesis 1: Controlling for wave 1 (W1) divorce proneness, W1 coparental disagreement and W1 coparental support each uniquely predict changes in both wives' and husbands' perceptions of divorce proneness three years later (at wave 4, W4). W1 coparental disagreement is associated with increases in both wives' and husbands' W4 divorce proneness. W1 coparental support is associated with decreases in both wives' and husbands' W4 divorce proneness.

Hypothesis 2: Controlling for W1 divorce proneness, W1 husbands' negative marital communication moderates the associations between both W1 coparental disagreement and W1 coparental support and changes in W4 wives' divorce proneness. W1 husbands' negative marital communication exacerbates the unique association between W1 coparental disagreement and increases in W4 wives' divorce proneness. W1 husbands' negative marital communication mitigates the unique association between W1 coparental support and decreases in W4 wives' divorce proneness.

Hypothesis 3: Controlling for W1 divorce proneness, W1 wives' negative marital communication moderates the associations between both W1 coparental disagreement and W1 coparental support and changes in W4 husbands' divorce proneness. W1 wives' negative marital communication exacerbates the unique association between W1

coparental disagreement and W4 husbands' increases in divorce proneness. W1 wives' negative marital communication mitigates the unique association between W1 coparental support and W4 husbands' decreases in divorce proneness.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The population of interest in the current study was the married parents of children transitioning into adolescence. The sample was drawn from a larger study examining how family dynamics affected children over the course of four years (from sixth grade to ninth grade) (Buehler, 2006). To collect data on a large nonclinical sample, participants were recruited from thirteen middle schools in a single county in the Southeast United States. Participation in the study was limited to families with parents that were either married or long-term cohabitants. Given the unique characteristics of blended families, the sample was restricted to couples without stepchildren (Buehler, Lange, & Franck, 2007).

Recruitment began with sixth graders being given permission letters, containing information about the study, during homeroom to bring home to their parents. Parents were also contacted directly about their interest in participating. Parents were sent follow-up letters that included self-addressed, stamped envelopes for their responses (Buehler, 2006). 80% of the parents who returned consent forms agreed to participate. 416 families, 37% of the eligible families, agreed to participate in the longitudinal study. There were no significant differences between families that did and did not agree to participate on any of the youth-reported variables (Cook, Buehler, & Blair, 2013).

Data were collected annually for three years following the initial collection. There was a 77% retention of families from when children were in sixth grade (W1) to when

children were in ninth grade (W4). The number of families declined from 416 in W1 to 320 in W4. Comparisons of the families that did and did not remain in the study, conducted with multivariate analysis of variance, did not find any significant differences on any of the study variables (Buehler, 2006).

The present study used data from W1 and W4 to examine associations between dimensions of coparenting (W1), spousal negative marital communication (W1), and divorce proneness (W4). Children transitioning into adolescence can represent a pivotal time of change in the marital relationship of parents. Developmental changes in children may result in parents having to grapple with significant challenges to their coparenting relationship (Cui & Donnellan, 2009). Being part of a couple that struggles with navigating these changes can lead to decreases in marital quality and potentially increases in divorce proneness (Don et al., 2013).

Sample Characteristics

The majority of participants were European American (91%), with a small percentage of African Americans (3%), and participants with other ethnic backgrounds (6%) (Buehler et al., 2007). The percentage of African Americans included in the study was smaller than the percentage of African Americans in both the county (5%) and the United States (7.8%) at that time (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000a, Table PCT27 of SF4). 51% of the families had daughters (Buehler & Welsh, 2009). The average educational status of the couples in the sample was an associate's degree or two years of college (Buehler et al.). The sample's educational status was similar to the average educational attainment of European Americans, over the age of twenty-four, in the United States at

that time (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b, Table P148A of SF4). The median household income for families in the sample was \$70,000. This was somewhat higher than the median household income of married couples in the United States in 2001 (\$60, 471; DeNavas-Walt & Cleveland, 2002). At the time of initial participation in the study, the sixth-grade students ranged from 11- to 14-years old ($M = 11.86$, $SD = .69$) (Buehler, 2006).

Procedure

Consent

Parents and children gave written consent for children to fill out initial questionnaires about their family life when the children were in sixth grade. Children and parents that were eligible for inclusion then gave written consent and assent to participate, and remain, in the study (Buehler & Welsh, 2009).

Data Collection

Marital data were collected through questionnaires. In W1, couples were mailed questionnaires that wives and husbands were asked to complete independently. Questionnaires were collected when researchers visited couples at their homes. During these home visits, couples were also asked to complete a second questionnaire, which contained more sensitive information. Researchers were present to guarantee that husbands' and wives' responses remained private. Couples were asked to follow the same procedure and complete both questionnaires again three years later (W4). Families received \$100 at W1 and \$150 at W4 (Buehler & Welsh, 2009).

Measures

Coparental Disagreement

Coparental disagreement was measured at W1, using husbands' and wives' reports on the seven-items from the Coparental Relationship Variables scale (Ahrons, 1983). Coparental disagreement was assessed as a dyadic construct; therefore, wives' and husbands' reports were aggregated to create a single score. Dimensions of coparenting were conceptualized in the current study as a couple's shared family dynamic (Mangelsdorf et al., 2011). Husbands and wives were asked to rate how often they disagreed with their spouses on topics related to childrearing, using a five-point scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*). Sample items included: "How often do you and your spouse disagree on children's discipline" and "How often do you and your spouse disagree on physical care of your child(ren)." (See Appendix A for a list of all items). Cronbach's alphas for coparental disagreement were .74 for wives and .80 for husbands.

Coparental Support

Coparental support was measured at W1, using husbands' and wives' reports on five-items from the Coparenting Questionnaire (Margolin, 1992). Coparental support, similarly to coparental disagreement, was assessed as a dyadic construct, based on the aggregation of wives' and husbands' reports (Mangelsdorf et al., 2011). Husbands and wives were asked to rate how often their partner had supported them in their parenting role, using a five-point scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*). Sample items included: "My

spouse tells me a lot of things about this child,” and “My spouse asks my opinion on issues related to parenting.” Cronbach’s alphas for coparental support were .78 for fathers and .81 for mothers.

Divorce Proneness

Divorce proneness were measured at W1 and W4, using husbands’ and wives’ reports on four-items from the propensity for divorce subscale (Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1983). Wives’ and husbands’ divorce proneness were assessed as separate measures (Cook & Kenny, 2005). Husbands and wives were asked to rate how often they had considered or taken steps towards divorce, using a four-point scale (1 = *not in the last year* to 4 = *yes, within the last 3 months*). Sample items included: “Have you seriously suggested to your spouse the idea of ending your relationship?” and “Have you discussed separation from your spouse with a close friend?” At W1, Cronbach’s alpha for divorce proneness was .89 for mothers and .80 for fathers. At W4, Cronbach’s alphas for divorce proneness were .90 for mothers and .82 for fathers.

Spousal Negative Marital Communication

Spousal negative marital communication was measured at W1, using husbands’ and wives’ reports on five-items from the overt conflict style scale (Buehler, Krishnakumar, Stone, Anthony, Pemberton, & Gerard, 1998) and thirteen-items from the Verbal and Physical Aggression subscale of the Conflicts and Problem-Solving Strategies questionnaire (Kerig, 1996). Self-reports and partner-reports were aggregated to create a single score for both wives’ and husbands’ negative marital communication. Including both self- and partner-reports reduces the probability of reporter bias (Birditt et al., 2010).

Husbands and wives were asked to report how often they or their spouses used specific types of negative communication, using a five-point scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*). Cronbach's alphas for husband's reports of their own negative marital communication were .89 and .92 for reports of their spouse's communication. Cronbach's alphas for wives' reports of their own negative marital communication were .89 and .91 for reports of their spouse's communication.

Education

Education was measured at W1, using husbands' and wives' reports on a single-item measure, assessing their highest level of completed education. The academic achievements of both partners have been shown to be a better indicator of socioeconomic status than annual earnings (Cherlin, 2014). Possible answers ranged from *no schooling completed* to *doctoral degree*. Couples were categorized as having either low or high education. Couples with low education were defined as including at least one member who had completed less than two years of college. Couples with high education were defined as having both members having had completed two or more years of college. Based on past findings that couples with less education are more likely to have low SES and be at higher risk for divorce proneness, when compared with couples with more education (Conger et al., 2010), the current study dummy-coded low education couples (50.72% of the couples) as 1 and high education couples as 0.

Analytic Procedures

SPSS (version 20) was used to calculate descriptive statistics. Multiple regression in AMOS 7.0 was used to test three models (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). Curved,

double-headed arrows were used to estimate the associations among the exogenous variables (the independent variables, control variables, moderators, and interaction terms), and also between the dependent variables. Straight, single-headed arrows were used to estimate the paths from the exogenous variables to the dependent variables (Keith, 2015). To reduce bias as much as possible when addressing missing values, the full information maximum likelihood estimator technique was used (Enders, 2001).

Testing the First Hypothesis

In the first model, AMOS was used to calculate the unique, direct effects of W1 coparental disagreement and support on changes in wives' and husbands' W4 divorce proneness. Wives' and husbands' W1 measures of divorce proneness were included in the model to control for baseline levels of divorce proneness. Partial or full support for the hypothesis was found if some or all of the following conditions were met: (a) if W1 coparental disagreement was associated with increases in wives' perceptions of divorce proneness three years later (at W4); (b) if W1 coparental disagreement was associated with increases in husbands' perceptions of divorce proneness three years later (at W4); (c) if W1 coparental support was associated with decreases in wives' perceptions of divorce proneness three years later (at W4); (d) if W1 coparental support was associated with decreases in husbands' perceptions of divorce proneness three years later (at W4). The significance level for all estimates was set at $p < .05$

Testing the Second and Third Hypotheses

The moderating effect of wives' or husbands' negative marital communication on the association between coparental disagreement or coparental support and changes in

wives' or husbands' divorce proneness were tested separately in the second and third models, respectively. In both models, the independent variables and moderators were mean-centered. It is common to center continuous variables in models which test moderators because it reduces multicollinearity between the independent variables and moderating variables when testing interaction terms. It also has the additional benefit of facilitating moderator probing (Holmbeck, 2002).

Separate interaction terms were created for centered wives' and husbands' negative marital communication with both centered coparental disagreement and centered coparental support (Proulx, Buehler, & Helms, 2009). The interaction terms were included in the models as manifest variables. A significant association between the interaction and dependent variable indicated that spousal negative communication moderated the association between the independent and dependent variables (Hayes, 2012). The significance level for all estimates was set at $p < .10$. Work by Whisman and McClelland (2005) supports the acceptability of using a higher probability level when determining the statistical significance of interaction effects in order to increase power. Whisman and McClelland demonstrated that using a probability level of .10 increases the ability of researchers to detect critical interaction patterns which might otherwise be missed.

Partial or full support for Hypothesis 2 was found in the second model if some or all of the following conditions were met: (a) if centered W1 husbands' negative marital communication exacerbated the association between centered W1 coparental disagreement and W4 wives' divorce proneness; and (b) if centered W1 husbands'

negative marital communication mitigated the association between centered W1 coparental support and W4 wives' divorce proneness.

Partial or full support for Hypothesis 3 was found in the third model if some or all of the following conditions were met: (a) if centered W1 wives' negative marital communication exacerbated the association between centered W1 coparental disagreement and W4 husbands' divorce proneness; and (b) if centered W1 wives' negative marital communication mitigated the association between centered W1 coparental support and W4 husbands' divorce proneness.

Significant interactions were probed using the Johnson–Neyman (J-N) technique with the PROCESS v2. 16 Custom Dialog in SPSS. Finding significant interactions indicates that the association between the independent variable and outcome variables significantly differs across levels of the moderator (Holmbeck, 2002). In the present study, significant interactions indicate that the effects of coparental disagreement or support on wives' or husbands' divorce proneness are a function, in part, of spousal negative communication (Hayes, 2012). Probing is necessary for clarifying how the range of scores on the moderator influences changes in the strength of association between the independent and dependent variable (D'Alonzo, 2004). Researchers often test whether associations are significant at low, moderate, or high levels of the moderator. These categories are determined by testing the association with scores one standard deviation above the moderator mean, the value of the mean, and one standard deviation below the moderator mean. In practice, these points are somewhat arbitrary and may not be reliable indicators of significant cut-off points in the moderator continuum (Hayes, 2013). The J-

N technique provides an alternative process which eliminates the necessity of testing multiple scores in the moderator continuum by producing regions of significance. Regions of significance include all of the moderator values above or below a specific score that result in significant associations between independent and dependent values (Rast, Rush, Piccinin, & Hofer, 2014). In the current study, regions of significance included all scores on spousal negative marital communication that had a *p* value less than .10 (Whisman & McClelland, 2005). Statistically significant spousal negative marital communication scores resulted in changes in the magnitude of the associations between either coparental disagreement or coparental support and changes in wives' or husbands' divorce proneness (D'Alonzo; Whisman & McClelland, 2005).

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations between the independent variables and control variables are presented in Table 1. (See Appendix B for tables). All correlations were in the expected directions.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Coparental Disagreement and Support

To test the first hypothesis, the unique effects of W1 coparental disagreement and W1 coparental support on changes in both wives' and husbands' perceptions of divorce proneness three years later (at W4) were examined in Model 1 (see Figure 2). The first hypothesis also postulated that W1 coparental disagreement would be associated with increases in W4 divorce proneness for both wives and husbands and that W1 coparental support would be associated with decreases in W4 divorce proneness for both wives and husbands.

Partial support was found for Hypothesis 1 (see Table 2). Controlling for divorce proneness at W1, W1 coparental disagreement significantly predicted increases in divorce proneness over three years for husbands ($b = .15$, $\beta = .13$, $p < .05$). However, W1 coparental disagreement did not significantly predict increases in W4 wives' divorce

proneness ($b = .08, \beta = .05, p = .36$). W1 coparental support did not significantly predict decreases in W4 divorce proneness for either wives ($b = -.09, \beta = -.08, p = .19$) or husbands ($b = -.06, \beta = -.06, p = .28$).

Hypothesis 2: Moderating Effects of Husband's Negative Marital Communication

To test the second hypothesis, the moderating effect of W1 husbands' negative marital communication was examined on the unique effects of both W1 coparental disagreement and W1 coparental support on changes in wives' perceptions of divorce proneness three years later (at W4) in Model 2 (see Figure 3). The second hypothesis also postulated that W1 husbands' negative marital communication would exacerbate the association between W1 coparental disagreement and W4 wives' divorce proneness and mitigate the association between W1 coparental support and W4 wives' divorce proneness.

Partial support for Hypothesis 2 was found (see Table 4). The interaction of W1 coparental disagreement with W1 husbands' negative marital communication had a significant association with W4 wives' divorce proneness ($b = -.32, \beta = -.09, p < .10$). However, the association between the interaction of W1 coparental support with W1 husbands' negative W4 wives' divorce proneness was not significant ($b = -.10, \beta = -.04, p = .48$).

Regions of significance. The significant interaction between W1 coparental disagreement (CD1) with W1 husbands' negative marital communication (HNMC1) was probed with the Johnson-Newman (J-N) technique in PROCESS. The J-N technique was used to examine the exact manner in which HNMC1 moderated the association between

CD1 and wave 4 wives' divorce proneness (WDP4). Using this technique, no point in the range of centered HNMC1 scores was found to significantly moderate the association between W1 coparental disagreement (CD1) and W4 wives' divorce proneness (WDP4) (see Table 6).

Hypothesis 3

To test the third hypothesis, the moderating effect of W1 wives' negative marital communication was examined on the unique effects of both W1 coparental disagreement and W1 coparental support on changes in husbands' perceptions of divorce proneness three years later (at W4) in Model 3 (see Figure 4). The third hypothesis also postulated that W1 wives' negative marital communication would exacerbate the association between W1 coparental disagreement and W4 husbands' divorce proneness and mitigate the association between W1 coparental support and W4 husbands' divorce proneness.

Partial support for Hypothesis 3 was found (see Table 7). The interaction of W1 coparental disagreement with W1 wives' negative marital communication had a significant association with W4 husbands' divorce proneness ($b = .26, \beta = .09, p < .10$). The interaction of W1 coparental support with W1 wives' negative marital communication did not have a significant association with W4 wives' divorce proneness ($b = -.05, \beta = -.02, p = .65$).

Regions of significance. The significant interaction between W1 coparental disagreement (CD1) with W1 wives' negative marital communication was probed with the Johnson-Newman (J-N) technique in PROCESS. The J-N technique was used to examine the manner in which WNMC1 moderated the association between coparental

disagreement (CD1) and W4 husbands' divorce proneness (HDP4). When W1 wives' negative marital communication (WNMC1) was very low (10th percentile), low (25th percentile), or moderate (50th percentile), W1 coparental disagreement (CD1) was not associated with W4 husbands' divorce proneness (HDP4) (see Table 9). When W1 wives' negative marital communication (WNMC1) was high (75th percentile; $b = .18$, $t(302) = 1.84$, $p = .07$) or very high (90th percentile; $b = .27$, $t(302) = 1.85$, $p = .06$), higher levels of W1 coparental disagreement (CD1) were associated with higher levels of W4 husbands' divorce proneness (HDP4).

The region of significance can be seen in Figure 5, which graphically depicts the range of centered scores for W1 wives' negative marital communication (WNMC1) where the conditional effect of W1 coparental disagreement (CD1) on W4 husbands' divorce proneness (HDP4) and is not statistically significant (Hayes, 2012). This figure displays the 90% confidence bands for the association between levels of WNMC1 and the strength of association between CD1 and HDP4. Higher levels of CD1 were associated with higher levels of HDP4 when men were married to women who scored (mean centered) higher than .10 on WNMC1. This region of significance represents 34.44% of the men in the sample.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The current study examined the main effects of two dimensions of coparenting, coparental disagreement and support, and their interactions with spousal negative marital communication, in the longitudinal prediction of changes in wives' and husbands' divorce proneness. As hypothesized, coparental disagreement was associated with increases in husbands' divorce proneness and this relationship was moderated by wives' negative marital communication. Main effects were not found for coparental disagreement on wives' divorce proneness or for coparental support on couples' divorce proneness. The interpretation of the results, the strengths and limitations of the study, and future directions are discussed below.

Interpretation of Results

Main Effect of Coparental Disagreement

Model 1 tested the unique effects of wave 1 (W1) coparental support and disagreement on both wives' and husbands wave 4 (W4) divorce proneness. As expected, when controlling for baseline divorce proneness in W1, the correlations between W1 coparental disagreement and husbands' and wives' W4 divorce proneness were both positive. A significant association was found between W1 coparental disagreement and W4 husbands' divorce proneness. The association between W1 coparental disagreement and W4 wives' divorce proneness was not significant.

The current study's findings regarding the main effects of coparental disagreement on wives' and husbands' divorce proneness were unexpected. Research on the impact of coparental disagreement on marital outcomes has produced mixed findings regarding gender differences. In a longitudinal study, Don et al. (2013) found, for example, that, when not controlling for coparental support, coparental disagreement was associated with wives' reports of marital quality but had no impact on husbands' marital quality. The authors attributed this outcome to women placing a higher importance on their parenting role than men. In contrast, however, a slim body of work has argued that, in fact, men are more susceptible to coparental disagreement than women (McClain & Brown, 2017). Schoppe-Sullivan, Cannon, Brown, Mangelsdorf, and Sokolowski (2008) explained that, given that they are commonly the primary caregivers, women may utilize maternal gatekeeping in the face of coparental disagreement. Maternal gatekeeping refers to strategies used by mothers to either increase or decrease fathers' involvement in childrearing. In the role of primary caregiver, women often have the power to ignore their husbands' parenting opinions and instead make, and implement, their own parenting decisions. Not only do these maternal gatekeeping behaviors result in fathers being less likely to be involved in their children's lives, but they also influence men's assessments of their marital relationships. Men may perceive their relationships more negatively as a result of feeling as if they are on opposite sides from their wives. This may lead to increased conflict and stress, as well as reduced feelings of friendship, intimacy, and trust (Holt, 2016).

The lack of significance found in the current study, between coparental disagreement and wives' divorce proneness, may also be the result of the sample being composed of couples with children transitioning in adolescence. The majority of research on coparental disagreement has been conducted on parents of newborns or young children (Latham, Mark, & Oliver, 2017). It is possible that the current findings speak to specific gendered developmental paths of coparental disagreement on marital outcomes. Men and women may have different parental time periods where they are more susceptible to coparental disagreement. The parents in Don et al.'s (2013) study, for example, all had children under a year old. As new parents, women often have to deal with more parental responsibilities and stress than their husbands. This may make new mothers more sensitive to coparental disagreement and more likely to experience declines in marital quality than new fathers (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008).

Parenting roles may not remain consistent over time, however, resulting in possible changes to the gendered impact of coparental disagreement. Men and women may both buy into the traditional belief that mothers, unlike fathers, have an innate, instinctual parenting ability (Cherlin, 2014). This may make the fathers of young children more accepting of their wives' right to make parenting decisions when encountering coparental disagreement. As children age, however, fathers may take on more active parenting roles (McHale & Irace, 2011). As a result, coparental disagreement may begin to have a stronger influence on husbands' divorce proneness. The mothers of older children may be less threatened by coparental disagreement because they are more confident in their parenting role (McClain & Brown, 2017).

Main Effect of Coparental Support

As expected, when controlling for baseline divorce proneness in W1, the correlations between W1 coparental support and husbands' and wives' W4 divorce proneness were both negative. Neither association was significant however. Previous work with family systems theory shaped the expectation that an individual's feelings about their coparenting relationship would influence whether or not they contemplated ending the relationship (Zvara et al., 2015). When not controlling for coparental disagreement, research has linked more coparental support with reports of more trust and intimacy in relationships, influencing perceptions of higher marital quality and lower divorce proneness (Merrifield & Gamble, 2013). The finding that positive behaviors have a weaker impact on marital outcomes than do negative behaviors offers a possible explanation for the current study's findings. The positive impact of coparental support may not be strong enough to provide a barrier against other threats to marital quality and subsequent divorce proneness (Woodin, 2011). Even when supported by their spouses, individuals may feel less like they are members of the same team if they are unable to spend quality time with one another, struggle with financial concerns, or are forced to navigate unexpected challenges (Scott, Rhoades, Stanley, Allen, & Markman, 2013).

Research on coparental support, similarly to coparental disagreement, has primarily focused on the parents of young children and has neglected to examine its potential developmental path across marriages. It is possible that the lack of association found between coparental support and divorce proneness in the current study represents a change in the importance that individuals give to coparental support over the course of

their relationships (Pudasainee-Kapri & Razza, 2015). When men and women first become parents, their coparenting relationship may play a key role in how they assess their marital relationship. Over time, however, individuals may begin to prioritize considerations of other marital variables when evaluating their relationship. Coparental support may progress from decreasing negative marital outcomes in marriages to no longer influencing change in divorce proneness (Scott et al., 2013).

Moderating Effect of Husbands' Negative Marital Communication

The current study found that husbands' negative marital communication significantly moderated the association between coparental disagreement and wives' divorce proneness. When the moderator effect was probed, however, the T-N procedure was unable to identify a region of significance. A secondary analysis, examining whether there were statistically significant simple slopes across different levels of that husbands' negative marital communication, found the same pattern of results. It is possible that this indicates that there were no values in the continuum of moderator scores which altered the association between the two variables (Holmbeck, 2002; Rast et al., 2014). This results of the probe could also be due to a weak effect making it difficult to detect disordinal interactions (Whisman & McClelland, 2005). This study had adequate statistical power to find an interaction effect, and so this finding of a significant interaction might be a statistical artifact. It is possible that an unknown characteristic of the husbands' negative marital communication measure led to a statistical overstatement of its moderation effect on the association between coparental disagreement and wives' divorce proneness (Marks, 2015).

Moderating Effect of Wives' Negative Marital Communication

The finding of a main effect, between W1 coparental disagreement and W4 husband's divorce proneness, was qualified by the discovery of a significant interaction term (Barton et al., 2015). Results from testing hypothesis three revealed that, at high levels of W1 wives' negative marital communication, increases in the moderator exacerbated the association between coparental disagreement and increases in husbands' divorce proneness (Lewis-Beck & Lewis-Beck, 2016). This finding indicated that men, in relationships that were relatively higher in coparental disagreement, were more likely to experience divorce proneness, but only when they also had wives with higher levels of negative marital communication (Hayes, 2013). As such, for part of the sample, coparental disagreement was not associated with increases in husbands' divorce proneness. For another part of the sample (i.e., those with wives high on negative marital communication), coparental disagreement was associated with husbands' divorce proneness three years later.

The current study is unique in its inclusion of negative marital communication as a moderator between coparenting and marital outcomes. The finding that higher levels of wives' negative marital communication increased the positive association between coparental disagreement and husbands' divorce proneness, however, is theoretically consistent with adjacent research. Individuals who experience spousal negative communication are more likely to be divorce prone because they are less satisfied with the relationship, less confident in their ability to solve their relationship problems, and less committed to their marriages (Stanley et al., 2002). Relationships are particularly

vulnerable to spousal negative marital communication during coparental disagreement. Clashing over child-rearing issues is one of the primary sources of conflict between couples with children and has been cited as a key cause of marital decline (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003). The combination of both stressors seems to be particularly salient for husbands' marital assessments.

The previous description of maternal gatekeeping may explain why men are particularly vulnerable to their wives using negative communication. Husbands who already struggle with not feeling like they are considered equal parenting partners may become even more inclined to consider leaving their relationship when their wives use negative communication. The use of this type of communication may serve to increase husbands' belief that their wives are not interested in trying to cooperate with them to improve their marriage (Leggett, Roberts-Pittman, Byczek, & Morse, 2012).

Study Strengths

The majority of research on coparenting is primarily interested in how it effects child outcomes (see Latham et al., 2017). This focus stems from the belief that the coparenting relationship is less likely to influence the relationship between romantic partners than between parents and children (McHale, 2009). One of the strengths of the current study was its focus on the association between coparenting and the marital relationship. The findings contributed to the literature by demonstrating the importance of examining the influence of coparenting, especially coparental disagreement, on the marital relationship and marital outcomes. It is possible that previous research has underestimated this association due to the failure to distinguish between different

dimensions of coparenting or failing to include measures of coparental disagreement in studies of marital outcomes (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011).

Another strength of the study was its methodology. Given the very small body of research on the relationship between coparenting and divorce proneness, the longitudinal design used in the current study added to the literature by examining how family and marital dynamics changed over time (Fagon & Palkovitz, 2011). Rather than examining whether a prospective relationship existed between coparenting in wave one and divorce proneness three years later, the design of the current study allowed for the measure of change in divorce proneness by controlling for divorce proneness in wave one.

The use of multiple informants when assessing coparenting and spousal negative marital communication was also a strength. Past research on coparenting often relied on wives' scores to assess the coparenting relationship of both parents. Family researchers have argued that it is important to use data from both partners when measuring marital variables, given empirical evidence that individuals in close relationships are interdependent (Thompson & Walker, 1982; Wittenborn, Dolbin-MacNab, & Keiley, 2013). Collecting information from both wives' and husbands' allowed for a measure of the complexity inherent in the coparental and marital relationship (Lanz, Sorgente, & Tagliabue, 2018). Aggregating wives' and husbands' scores on coparenting was conceptually consistent with the empirical findings that the coparenting relationship, rather than individual perceptions of the relationship, was associated with numerous family outcomes, for both children and parents (May, Fletcher, Dempsey, & Newman, 2015). Similarly, aggregating both individual and partners' perceptions of negative

marital communication produced a dyadic assessment of the marital interaction, compared with only measuring an individual's or partner's perception (Lanz et al.).

The analytical tools used in the current study were another strength. The use of AMOS allowed for the inclusion of both husbands' and wives' W4 divorce proneness as dependent variables in all three models. Using AMOS, it was possible to control for the interdependence of partners' marital outcomes when calculating the specific pathways between coparenting and wives' and husbands' divorce proneness (Cook & Kenny, 2005). Using the J-N technique to identify regions of significance was also a strength because it is a more reliable method for probing moderation than the majority of other methods. Rather than hoping that selected values represent low, moderate and high levels of moderation, the calculation of regions of significance results in the exact cut off point in the continuum of possible scores where associations move from significance to non-significance (Rast et al., 2014).

A final strength of the current study was the relatively large sample size. The inclusion of over four hundred couples allowed for the statistical tests used in the current study to have more statistical power. This was especially important when it came to examining whether spousal negative communication was a significant moderator of the associations between coparenting and divorce proneness. Statistical tests with low power are far less likely to be able to determine whether the moderator effect is statistically significant (Hedges & Pigott, 2004). It is very probable that with a smaller sample size, the current study would not have been able to detect any moderation effect and would have falsely dismissed wives' negative marital communication as a moderator.

Study Limitations

The homogeneity of the sample used in the current study limits the generalizability of these results. Most of the families included in the study identified as White. On average, the families included in the sample were financially better-off than married Americans. None of the families included step-children. Coparenting processes and spousal negative marital communication, as well as their associations with divorce proneness, may be unique to the type of sample used in the current study (Don et al., 2013). The generalizability of the results may also be restricted due to the requirements for couples' inclusion in the study. The study's sample only included couples where both wives and husbands agreed to participate. It is possible that the willingness of both members to participate represent a specific underlying philosophy about family relationships. It is also possible that this same philosophy shapes the participants' coparenting behavior and proneness for divorce. The associations found in the study, therefore may not be found in couples in which one or both of the members were not willing to participate in the study (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008).

As described previously in the discussion, it is possible that coparental disagreement and support operate uniquely either in different stages of marriage or at children's different development stages. The findings of the current study provide evidence of a gendered association between coparenting and divorce proneness when children are beginning the transition to adolescence. However, given that the study did not examine changes in relationships across different periods in their marriage or their

children's development, it is not known if the impact of the coparenting relationship remains consistent over the course of marriage (Don et al., 2013).

It is possible that the pathways among the two dimensions of coparenting, spousal negative marital communication, and divorce proneness are more complex than assumed in the study. For example, it is possible that specific personal traits mediate or moderate the association between coparental disagreement and husbands' divorce proneness. Furthermore, despite the longitudinal design used in the current study, it is not possible to conclude that coparenting caused divorce proneness. The changes in both variables may actually reflect the presence of an unknown variable rather than an association with one another (Fagan & Palkovitz, 2011).

Conclusion

Despite its limitations, the unique characteristics of the current study make it an important addition to the literature. The findings of the current study demonstrate the importance for practitioners, especially those working with married couples with children in middle or high school, of questioning the wide-spread belief that the coparenting relationship has a stronger influence on women than men. Interventions aimed at decreasing divorce proneness should develop strategies for helping couples navigate coparental disagreements. Practitioners should stress the importance of individuals avoiding or minimizing negative communication during coparental disagreement, and work with couples to develop healthy communication.

Expanding on the length of time couples are studied may lead to the ability to isolate additional relevant variables. Including data on couples when children are young

would allow researchers to examine whether parent-child relationships changed as their children transitioned to adolescence and how those changes may impact marital relationships. This would also allow researchers to isolate whether or not coparental disagreement and coparental support changed during the course of the marital relationship, leading to changes in divorce proneness, or whether they remained stable, but had different effects on divorce proneness.

Future research should address the gaps in scholarship regarding developmental trajectories of coparental disagreement and support with divorce proneness. It should examine how the length of time in a relationship, or the age of children, uniquely contributes to the associations between coparenting and divorce proneness.

Further contributions to this area of study could also be made by expanding our knowledge on how spousal negative marital communication contributes to the association between coparenting and divorce proneness. It would be helpful for researchers to specify whether or not, or how often, negative communication was used during coparental disagreements. Examining the trajectory of spousal negative marital communication in marital relationships could also provide information on a potential source of change across relationships.

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APPENDIX A
MEASURE ITEMS

Coparental Disagreement

Parents completed 7 items about how often they disagreed on issues related to family life in the last twelve months from Ahrons' scale (1983):

1. Children's discipline.
2. Attending school or church functions.
3. Your child(ren's) dress or grooming.
4. Physical care of your child(ren).
5. Your child(ren's) behavior in public or at school.
6. Your child(ren's) behavior at home.
7. Money for your child(ren's) needs.

Response Scale: (1) *never*; (2) *rarely*; (3) *sometimes*; (4) *usually*; (5) *always*

Source:

Ahrons, C. R. (1983). Predictors of paternal involvement postdivorce: Mothers' and fathers' perceptions. *Journal of Divorce*, 6, 55-69. doi:10.1300/J279v06n03_05

Coparental Support

Parents completed 5 cooperation items from the Coparenting questionnaire (Margolin, 1992):

1. Tells me a lot of things about this child.
2. Fills me in on what happens during this child's day.
3. Says nice things about me to this child.
4. Asks my opinion on issues related to parenting.
5. Shares the burden of discipline.

Response Scale: (1) *never*; (2) *rarely*; (3) *sometimes*; (4) *usually*; (5) *always*

Source:

Margolin, G. (1992). *Coparenting Questionnaire*. Unpublished instrument, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.

Divorce Proneness

Parents completed 4 items regarding propensity for divorce (Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1983):

1. Have you seriously suggested to your spouse the idea of ending the relationship?
2. Have you discussed separation from your spouse with a close friend?
3. Have you thought your marital relationship might be in trouble?
4. Has the thought of separating from your spouse crossed your mind?

Response Scale: (1) *not in the last year*; (2) *yes, within the last year*; (3) *yes, within the last 6 months*; (4) *yes, within the last 3 months*

Source:

Booth, A., Johnson, D., & Edwards, J. N. (1983). Measuring marital stability. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 48, 381-387. doi:10.2307/351516

Negative Marital Communication

Parents completed 18 items regarding their own conflict style and verbal and physical aggression (Buehler et al., 1998; Kerig, 1996):

1. Call my spouse names.
2. Threaten my spouse.
3. Yell at my spouse.
4. Insult (show disrespect for) my spouse.
5. Tell my spouse to shut up.
6. Make accusations.
7. Become sarcastic.
8. Insist on own point of view.
9. Beat up my spouse.
10. Slap my spouse.
11. Strike, kick, or bite my spouse.
12. Push, pull, shove, or grab my spouse.
13. Throw things, slam doors, break things.
14. Blame my spouse.
15. Criticize my spouse.
16. Demand that my spouse change.
17. Interrupt my spouse.
18. Talk louder than my spouse so he or she can't interrupt me.

Parents completed 18 items regarding their spouse's conflict style and verbal and physical aggression (Buehler et al., 1998; Kerig, 1996):

1. Call me names.
2. Threaten me.
3. Yell at me.
4. Insult (show disrespect for) me.
5. Tell me to shut up.
6. Makes accusations.
7. Becomes sarcastic.
8. Insists on his or her own point of view.
9. Beats me up.
10. Slaps me.
11. Strikes, kicks, or bites me.
12. Pushes, pulls, shoves, or grabs me.
13. Throw things, slam doors, or break things.
14. Blames me.
15. Criticizes me.
16. Demands that I change.
17. Interrupts me.
18. Talk louder than me so I can't interrupt him or her.

Response Scale: (1) *never*; (2) *rarely*; (3) *sometimes*; (4) *usually*; (5) *always*

Source:

Buehler, C., Krishnakumar, A., Stone, G., Anthony, C., Pemberton, S., Gerard, J., & Barber, B. K. (1998). Interparental conflict and youth problem behaviors: A two-sample replication study. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *60*, 119-132. doi:10.2307/353446

Kerig, P. K. (1996). Assessing the links between interparental conflict and child adjustment: The conflicts and problem-solving scale. *Journal of Family Psychology*, *10*, 454-473. doi:10.1037/0893-3200.10.4.45

APPENDIX B
TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Bivariate Correlations between Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. CD1	---	-.38**	.16**	.21**	.22**	.20**	-.01
2. CS1		---	-.21**	-.17**	-.35**	-.27**	-.03
3. WDP4			---	.59**	.37**	.34**	.07
4. HDP4				---	.20**	.35**	-.01
5. WDP1					---	.58**	.01
6. HDP1						---	.00
7. EDU							---
<i>M</i>	1.95	3.96	1.27	1.20	1.20	1.16	0.49
<i>SD</i>	0.37	0.51	0.60	0.50	0.51	0.42	0.50

Note. CD = coparental disagreement; CS = coparental support; W = wives'; H = husbands'; DP = divorce proneness; EDU = education.

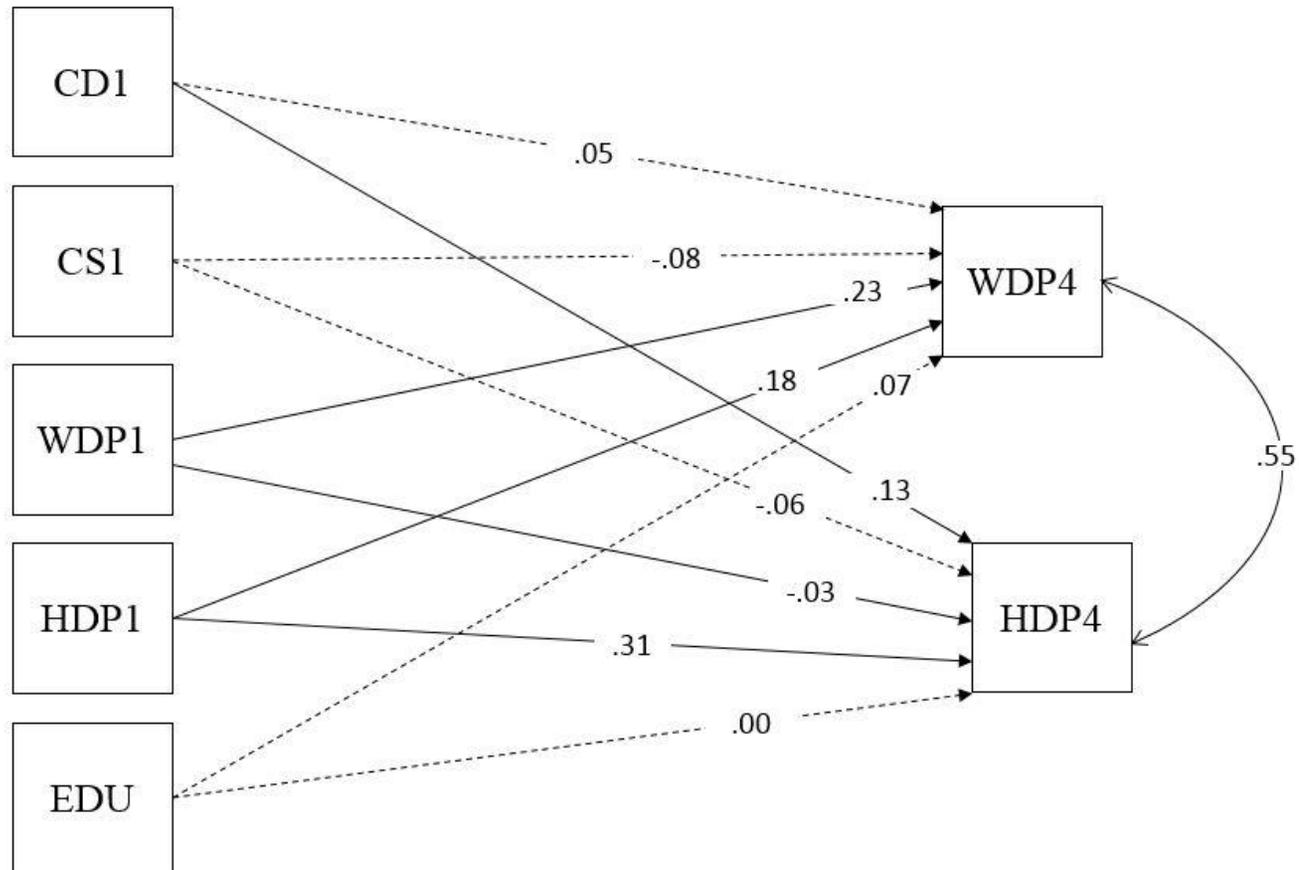
* Significant at $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2. Hypothesis 1 Latent Variables and Factor Loadings

Variable	W4 Wives' Divorce Proneness				W4 Husbands' Divorce Proneness			
	b	β	S.E.	<i>p</i>	b	β	S.E.	<i>p</i>
CD1	0.08	0.05	0.09	0.36	0.15	0.13	0.074	0.04*
CS1	-0.09	-0.08	0.07	0.19	-0.06	-0.06	0.06	0.28
WDP1	0.26	0.23	0.07	***	-0.02	-0.03	0.06	0.71
HDP1	0.26	0.18	0.09	.01**	0.37	0.31	0.08	***
EDU	.088	0.07	.064	.164	0.01	0.00	0.05	0.90

Note. CD = coparental disagreement; CS = coparental support; W = wives'; H = husbands'; DP = divorce proneness; EDU = education.
 * Significant at $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Figure 2. Direct Coparental Disagreement and Support Model Predicting Changes in Wives' and Husbands' Divorce Proneness



Note. 1 = wave 1; 4 = wave 4; CD = coparental disagreement; CS = coparental support; W = wives'; H = husbands'; DP = divorce proneness; EDU = education. Solid lines indicate significant ($p < .05$) associations. Dashed lines indicate non-significance ($p > .05$). Coefficients are standardized beta coefficients. For clarity of presentation, the correlations between exogenous variables are not shown in Figure 1 but can be seen in Table 3

Table 3. Correlations between Hypothesis 1 Exogenous Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1. CD1	---	-.38***	.23***	.20***	-.01
2. CS1		---	-.35***	-.27***	-.03
3. WDP1			----	.58***	.00
4. HDP1				---	.00
5. EDU					---

Note. 1 = wave 1; CD = coparental disagreement; CS = coparental support; W = wives'; H = husbands'; DP = divorce proneness; EDU = education. *** Significant at $p < .001$.

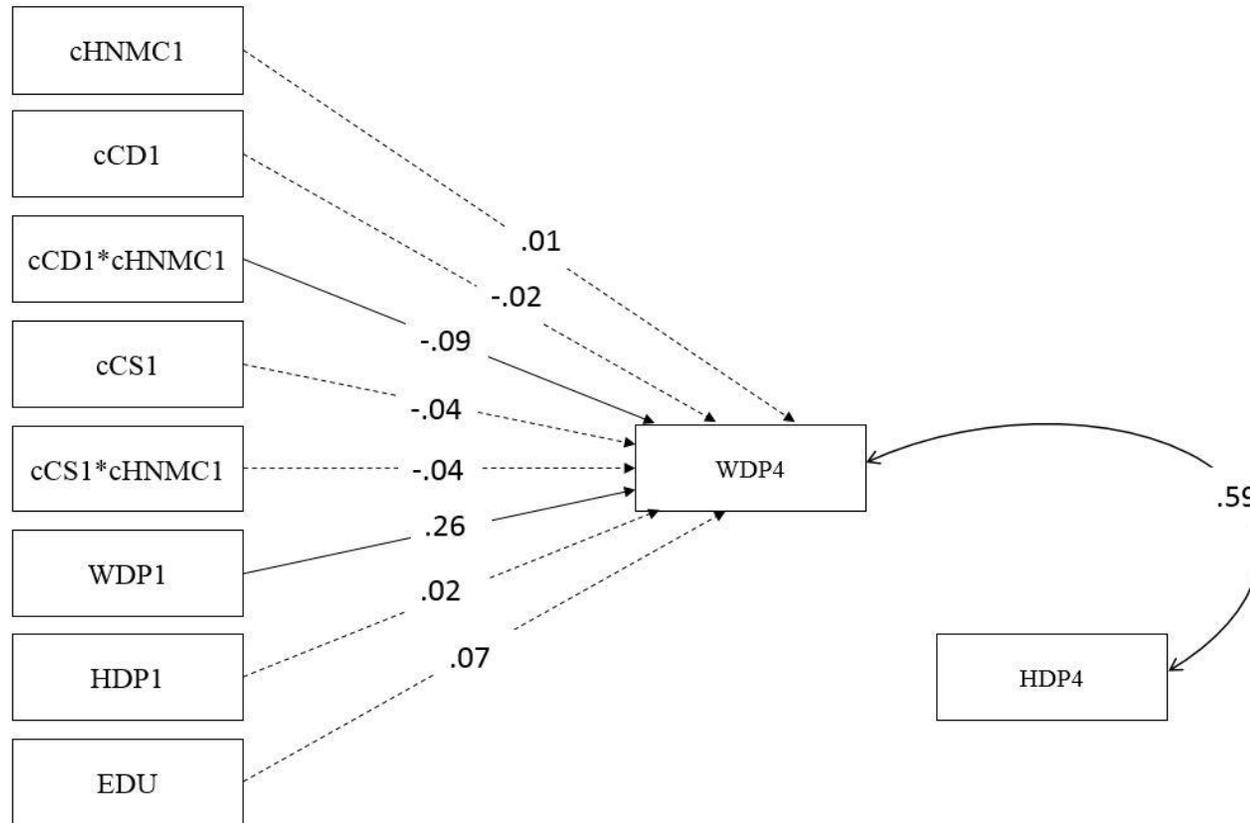
Table 4. Hypothesis 2 Regression Estimates

Variable	W4 Wives' Divorce Proneness				
	b	β	S.E.	<i>p</i>	
cCD1	-.03	-.02	.08	.67	
cCS1	-.04	-.04	.06	.47	
cHNMC1	.02	.01	.08	.79	
cCD1 x cHNMC1	-.32	-.09	.19	.09	
cCS1 x cHNMC1	-.10	-.04	.14	.48	
WDP1	.27	.26	.06	***	
HDP1	.04	.02	.08	.66	
EDU	.08	.07	.05	.12	

Note. 1 = wave 1; c = centered; W = wives'; H = husbands'; NMC = negative marital communication; CD = coparental disagreement; CS = coparental support; EDU = education. *** Significant at $p < .001$.

Figure 3. Moderated Coparental Disagreement and Support Model Predicting Changes in Wives' Divorce Proneness

06



Note. 1 = wave 1; 4 = wave 4; c = centered; W = wives'; H = husbands'; NMC = negative marital communication; CD = coparental disagreement; CS = coparental support; EDU = education. Solid lines indicate significant ($p < .10$ for interactions and $p < .05$ for non-interactions) associations. Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant ($p > .10$ for interactions and $p > .05$ for non-interactions) associations. Coefficients are standardized beta coefficients. For clarity of presentation, the correlations between exogenous variables are not shown in Figure 2, but can be seen in Table 5

Table 5. Correlations between Hypothesis 2 Exogenous Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. cCD1	---	-.39***	.40***	.00	N/A	.23***	.21***	-.01
2. cCS1		---	-.33***	N/A	.13**	-.35***	-.27***	-.03
3. cHNMC1			---	.18***	-.12**	.32***	.35***	-.04
4. cCD1 x cHNMC1				---	-.49***	.13**	.18***	-.01
5. cCS1 x cHNMC1					---	-.21***	-.22***	-.06
6. WDP1						---	.59***	.00
7. HDP1							---	.00
8. EDU								---

Note. 1 = wave 1; c = centered; W = wives'; H = husbands'; NMC = negative marital communication; CD = coparental disagreement; CS = coparental support; EDU = education. ** Significant at $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 6. Conditional Effect of CD1 on WDP4 at Values of HNMC1

Percentile	HNMC1	Effect	S.E.	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
10 th	-.43	.08	.11	.73	.46
25 th	-.29	.05	.09	.56	.58
50 th	-.07	.00	.08	.05	.96
75 th	.21	-.05	.10	-.53	.60
90 th	.48	-.11	.15	-.76	.44

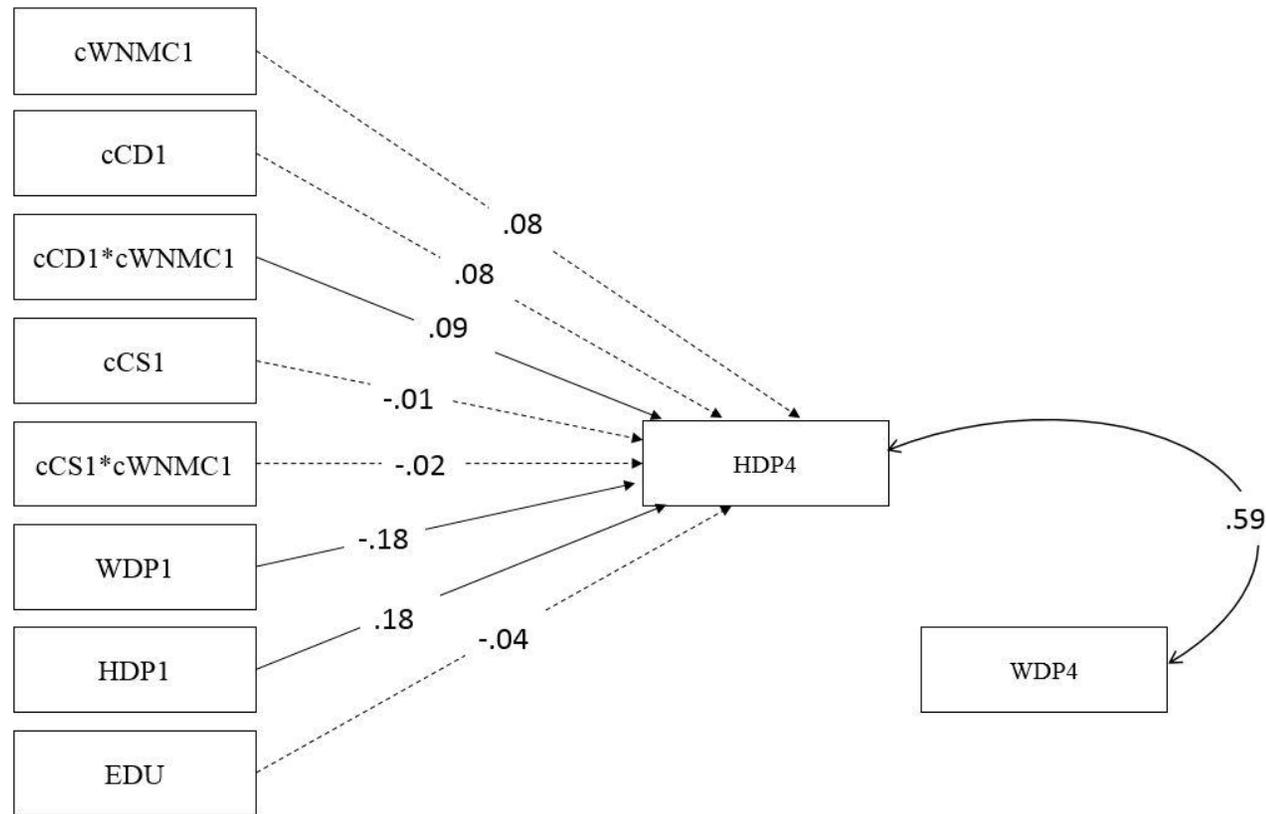
Note. CD1 = W1 coparental disagreement; WDP4 = W4 wives' divorce proneness; HNMC1 = W1 husbands' negative marital communication; CD1 and HNMC1 were both centered.

Table 7. Hypothesis 3 Regression Estimates

W4 Husbands' Divorce Proneness				
Variable	b	β	S.E.	<i>p</i>
cCD1	.10	.08	.07	.14
cCS1	-.01	-.01	.05	.78
cWNMC1	.10	.08	.06	.13
cCD1 x cWNMC1	.26	.09	.15	.08
cCS1 x cWNMC1	-.05	-.02	.11	.65
WDP1	-.16	-.18	.05	.00
HDP1	.21	.18	.07	.00
EDU	-.04	-.04	.04	.37

Note. 1 = wave 1; c = centered; W = wives'; H = husbands'; NMC = negative marital communication; CD = coparental disagreement; CS = coparental support; EDU = education.

Figure 4. Moderated Coparental Disagreement and Support Model Predicting Changes in Husbands' Divorce Proneness



Note. 1 = wave 1; 4 = wave 4; c = centered; W = wives'; H = husbands'; NMC = negative marital communication; CD = coparental disagreement; CS = coparental support; EDU = education. Solid lines indicate significant ($p < .10$ for interactions and $p < .05$ for non-interactions) associations. Dashed lines indicate nonsignificant ($p > .10$ for interactions and $p > .05$ for non-interactions) associations. Coefficients are standardized beta coefficients. For clarity of presentation, the correlations between exogenous variables are not shown in Figure 3, but can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Correlations between Hypothesis 3 Exogenous Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. cCD1	---	-.38***	.42***	.05	N/A	.23***	.20***	-.01
2. cCS1		---	-.34***	N/A	.10*	-.35***	-.26***	-.03
3. cWNMC1			---	.05	-.05***	.36***	.40***	-.04
4. cCD1 x cWNMC1				---	-.41***	.11*	.15**	.02
5. cCS1 x cWNMC1					---	-.19***	-.27***	-.05
6. WDP1						---	.59***	.00
7. HDP1							---	.00
8. EDU								---

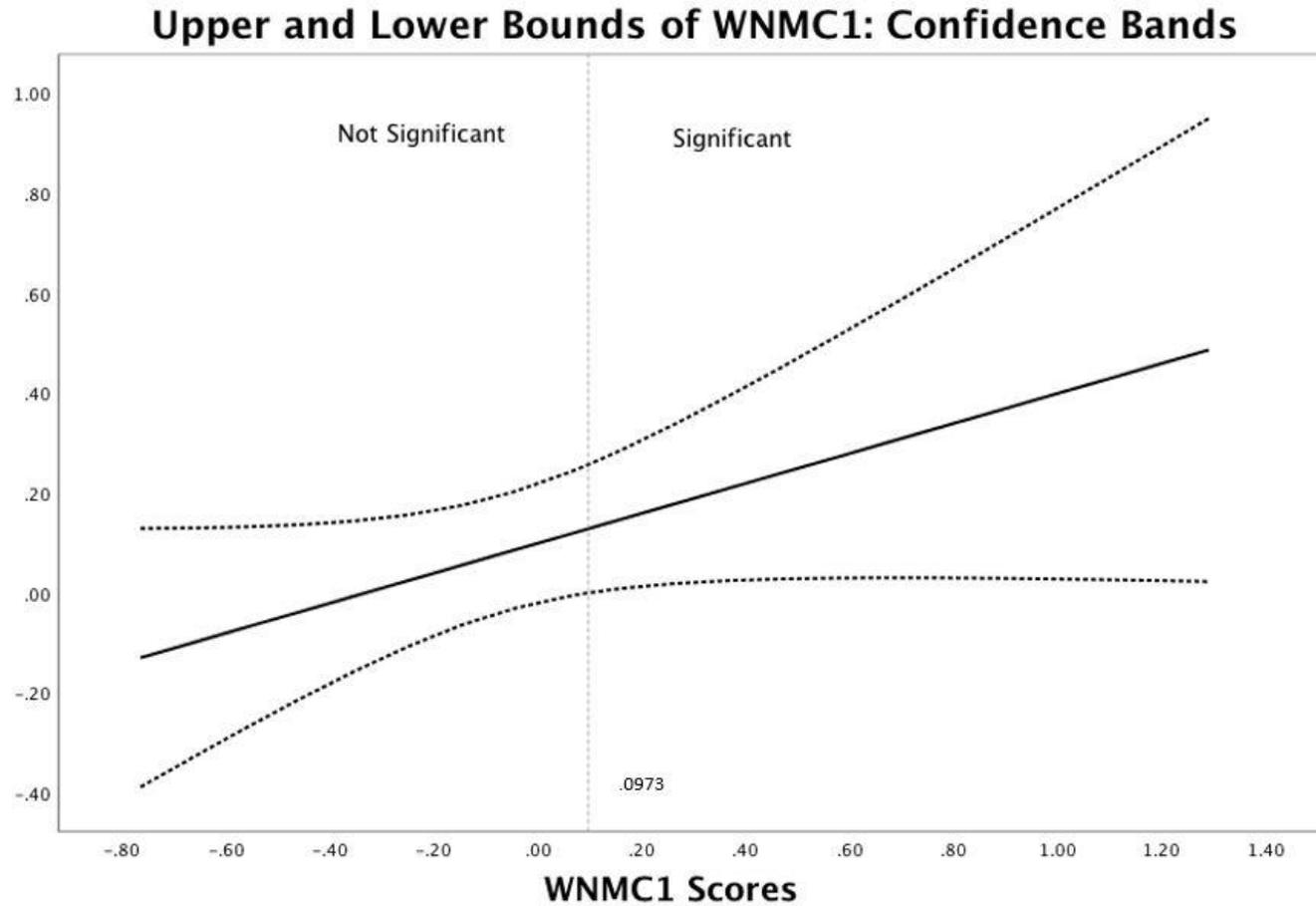
Note. 1 = wave 1; c = centered; W = wives'; H = husbands'; NMC = negative marital communication; CD = coparental disagreement; CS = coparental support; EDU = education. * Significant at $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 9. Conditional Effect of CD1 on HDP4 at Values of WNMC1

Percentile	WNMC1	Effect	S.E.	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
10 th	-.49	-.05	.11	-.42	.67
25 th	-.29	.01	.08	.14	.89
50 th	-.07	.08	.07	1.11	.27
75 th	.26	.18	.10	1.84	.07
90 th	.57	.27	.14	1.85	.06

Note. CD1 = W1 coparental disagreement; HDP4 = W4 husbands' divorce proneness; WNMC1 = W1 wives' negative marital communication; CD1 and WNMC1 were both centered.

Figure 5. Wives' Negative Marital Communication as a Moderator of the Associations between Coparental Disagreement and Husbands' Divorce Proneness



Note. *WNMC1* = centered Wave 1 wives' negative marital communication.