

# Couples Research & Therapy Newsletter

The Newsletter of Couples Research & Therapy AABT–SIG Spring/Summer '02

## CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

Notes from  
Annmarie, Kristi, & Mark.....1

Editor's Comments  
Susan Stanton.....2

Treasurer's Update  
Erika Lawrence.....2

Emerging Perspectives in the Study  
of Physical Aggression in Intimate  
Relationships  
Erika Lawrence.....3

Kudos.....6

The Effects of Divorce on Children  
Scott Stanley & Frank Fincham....7

Notes from  
Danielle & Lauren.....10

Self-Help Book Review  
Patricia Noller.....11

What's In Press .....12

### Couples Research and Therapy Newsletter

Editor: Susan Stanton, B.A.  
University of North Carolina  
Department of Psychology  
Davie Hall, CB# 3270  
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3270  
Phone: (919) 962-2212;  
Fax: (919) 445-4888  
[sstanton@email.unc.edu](mailto:sstanton@email.unc.edu)

## Notes from the Triumvirate

### SIG Co-Presidents' Column

We are pleased to be writing our first column for the SIG newsletter. At the SIG meeting in November the members of the SIG decided to install three co-presidents. This marks the first time a triumvirate (Don, we hope you don't mind if we use this term instead of your suggestion) has been selected to lead the SIG. Each of us has found being a triumvir to be quite a trip, but time will tell if the trial of the triarchy results in triumph or tribulation. For those who do not already know us, let us introduce each triumvir of the triumvirate with their SIG responsibilities, research interests, graduate institution, and contact information:

**Annmarié Cano**

*SIG Responsibilities:* record keeping and reporting to AABT in triplicate.  
*Research Interests:* marriage, depression, and chronic pain.  
*Graduate Institution:* State University of New York at Stony Brook  
*Contact Information:* Department of Psychology  
Wayne State University  
71 W. Warren  
Detroit, MI 48202  
phone: (313) 577-1492  
fax: (313) 577-7636  
e-mail: [acano@wayne.edu](mailto:acano@wayne.edu)

**Kristina Coop Gordon**

*SIG Responsibilities:* arranging preconference colloquium or workshop.  
*Research Interests:* Betrayal and forgiveness, social information processing in marriage, emotion regulations in marriage.  
*Graduate Institution:* University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill  
*Contact Information:* Department of Psychology  
University of Tennessee  
310B Austin Peay Building  
Knoxville, TN 37996-0900  
phone: (865) 974-3347  
fax: (865) 974-3330  
e-mail: [kgordon1@utk.edu](mailto:kgordon1@utk.edu)

**Matthew D. Johnson**

*SIG Responsibilities:* write newsletter articles.  
*Research Interests:* Developmental course of marital distress.  
*Graduate Institution:* University of California, Los Angeles  
*Contact Information:* Department of Psychology  
State University of New York at Binghamton  
Binghamton, NY 13902-6000  
phone: (607) 777-6315  
fax: (607) 777-4890  
e-mail [mjohnson@binghamton.edu](mailto:mjohnson@binghamton.edu)

Please feel free to contact any of us if you have a question or concern about the SIG. No matter will be considered too trivial.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

**CO-PRESIDENTS, CONTINUED**

We have heard many positive comments about the representation and schedule of marital events at the conference in Philadelphia. We would like to publicly thank Joanne and Jean-Phillippe for their efforts in getting more SIG representation on the program committee. We have already approached the new program director with the list of members from our SIG willing to serve on this committee in the future. We can also promise that we will try to keep the Christensen lab group in check at the Saturday night dance by continuing the tradition of Andy Christensen's symposium being scheduled on Sunday morning.

The SIG special event was successful despite a modest turnout. The talk on analyzing diary data with hierarchical linear modeling was informative and well received. We are still looking for a speaker or theme for this year's preconference SIG event. The SIG had decided to invite Bob Levenson, but he will not be able to make it. Kristina is looking for suggestions. There is also some discussion about where to have such an event with the suggestion of having it at Lake Tahoe being bandied about. Again, if you have thought on this please contact Kristina.

AABT headquarters has told us that all of our members must be members of AABT. This means that if you are a member of the SIG and not a member of AABT, you will have an important decision to make. We hope that you will choose the path of goodness and light and become a member of AABT. In addition, please encourage others to become members of AABT and be sure to have them note that they were recommended by the Couples SIG, because our SIG will get cold hard cash for each new convert. In the coming months we will continue to work on the preconference program and we hope to have a marital research guide to the conference for you in the Fall newsletter. Until then keep up the good science.

Annemarie, Kristi, & Matt

SIG Triumverate

# Editor's Comments

Susan Stanton

What an exciting time to be in the marital field! Lively debates, creative approaches to methodology, clinical revolutions, and thoughtful challenges to our theories confirm my first impression that we rock. What other field can combine the effects of divorce on children with unanswered questions in understanding violence in marriage plus a revitalized approach to a 30-year-old therapy all in one newsletter? What other SIG has members publishing on everything from anxiety in close relationships to testosterone levels during couple interactions to adult attachment in depression? And let's face it, what other group has leaders and members as cool as our co-presidents, graduate students co-presidents, treasurer, and our kudos recipients (I don't know about that editor though—she's pretty questionable)? I'm so proud to bring all that innovation and intelligence to our couples sig newsletter! I am particularly happy to see us asking questions about how we can apply our successful research to new interventions, methodological approaches, and conceptual understandings of couples phenomenon, as exemplified by the contributors in this issue.

As quiet and nervous as I was in volunteering for this job, shyness and subtlety is not in my blood, so here is a quick introduction to me (although it would be more fun to remain an intriguing, shadowy figure). I received my undergraduate degree at Williams College in Massachusetts and I am finishing my third year in the clinical psychology program and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where I am part of Don Baucom's marital studies group. Surprisingly, my research focus is on couple processes; in particular I am looking at the process of social support when one partner has an individual problem or goal. The most exciting part of my training will occur in three weeks when my lab joins Kurt Hahlweg and colleagues in Germany for an international "conference." Don assures me it is common practice to spend one day presenting material and nine days sightseeing during these international conferences. Who am I to question an eminent professor?

Please contact me at [stanton@email.unc.edu](mailto:stanton@email.unc.edu) to contribute to the Fall/Winter newsletter. It's never too early!

## TREASURER UPDATE

Hello all. First, thank you so much for responding to my recent e-mail requests for updated contact information. With your help, I have been able to update the membership directory quite a bit, and Ragnar and I will be working to update the membership list on the website. Thank you also for catching up on past and current dues. Our treasury now contains \$1727, which puts us in good shape for next year's convention. With regard to SIG membership: we currently have 68 student members and 87 non-student members, for a total of 155 members in our SIG.

Please be aware that everyone in the SIG is presumed to be on the SIG listserv and have access to the SIG website. Feel free to contact me if for some reason you are not connected to one of these resources and would like to be.

As always, dues are \$20 for faculty members/professionals and \$5 for students/1<sup>st</sup> year Ph.D.s. If you would like to catch up on dues, you can mail me a check made out to the "AABT Couples SIG" at:

Erika Lawrence, Ph.D.  
Department of Psychology  
University of Iowa  
11 Seashore Hall East  
Iowa City, IA 52242-1407

I look forward to seeing you all in November.  
Take care,

Erika

# Emerging Perspectives in the Study of Physical Aggression in Intimate Relationships

Erika Lawrence, Ph.D., University of Iowa

One-third to one-half of engaged and newly married couples report the presence of physical aggression in their relationships (Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001; Leonard & Roberts, 1998; O'Leary et al., 1989). Further, relationship violence is associated with a variety of physical and psychological disorders in the aggressors themselves, the victims of this violence, and the children who are raised in homes in which violence occurs (Follingstad et al., 1991; Kolbo et al., 1996). Unfortunately, there is a lack of basic research to inform intervention efforts targeting physical aggression in relationships. The purpose of this article is to present some unanswered questions and to provide a starting point for future discussion.

## What is the context of physically aggressive episodes in relationships?

Our ability to answer most of the questions we have tackled to date (e.g., prevalence rates of aggression in relationships, the severity and frequency of violence enacted by men and women, whether aggression continues over the course of a relationship) must be credited in part to the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS; Straus, 1979), the most widely-used self-report questionnaire in studies of physical aggression in intimate relationships. However, many of the unanswered questions may require novel methodological approaches in order to address them adequately. Questions about contextual factors in particular may require a move beyond questionnaire data. Behavioral observation has allowed us to get closer to the phenomenon of violence by allowing us to examine constructs such as skills and affect displayed during conflictual discussions. However, physical aggression typically is not seen in

these interactions so our observation is still one step removed from the phenomenon under investigation. A notable exception can be found in Capaldi's work (e.g., Capaldi & Crosby, 1997), in which she has evidence of couples actually engaging in moderate levels of physical aggression during their videotaped problem-solving interactions, allowing for a more direct investigation of the phenomenon. In the absence of this type of evidence, shifts in methodological approaches, such as the use of diary data or individual interviews, might allow us to begin to answer questions about the context of aggressive episodes themselves. For example, what are the antecedents/provoking factors triggering aggression for men and women? How are aggressive conflicts resolved? What attributions and/or emotional reactions do spouses experience before, during, and after violent episodes?

## Are factors such as psychological domination, fear and injury truly unique to battering relationships?

In addition to addressing novel contextual questions, we might begin to challenge existing theoretical approaches and implicit assumptions about violence. For example, researchers have begun to view domestic violence as encompassing two types of phenomena. The first type is alternately referred to as situational violence, reactive aggression, or family-only violence, and the second type as battering, proactive aggression, antisocial/general violence or

intimate terrorism (Chase et al., 2001; Holtzworth-Monroe & Stuart, 1994; Johnson, 2002; Waltz et al., 2000). In an effort to further distinguish between types of aggressors or aggressive relationships, hypotheses attributed to one type of aggressive relationship could be tested empirically in another type. For example, are factors such as psychological domination, fear and injury truly unique to battering relationships? Is aggression defensive for women in reactively aggressive relationships as well as in battering relationships?

## What is the developmental course of physical aggression in relationships longitudinally?

Lawrence and Bradbury (2001) found that couples that were initially moderately aggressive (e.g., pushing, slapping, throwing) were not at greater risk for marital dysfunction than initially nonaggressive couples. How could moderate aggression not place couples at greater risk for marital distress and dissolution? One possible explanation is that couples that are initially nonaggressive become aggressive over time; that is, they look like the moderately aggressive couples if their aggression is examined longitudinally. Alternatively, the moderately aggressive couples become nonaggressive over time, such that they look like the nonaggressive couples longitudinally. To address this question, it is necessary to move from the collection of cross-sectional to multi-wave longitudinal data, to differentially examine initial levels and rates of change in aggression, and to more generally move toward an understanding of the developmental course of violence over time.

**(Continued on the following page)**

## **EMERGING PERSPECTIVES IN PHYSICAL AGGRESSION, CONTINUED**

In terms of initial levels of aggression, one unanswered question is how couples reconcile the presence of aggression premaritally with the decision to get married. Perhaps behavioral or cognitive mechanisms are at work. For example, the aggression itself might have occurred in isolated instances and thus spouses are dismissing it as unimportant within the larger context of their relationship. Another possibility is that spousal appraisals about the aggression are generated within the context of appraisals about a larger construct such as emotional engagement, which could also include strong interspousal support and/or a strong sexual relationship. In this example, spouses might interpret physical aggression as one aspect of a globally passionate and loving relationship, which might then be associated with higher initial marital adjustment.

A related question is why spouses do not identify aggression as a problem, even though researchers have evidence that the aggression does have longitudinal consequences (e.g., Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001; O'Leary et al., 1989). Ehrensaft and Vivian (1996) found that over 60% of couples seeking marital therapy experience physical violence in their relationships, but fewer than 10% spontaneously report or identify the violence as a presenting problem. Spousal explanations for not spontaneously reporting the violence included: (a) it is not a problem, (b) it is unstable or infrequent, and (c) it is secondary to or caused by other problems. Most likely, spouses' templates for what is "normal behavior" may differ. Additionally, there is evidence that spouses report that physical aggression in relationships in general is not acceptable, although they concurrently are experiencing aggression in their own relationships. Why do such apparent contradictions exist?

An examination of rates of change in aggression over time may

provide critical information as well. For example, stable aggression suggests importance of biological or intrapersonal factors whereas unstable aggression reflects environmental or interactional factors. Establishing trajectories of aggression may determine whether we need to develop unique theoretical models and identify unique predictive forces. For example, social learning theorists have suggested that aggression increases in severity and frequency over time, and that it transitions from expressive to instrumental in function (e.g., O'Leary & Vivian, 1990). It seems likely that, although this model may apply to battering relationships, it may not be applicable to reactively violent relationships. Alternative theoretical models may be more appropriate for reactively violent relationships, such as an adaptation of a vulnerability-stress model.

---

### **...One potential intervention would be to target mate selection skills based on acceptability of aggression.**

---

Once initial levels and rates of change in physical aggression have been explored, we will be able to examine whether the factors that predict these two aspects of the trajectories differ. For example, potential factors for initial levels of physical aggression may include violence in one's family of origin or dysfunctional attachment patterns. In contrast, rates of change in aggression over time in spouses that exhibit initial aggression may be a function of the way in which spouses cope with stress or the type of negative affect expressed during conflict. A close examination of the development of aggression longitudinally, with a focus on both initial levels and rates of change over time, would allow us to begin to answer these questions.

### **How do we intervene in violent relationships?**

An understanding of the risk factors suggested above could inform intervention efforts as well as theoretical models. For example, if intrapersonal factors such as family of origin violence and attributions toward relationship violence are strong contributors to violence trajectories, one potential intervention would be to target mate selection skills based on acceptability of aggression. Perhaps both people in reactively aggressive relationships find aggression acceptable and choose mates based on that expectation. Alternatively, some partners may not have been physically aggressive before they entered the relationship. In that case, the aggression would have a different antecedent or cause.

Moreover, from a practical standpoint, reactively aggressive and battering relationships probably differ in the extent to which intervention might successfully decrease the aggression. Existing treatment programs targeting batterers suffer from high rates of attrition and relatively low rates of effectiveness (e.g., Hamberger & Hastings, 1993; Rosenfeld, 1992). Researchers and clinicians are beginning to suggest that male batterers cannot be effectively rehabilitated and should instead be incarcerated for life (e.g., Jacobson, 1997). Regardless of one's stance on the treatment of male batterers, it is evident that treating these men is at best extremely difficult. Further, given that male batterers have been diagnosed as having antisocial personality traits (e.g., Holtzworth-Munroe & Stuart, 1994), it seems likely that prevention of battering also would be difficult. More promising are programs undertaken early in relationships to decrease reactive violence. For example, Avery-Leaf et al. (1997) piloted a prevention program in high schools targeting attitudes toward dating aggression. Markman et al. (1993) implemented a prevention program in which they teach constructive ways to handle marital conflict,

**(Continued on the following page)**

## **EMERGING PERSPECTIVES IN PHYSICAL AGGRESSION, CONTINUED**

although the program's effectiveness in preventing physical aggression is still being determined. Overall, however, few violence prevention programs have been implemented or tested empirically. Basic research on battering and reactive violence can be used as a stepping stone toward the development and dissemination of community-wide prevention programs targeting different types of violence and their individual and dyadic correlates and consequences.

### Why is it that, even when aggression decreases or desists over time, marital dysfunction still occurs?

Lawrence and Bradbury (2001) found that couples that were initially moderately aggressive maintained low levels of aggression over time but did not become severely distressed and did not divorce any more than nonaggressive couples did. In contrast, couples in relationships initially marked by severe aggression stopped or markedly decreased their aggressive behavior by the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of marriage, but both spouses still became severely distressed or divorced over time. What can we make of this surprising finding? Potential pathways may be behavioral or cognitive in nature. Behaviorally, it is possible that, for severely aggressive couples, emotional disengagement mediates the link between aggression cessation and marital dysfunction. That is, spouses may desist in their aggressive behavior in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of marriage but not know how to behave during conflict, possibly as a function of poor conflict resolution models and/or familial divorce. Consequently, spouses in such relationships may emotionally withdraw on a global scale, leading to declines in physical aggression, conflict, interspousal support, and intimacy. In contrast, spouses in moderately aggressive relationships may maintain low levels of physical aggression but concurrently maintain

supportive and intimate behaviors, allowing them to continue feeling emotionally engaged and maritally satisfied despite the presence of physical aggression. An alternative behavioral pathway might be that, for severely aggressive couples, psychological aggression mediates the link between aggression cessation and marital dysfunction. That is, spouses may desist in their physically aggressive behavior in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of marriage but, in the absence of alternative models for managing conflict, wind up replacing the physical aggression with psychological aggression. Given that psychological aggression has been found to be extremely damaging to some aspects of individual adjustment (e.g., Arias & Pape, 2001), it seems likely that increased psychological aggression would contribute to declines in marital adjustment as well. In contrast, spouses in moderately aggressive relationships may maintain low levels of physical aggression but also maintain low levels of psychological aggression, so they do not experience marital decline.

### **Spouses in [severely aggressive] relationships may emotionally withdraw on a global scale, leading to declines in physical aggression, conflict, interspousal support, and intimacy.**

A cognitive mechanism such as spousal attributions toward relationship violence also might mediate the link between declines in physical aggression and declines in marital adjustment. Perhaps the aggression subsides but cognitive attributions are different for spouses in moderately versus severely aggressive relationships and these cognitions are maintained. That is, even though the aggression stops the damage has already been done at the cognitive level. This pathway would suggest that attributions toward violence differ for spouses in

moderate versus severely aggressive relationships as opposed to those in aggressive versus nonaggressive relationships. That is, the key factor would be that the severe aggression occurred at all, regardless of its later desistance. Another possible way that cognitions might mediate this link is through a change in attributions toward violence after the violence itself has subsided. Specifically, once the violence stops, spouses may feel safer to think about and challenge their assumptions about relationship violence. For example, cognitive dissonance may be a factor when aggression is present but once it has desisted, spouses are better able to challenge their attributions toward violence; consequently, their attributions toward relationship violence become increasingly negative and marital dysfunction increases.

### How much are existing, established findings in the field affected by the possibility that violence is present in our samples?

Most of this article has been focused on unanswered questions about aggression in relationships and how best to conceptualize this phenomenon. However, our knowledge of the role of aggression in relationships necessarily affects our understanding of relationships more broadly. A strong example of this can be found in Holtzworth-Monroe and Hutchinson's (1993) paper, in which they suggested that violence accounts for the association between attributions and marital adjustment. Although a subsequent paper by Fincham et al. (1997) presented contradictory evidence, Holtzworth-Monroe's approach is notable. Specifically, knowing something about aggression changes how we think about marital adjustment and associations involving this adjustment.

Hopefully, the ideas put forth in this article serve to trigger discussions about the direction the marital violence field, and research on intimate relationships more broadly, might take over the next decade.

**(References on following page)**

## References

- Arias, I. & Pape, K.T. (2001). Psychological abuse: Implications for adjustment and commitment to leave violent partners. In O'Leary, K.D. & Maiuro, R.D. (Eds.), *Psychological abuse in violent domestic relations* (pp. 137-151). NY: Springer.
- Avery-Leaf, S., Cascardi, M., O'Leary, K.D. & Cano, A. (1997). Efficacy of a dating violence prevention program on attitudes justifying aggression. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 21*, 11-17.
- Capaldi, D.M. & Crosby, L. (1997). Observed and reported psychological and physical aggression in young, at-risk couples. *Social Development, 6*, 184-206.
- Chase, K.A., O'Leary, K.D. & Heyman, R.E. (2001). Categorizing partner-violent men within the reactive-proactive typology model. *JCCP, 69*, 567-572.
- Ehrensaft, M.K. & Vivian, D. (1996). Spouses' reasons for not reporting existing marital aggression as a marital problem. *Journal of Family Psych, 10*, 443-453.
- Fincham, F., Bradbury, T., Arias, I., Byrne, C. & Karney, B. (1997). Marital violence, marital distress, and attributions. *Journal of Family Psych, 11*, 367-372.
- Follingstad, D.R., Brennan, A.F., Hause, E.S., Polek, D., et al. (1991). Factors moderating physical and psychological symptoms of battered women. *Journal of Family Violence, 6*, 81-95.
- Hamberger, L.K. & Hastings, J.E. (1993). Court mandated treatment of men who batter their partners: Issues, controversies and outcomes. In N.Z. Hilton (Ed.), *Legal responses to wife assault: Current trends and evaluation* (pp. 188-229). CA: Sage.
- Holtzworth-Monroe, A. & Hutchinson, G. (1993). Attributing negative intent to wife behavior: The attributions of martially violent versus nonviolent men. *Journal of Abnormal Psych, 102*, 206-211.
- Holtzworth-Monroe, A. & Stuart, G. (1994). Typologies of male batterers: Three subtypes and the differences among them. *Psych Bulletin, 116*, 476-497.
- Huston, T., Niehuis, S. & Smithy, S. (2001). The early marital roots of conjugal distress and divorce. *Current Directions in Psych Science, 10*, 116-119.
- Jacobson, N. (November, 1997). Controversies in the treatment of domestic violence: Deriving clinical implications from basic research. Presented at the 31<sup>st</sup> AABT Therapy Convention, Miami Beach, FL.
- Johnson, M.P. (February, 2002). Personal communication.
- Kolbo, J.R., Blakely, E.H. & Engleman, D. (1996). Children who witness domestic violence: A review of empirical literature. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 11*, 281-293.
- Lawrence, E. & Bradbury, T.N. (2001). Physical aggression as a predictor of marital dysfunction: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Family Psychology, 15*, 135-154.
- Leonard, K.E. & Roberts, L.J. (1998). Marital aggression, quality, and stability in the first year of marriage: Findings from the Buffalo Newlywed Study. In T.N. Bradbury (Ed.), *The developmental course of marital dysfunction* (pp. 44-73). NY: Cambridge.
- Markman, H.J., Renick, M.J., Floyd, F.J., Stanley, S.M. & Clements, M. (1993). Preventing marital distress through communication and conflict management training: A 4- and 5-year follow-up. *JCCP, 61*, 70-77.
- O'Leary, K.D., Barling, J., Arias, I., Rosenbaum, A., Malone, J. & Tyree, A. (1989). Prevalence and stability of physical aggression between spouses: A longitudinal analysis. *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psych, 57*, 263-268.
- O'Leary, K.D. & Vivian, D. (1990). Physical aggression in marriage. In F.D. Fincham & T.N. Bradbury (Eds.), *The psychology of marriage* (pp. 323-348). NY: Guilford.
- Rosenfeld, B.D. (1992). Court-ordered treatment of spouse abuse. *Clinical Psych Review, 12*, 205-226.
- Straus, M.A. (1979). Measuring intrafamily conflict and violence: The Conflict Tactics (CT) Scales. *Journal of Marriage & the Family, 41*, 75-88.
- Waltz, J., Babcock, J.C., Jacobson, N.S. & Gottman, J.M. (2000). Testing a typology of batterers. *JCCP, 68*, 658

---

# KUDOS!!!

---

**PROFESSIONALS:**

**James Cordova** reports two exciting events. On February 25, he and his wife Cindy had a son named Samuel James Cordova. Samuel and his sister Ariana are getting along famously. James also will be moving from the University of Illinois to Clark University with a promotion to Associate Professor.

**Crystal Dehle** welcomed Taylor Benjamin Dehle on January 15. Mother and son are doing well.

# The Effects of Divorce on Children

By Scott M. Stanley, Ph.D., University of Denver, and Frank D. Fincham, Ph.D., State University of New York at Buffalo

The effects of divorce on children have been hotly debated for decades, both because it is particularly difficult to isolate effects and also because the possibilities affect deeply held concerns people have for the welfare of children. Here, we review some of the reasons why it is difficult to gauge the effects of divorce on children and present some of the understandings that have emerged in recent years.

## The Gordian knot: Understanding Child Outcomes Associated with Parental Divorce

Divorce research is plagued by methodological problems concerning samples, measurement, and the interpretation of findings. This can be illustrated in perhaps the most well-known work on the subject, the research of Judith Wallerstein. She argues that parental divorce has far-reaching, serious, and relatively common long-term consequences that even affect children's adult relationships on such dimensions as security and trust. However, these conclusions emerge from the study of 131 mostly White upper-middle class children in California whose parents divorced in 1971. In addition to its small size, lack of representativeness, and the lack of a control or comparison group, her sample has been criticized for selecting families experiencing significant problems prior to divorce. Sampling issues in divorce research are not limited to representativeness. Given changed cultural attitudes towards divorce, generalization across time (cohort effects) as well as samples must be considered. Finally, because families self-select into the divorce population, they might differ from families that do not divorce in ways that could account for the presumed "effect of divorce" on children. Causality cannot be isolated from selection because family process is difficult to separate from family structure changes.

Two measurement issues greatly affect findings and interpretations in this field: the form of measurement and the selection of constructs to measure. Wallerstein, for instance, relies exclusively on interviews that yield rich observations rarely seen in the work of others. Others, such as Hetherington and Cherlin, have used standardized measures, accepting some lack of depth for the benefits of standardization and large samples. Sociologist Paul Amato, while noting methodological concerns with Wallerstein's research and favoring the use of standardized measures, has recognized the potential in the depth of her work for the development of ideas and hypotheses for further testing. For example, Wallerstein found many children of divorce have strong resentment of fathers who stopped providing financial support when no longer legally required to provide it, with many not helping to pay for college for their offspring. This could be a relatively common, negative effect of divorce that is not captured by standardized measures used in this literature.

As important as what is measured is what is not measured in research about divorce. This is especially true when results can have personal, and sometimes painful, meanings—where there is an understandable tendency to favor null findings. To find that children who are affected by parental divorce are not likely to have lives much different from those from intact homes could be reassuring to many. Yet thin measurement, or the absence of measures of some constructs, favors finding no differences when differences may be present. A recent article by Lawton and Bures (2001) highlights the fact that important differences can be found when attention is turned to dimensions often overlooked. They looked at the long-term correlates of parental divorce on religious identification and practice using the NSFH data set. Among a variety of findings, they found that children of divorce from various faith groups were roughly 2 to 2.7 times more likely to reject faith and religious involvement as adults when compared to those whose parents had not divorced. The authors conceptualized their findings in terms of community connection and continuity; that in many cases parental divorce lowers such continuity via decreased religious involvement. Not only is this study interesting for identifying an outcome rarely discussed in this literature, but it enriches theory as to why children of divorce are more likely to divorce as adults: they are less likely to become embedded in groups that can provide ongoing social support for couples in marriage.

---

**Children of divorce from various faith groups were roughly 2 to 2.7 times more likely to reject faith and religious involvement as adults when compared to those whose parents had not divorced.**

---

A central challenge for researchers in interpreting data on divorce outcomes has been to tease out effects that can be attributed to parental divorce per se from pre-existing characteristics. For example, Cherlin et al. (1991) use national, longitudinal studies in both in the UK and USA to show that the effects of divorce on academic performance and ratings of child behavior drop by about 50% when pre-divorce functioning is considered. (The degree of effect explained by pre-divorce functioning may be more or less than this 50% in other important domains).

There is compelling evidence that both pre- and post-divorce parental conflict is strongly associated with child maladjustment. Such findings are important because if parental conflict is the chief damaging element for children of distressed and divorce prone parents, it makes it easier to argue that children of high-conflict parents may be less

**CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**

**DIVORCE, CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE** likely to be harmed, and may even benefit, from parental divorce. This view that conflict explains of the most negative effects usually attributed to divorce has come under increased scrutiny by a number of sociologists who were once skeptical about negative effects of divorce per se. They have more recently concluded that there is evidence of negative effects over and above the effects of conflict or other pre-existing problems.

Sociologist Andrew Cherlin has been a strong proponent of the belief that most of the effects attributed to divorce were really reflected pre-existing problems in the family, and that children were not very likely to be harmed if parents dissolved their marriages. In his more recent work, he concludes that there is evidence of increased risk from divorce in and of itself (see bullets below). Likewise, sociologists Paul Amato and Allan Booth have changed their views based on what is widely regarded as one of the most extensive, well conducted studies of the long-term outcomes of children of divorce. Whereas they used to talk about such things as the negative stereotype that it is better for unhappy couples to remain together for the sake of their children, they more recently conclude that in up to 70% of the cases where parents divorce, the children would be better served if their parents remained together until they were grown.

---

**“Spending one-third of one's life living in a marriage that is less than satisfactory in order to benefit children—children that parents elected to bring into the world—is not an unreasonable expectation.” (Amato & Booth, 1997)**

---

This is all part of their reasoning behind the concept of the “good-enough” marriage for the average adult and child; that there are many marriages that are not deeply gratifying, yet nevertheless functional to the point of providing many of the key benefits of marital and family stability in the lives of the family members.

Norval Glenn and Maggie Gallagher have noted a further complication in interpretation of the effects of divorce (personal communication, April, 2002). The examination of pre-existing effects is often based on the assumption of divorce as a point in time event rather than a process often preceded by divorce proneness. In other words, to what degree can pre-divorce variance be apportioned into an element that would have been there whether or not divorce had ever been considered versus an element that resulted from talking and thinking about divorce? Are some effects of divorce occurring pre-divorce?

Over a decade ago, Norval Glenn (1987) suggested that there was a change occurring among social scientists. Many who had initially believed that changes in family trends and structure were simply the normal unfolding of cultural change were becoming more likely to conclude that something deleterious might be occurring on a large scale.

Yet, the data remain complex and feelings about their meaning run deep. While knowledge in this field has emerged over decades, we may be watching a field of study that is still in its infancy.

Notwithstanding the all too frequent gross simplification, overstatement or understatement of the effects of divorce on children, there is a solid foundation of what might be called first-generation research, or research documenting the existence of a phenomenon—in this case the child outcomes associated with parental divorce. The challenge for the field is to develop more fully the second-generation research, or research that explains the phenomenon by identifying direction of effect, causal mechanisms and so on. What do we know from first generation research?

#### Child Outcomes Associated with Parental Divorce: A Synopsis

Broadly speaking, there are increased risks for children that can be attributed to divorce per se, yet present knowledge suggests that most children of divorce do not suffer long-term dysfunctions. In other words, the risks seem to be increased but the effect sizes are rather small (discussed in Fincham, 2002) for commonly measured outcomes.

#### *What are the clear findings on child outcomes?*

- While 10% of children from intact homes had serious behavioral problems, roughly 30% of the children from divorced homes show such problems (Hetherington, 1993).
- As adults, 18% of children of divorce scored above a key cutoff on Rutter's index of mental health compared to 13.7% of those with intact parental marriages (Cherlin, Chase-Lansdale, & McRae, 1998). Cherlin concluded that 82% of children whose parents divorce will not experience lasting difficulties, though many will experience shorter term disruptions and problems in the two years post parental divorce.
- Level of parental conflict is a key determinant of the effects of parental divorce on children. Children of parents who engage in regular, high levels of conflict tend to do better psychologically and socially if their parents divorce. The types of conflict with clear, long-term negative effects include jealous behavior, quickness to anger, criticalness, moodiness, and stonewalling (Booth & Amato, 2001). Children of parents in low conflict, but unsatisfying marriages, are likely to do better if their parents remain together (Amato & Booth, 1997), and somewhere between 50 to 70% of divorces occur in low conflict marriages.
- Overall, the negative effects of both divorce and inter-parental conflict (without divorce) influence both boys and girls and all age groups.

**CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE**

**DIVORCE, CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE**

- Divorce increases the risks of depression for boys, regardless of mediating factors, due to the common scenario of the father leaving the home (Simons, Conger, Lorenz, Gordon, & Lin, 2000). Non-custodial fathers are less likely to discipline effectively and train their children, and have significantly less contact with their children, which may more adversely affect boys.
- When one partner is a child of divorce, the chances of a couple divorcing are doubled. When both partners are children of divorce, the chances of the couple divorcing are nearly tripled. There is evidence that these effects are linked to factors such as parental modeling, lower educational attainment, lowered stigma about divorce, and lower age at marriage (Glenn & Kramer, 1987).
- 70% of children from divorced families see divorce as an acceptable solution to an unhappy marriage, even when children are present, compared to 40% of children of from intact families (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).
- The relationships between children and their fathers are more often negatively impacted by divorce, with 70% reporting poor relationships with fathers compared to only 30% for children from intact families (Hetherington & Kelly, 2002).
- Children of divorce have lower levels of educational, occupational, and financial attainment—findings more attributable to changes in family structure than pre-existing differences in families (e.g., McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994).

*All things being equal, the children most likely to suffer the greatest, and longer term consequences, are those who experience the following (based on Amato's work; for a summary see [www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/divorce/effects.htm](http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/divorce/effects.htm).):*

- Greater loss of the skill and resources of parents as a result of loss of contact, and/or diminished parental competence as a result of the turmoil of the transition following divorce; e.g., emotional support and help in life.
- Greater loss of economic resources because of the divorce.
- Greater life stress connected with the divorce.
- Greater levels of exposure to ongoing inter-parental conflict.

Although most children of divorce do not manifest dysfunction, the relative risk for increased negative outcomes appears to be in the neighborhood of 2 to 3 times the comparable risk for children from intact homes for a number of important outcomes. So, if a child from an intact home has a 10% risk for some negative outcome, that risk for the child of divorce might be 2.5 times greater, at 25%. Some people conclude that these are huge increased risks while others focus on the 75% who are showing little evidence of long-term risk on currently measured variables of functioning. While children are not, on average, doomed by parental divorce, the effects can be substantial for a small minority when it comes to measurable dysfunction. Moreover, even if the outcome for a child of divorce is not outright clinical dysfunction, more common outcomes such as “distress,” reduced opportunity for education and financial attainment, or a greater likelihood of having a difficult relationship with the father remain concerning because of the large number of children affected by the increased risks.

*What can parents who divorce do to help their children cope?*

- Continue effective, involved parenting, and avoid hostile interchanges (Simons, Conger, Lorenz, Gordon, & Lin, 2000).
- Realize that the greatest negative effects occur in the two years following the divorce, especially for boys. This is the period of greatest disorganization for the children. More support, contact, and structure during this time when it may be most difficult to provide all three can likely mitigate some of the negative effects.

Conclusion

We have tried to convey how complex it is to advance understanding of the impact of parental divorce on children. Our goal was, in part, to provide an antidote to the oversimplified rhetoric that too often appears on this topic. With divorce (or the lack of parental team formation in the first place) being a prevalent experience in the lives of children, the stakes remain high. Significant funding for ongoing research as well as the development and refinement of preventive interventions is warranted. Although the effects of divorce on children remain controversial, primary and secondary prevention of risks is an endeavor least tainted by such controversies. Much of the work we all do is either directed at lessening the risks for marital distress and divorce in the first place, or the lessening of negative impacts of marital dissolution for adults and children in the second place. There is much work for us all to do.

**REFERENCES ON NEXT PAGE**

## References

- Amato, P. R., & Booth, A. (1997). A generation at risk: Growing up in an era of family upheaval. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- Amato, P. R., & Booth, A. (2001). The legacy of parents' marital discord: Consequences for children's marital quality. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, *81*, 627-638.
- Cherlin, A. J., Furtenburg, F. F., Chase-Lansdale, P. L., Kiernan, K. E., Robins, P. K., Morrison, D. R., & Teitler, J. O. (1991). Longitudinal studies of the effects of divorce on children in Great Britain and the United States. Science, *252*, 1386-1389.
- Cherlin, A. J., Chase-Lansdale, P. L., & McRae, C. (1998). Effects of parental divorce on mental health through the life course. American Sociological Review, *63*, 239-249.
- Fincham, F.D. (2002). Divorce. In N.J. Salkind (Ed.), Child development: Macmillan Psychology Reference Series. Farmington Hills, MI: Macmillan
- Forehand, R. Armistead, L., & David, C. (1997). Is adolescent adjustment following parental divorce a function of pre-divorce adjustment? Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, *25*, 157-167.
- Glenn, N. D. (1987). Continuity versus change, sanguineness versus concern: Views of the American family in the late 1980s. Journal of Family Issues, *8*, 348-354.
- Glenn, N. D., & Kramer, K. (1987). The marriages and divorces of the children of divorce. Journal of Marriage and the Family, *44*, 335-347.
- Grych, J., & Fincham, F. (1990). Marital conflict and children's adjustment. Psychological Bulletin, *108*, 267-290.
- Hetherington, E. M., & Kelly, J. (2002). For better or for worse: Divorce reconsidered. New York: Norton.
- Hughes, R., Jr. (1996). Internet in-service on children and divorce. <http://www.hec.ohio-state.edu/famlife/divorce/index.htm>.
- McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. (1996). Growing up with a single parent: What hurts, what helps. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lawton, L. E., & Bures, R. (2001). Parental divorce and the "Switching" of religious identity. Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, *40*, 99-111.
- Simons, R. L., Conger, R. D., Lorenz, F. O., Gordon, L. C., & Lin, K. (2000). Explaining the higher incidence of adjustment problems of children of divorce compared with those in two-parent families. Journal of Marriage and the Family, *61*, 1020-1033.
- Wallerstein, J. S., Lewis, J. M., & Blakeslee, S. (2000). The unexpected legacy of divorce: A twenty-five-year landmark study. New York: Hyperion.

---



---

## Notes From Danielle and Lauren

### Couples' Sig Graduate Student Co-Presidents' Column

---



---

Hello, Couples SIG! We would like to use our first column to introduce ourselves and pass on some of our ideas for our term as your student co-presidents. Danielle Black is originally from Pekin, Illinois (Yes, that is the real name of the town) and attended Bradley University for her undergraduate education. She worked for two years at SUNY Stony Brook with the Stony Brook Crew (e.g., Rick, Amy, Dan, and Sue). Danielle is currently a second-year clinical graduate student in Chris Murphy's lab at the University of Maryland Baltimore County. Lauren Papp is originally from Chicago and attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign for college. She is currently a graduate student in the University of Notre Dame's combined developmental and counseling psychology program. She works in Mark Cummings' research lab collecting and analyzing data from a longitudinal family study. We are still in the process of developing our ideas and goals as co-student presidents. We plan to post the very useful information collected by last term's presidents about internship sites that offer couples therapy on the website with links to the sites' web pages. In addition, we will send out information about the Couples SIG dinner at the next convention in Reno. We hope to meet many of the students in the SIG at a happy hour planned for the students before the annual dinner. We will have more information about the student happy hour and the annual dinner in the Fall newsletter. We hope to hear from other members of the SIG- especially the students! Please let us know what you think ... We're interested in hearing about other ideas you have (for the web page, newsletter, or the annual meeting at the convention). We would like to hear your ideas about information that would be helpful to students training to do couples research and therapy. Please drop us a line! Danielle's email: dblack@umbc.edu; Lauren's e-mail: Lauren.M.Papp.2@nd.edu

# Self-Help Book Review

## Reconcilable Differences

By: Andrew Christensen and Neil S. Jacobson. (2000) New York: The Guilford Press.

Review by: Patricia Noller, Ph.D University of Queensland, Australia

Based on earlier work of these authors on the development of Integrative Behavioral Couple Therapy, this book can be used by individuals or couples. The greatest benefit, however, is likely to be gained by a couple working through it together – perhaps under the guidance of a therapist.

The book begins with a demonstration that for any couple conflict there are three possible perspectives: his perspective, her perspective, and what an outsider would see. The rest of the book is divided into four sections: the anatomy of an argument, from argument to acceptance, deliberate change through acceptance, and when acceptance is not enough.

In the section on the anatomy of an argument, the authors focus on incompatibilities and vulnerabilities in couples. The term “incompatibility” is not used in the usual sense of a difference that cannot be overcome, but rather to include a range of differences, including “personality characteristics that are attractive early in the relationship [but] become problematic later” (p.34). Incompatibilities are seen as inevitable, because it is virtually impossible to find someone who is an ideal match for us on all relevant dimensions. A range of incompatibilities is dealt with, including those in the areas of love and power.

Vulnerabilities, on the other hand, are seen as coming out of our history, either the history of our present relationship or our past history in our family of origin or in previous relationships. The concept of “psychological allergy” is used to describe emotional overreactions to

situations to which an individual may have a special sensitivity. Partner negative behavior that touches on a vulnerability is most likely to evoke these intense emotional reactions. These vulnerabilities are seen as providing “the driving emotional force for our incompatibilities” (p.89).

In the last chapter in this section, the authors build a detailed anatomy of an argument. An argument is seen as involving three levels or stages: the initial problem or the content of the argument, the process of trying to deal with this initial problem, and the reactive problem created by the unsuccessful attempt to deal with the problem. Each of these stages is likely to involve intense emotions, particularly in situations where incompatibilities or vulnerabilities are affecting both partners.

In the second section, the authors explore the issue of accepting our incompatibilities, along with our (and our partner’s) vulnerabilities. The focus is on acceptance as an alternative to change – and even as a way of encouraging the change that we have been seeking. To quote “when you give up the effort to change your partner and instead accept him and his behavior toward you, he often makes spontaneous change in the direction that you originally wanted” (p. 194).

A distinction is made between acceptance and change. Change is made when the *offending* partner does something different, whereas acceptance involves the *offended* partner responding differently to the same behavior, for example, by not nagging, not being critical, or not becoming angry. A combination of these two processes is seen as the

most viable way to increased satisfaction in relationships.

Couples are also urged to create a story about their relationship problems, looking at those problems in terms of differences rather than deficits, in terms of description rather than evaluation, and acknowledging each other’s vulnerabilities. They are also encouraged to see conflict as an opportunity for sharing their vulnerable feelings and achieving greater intimacy. To quote, “Some couples experience their moments of greatest intimacy after conflict. They heal each other’s wounds with love. They demonstrate that conflicts don’t just alienate; they can also unite.”

The authors also suggest that couples try to objectify their problems by treating the problem as an “it” – something that they both face together rather than adopting opposing positions as in a tug-of-war. Seeing their problem “in the larger context of their gender, age, culture or personal history” (p.189), may help them to distance themselves from the problem and deal with it in a dispassionate way.

In the third section, the authors focus on deliberate change, acknowledging the frequent difficulties encountered in trying to change either our own or our partner’s behavior. They also acknowledge the even greater difficulty of trying to change thinking and feeling. Very often, these changes that we want can “strike at the core of incompatibilities or vulnerabilities that divide us” (p.210), and requests for such change may lead to a struggle *about* change, instead of a process *of* change.

# What's In Press?

**Chapman, A., & Dehle, C. (in press).** A comparative analysis of Integrative Couple Therapy and Cognitive-Behavioral Couple Therapy. **Cognitive and Behavioral Practice.**

The purpose of the paper is to provide behaviorally and cognitive-behaviorally oriented couples' therapists with a comparison of Integrative Behavioral Couples Therapy (IBCT; Christensen & Jacobson, 1996) and Cognitive Behavioral Marital Therapy (CBMT; Baucom & Epstein, 1990) that highlights similarities and differences between these two therapeutic approaches to treating marital discord. Both approaches derive from traditional behavioral marital therapy (BMT) but have emphasized emotional and cognitive factors more so than BMT. IBCT's contextual, or radical behavioral, viewpoint has translated to interventions that aim to establish a dyadic context supporting acceptance, empathy, and understanding through both acceptance and behavior change strategies. Rooted in social cognitive theory, CBMT also aims to increase acceptance, empathy, and understanding, but does so primarily through change-based interventions that target dysfunctional cognitive, behavioral, and affective responses and processes. It is our contention that understanding the relationship between the underlying theories and practices of these empirically supported approaches may improve their effective dissemination and use within the practice community.

Cohan, C.L., Booth, A., & Granger, D.A. (in press). **Gender moderates the relationship between salivary testosterone and marital interaction.** Journal of Family Psychology.

Higher testosterone levels are related to assertiveness and dominance. Given the relevance of those behavioral correlates to spouses' daily transactions, we explore links between testosterone levels and marital interaction among 92 newlywed couples. We assessed marital problem solving and social support transactions and collected saliva that was assayed for testosterone. We examined whether marital behavior was related via direct and interactive relationships with husbands and wives' testosterone levels. The link between spouses' testosterone and their behavior was contingent on the partners' testosterone levels. Husbands exhibited more adaptive problem-solving behavior and social support provision when husbands and wives were concordant for lower testosterone levels. In contrast, wives exhibited more adaptive support provision when spouses had discordant testosterone levels, such that wives had higher and husbands had lower levels.

Davila, J., & Beck, J.G. (in press). **Is social anxiety associated with impairment in close relationships? A preliminary investigation.** Behavior Therapy.

We examined the association between social anxiety and interpersonal functioning. Unlike prior research, we focused specifically on close relationships, given the growing evidence of dysfunction in these relationships among people with psychopathology. We proposed that social anxiety would be associated with specific interpersonal styles. One hundred sixty-eight young adults with a range of social anxiety symptoms were interviewed regarding symptom severity, interpersonal styles, and chronic interpersonal stress. Results indicated that higher levels of social anxiety were associated with

interpersonal styles reflecting less assertion, more conflict avoidance, more avoidance of expressing emotion, and greater interpersonal dependency. Moreover, lack of assertion and over-reliance on others mediated the association between social anxiety and interpersonal stress. Associations held controlling for depressive symptoms. Implications of these findings for interpersonally-oriented conceptualizations of social anxiety disorder are discussed.

Dehle, C., & Weiss, R. L. (in press). **Associations between anxiety and marital adjustment.** Journal of Psychology.

Cognitive-behavioral theories of marital functioning and contextual models of close relationships highlight the importance of proximal affect states, like anxiety, in couple functioning. Despite these assertions, research examining the role of state anxiety is noticeably absent from the literature on intimate relationships. The current study examines state anxiety and marital adjustment in a sample of 45 couples. Hierarchical regression analyses indicate that husbands' time-1 anxiety is predictive of both their own and their wives' subsequent reports of marital adjustment. Wives' time-1 anxiety was not predictive of either their own or their husbands' subsequent reports of marital adjustment. Discussion focuses on the role of husband anxiety in marital adjustment, and implications for further study of the contextual model of close relationships.

Fincham, F.D., & Beach, S.R. (in press). **Forgiveness in marriage: Implications for psychological aggression and constructive communication.** Personal Relationships.

Two studies examined whether forgiveness in married couples predicted partner reports of psychological aggression and constructive communication. Study 1 found that forgiveness of hypothetical acts of psychological aggression predicted partner reports of psychological aggression. Study 2 examined actual transgressions and found two underlying dimensions of forgiveness (positive and negative). The negative dimension predicted partner reports of psychological aggression but, for husbands, the positive dimension predicted partner reports of constructive communication. All findings were independent of both spouses' marital satisfaction. The implications for understanding marital interaction and future research on forgiveness are discussed.

Gee, C.B., Scott, R.L., Castellani, A.M., & Cordova, J.V. (in press). **Predicting 2-Year Marital Satisfaction From Partners' Discussion of Their Marriage Checkup.** Journal of Marital and Family Therapy.

This study tested whether the observed marital interactions of partners following a marriage checkup predicted marital satisfaction two years later. Additionally, this study examined whether recommendations to pursue therapy predicted subsequent treatment-seeking and whether changes in marital distress following the checkup remained stable over two years. Results suggest that the affective tone of a couples' interaction predicts later marital satisfaction. Further, receiving a treatment recommendation predicted subsequent treatment-seeking for wives. Finally, support was found for the hypothesis that changes in marital distress are self-sustaining.

Grych, J.H., Wachsmuth-Schlaefel, T., & Klockow, L.L. **Interparental aggression and young children's representations of family relationships.** Journal of Family Psychology.

Children's maternal, self, and marital representations were examined in 46 3 ½ - 7 year-olds using the MacArthur Story-Stem Battery. Children drawn from agencies serving battered women expressed fewer positive representations of their mothers and themselves, were more likely to portray interparental conflict as escalating, and were more avoidant and less coherent in their narratives about family interactions than children from a nonviolent community sample. Interparental aggression uniquely predicted representations of conflict escalation and avoidance after accounting for parent-child aggression, and the two types of aggression had additive effects in predicting positive maternal representations. The results suggest that witnessing aggression in the family affects children's developing beliefs about close relationships and may be a process by which these experiences give rise to later problems in social and emotional functioning.

Sanford, K. (in press). **Problem Solving Conversations in Marriage: Does It Matter What Topics Couples Discuss?** Personal Relationships.

To address the validity of a common procedure for assessing problem solving communication behavior in marriage, this study investigates the extent to which communication behavior is influenced by the difficulty of the topic being discussed. Married couples engaged in a sequence of four videotaped, problem-solving conversations and the topics discussed in each conversation were coded for difficulty. Hierarchical Linear Modeling was used to investigate both proximal and distal influences on communication behavior. At the proximal level, couples did not change their communication behavior in response to changes in topic difficulty that occurred across the four conversations. At the distal level, couples experiencing conflict over a highly difficult topic reported low

relationship satisfaction and used negative forms of communication behavior in all their problem-solving conversations, regardless of the issue being discussed. The relationship between topic difficulty and communication behavior was mediated by marital satisfaction.

Sanford, K. (in press). **Expectancies and Communication Behavior in Marriage: Distinguishing Proximal-Level Effects from Distal-Level Effects.** Journal of Social and Personal Relationships.

Investigates the relationship between married couples' communication behavior during problem solving conversations and their pre-conversation expectancies. Hierarchical Linear Modeling was used to distinguish between proximal-level and distal-level effects. A proximal-level effect is when fluctuations in a person's expectancies are followed by immediate changes in communication behavior. A distal-level effect is when a person's average expectancies across multiple conversations correlate with average communication behavior across multiple conversations. Married couples completed measures of pre-conversation expectancies and engaged in a sequence of four, videotaped problem-solving discussions. At the proximal level, wives' expectancies predicted communication behavior for both wives and husbands. Husbands' expectancies were largely non-significant at the proximal level. At the distal level, both wives' and husbands' expectancies predicted communication behavior.

Scott, R.L., & Cordova, J.V. (in press). **The Influence of Adult Attachment Styles on the Association Between Marital Adjustment and Depressive Symptoms.** Journal of Family Psychology

This study tested the hypothesis that attachment styles moderate the relationship between marital adjustment and depressive symptoms

among husbands and wives. In a sample of 91 married couples, ratings of the anxious-ambivalent attachment style moderated the relationship between marital adjustment and depressive symptoms for both husbands and wives. Additionally, ratings of the secure attachment style moderated the relationship between marital adjustment and depressive symptoms for wives, with a trend for husbands. These findings suggest a relationship between insecurity and a predisposition to depressive symptoms in marital relationships.

Sullivan, Kieran T., & Anderson, C. (in press). **Recruitment of Engaged Couples for Premarital Counseling: An Empirical Examination of the Importance of Program Characteristics and Topics to Potential Participants.** *Journal of the Family.*

The recent emphasis on prevention in helping couples to avoid marital distress may be limited by lack of participation in prevention programs by engaged couples. The purpose of this study is to understand what potential participants perceive are attractive characteristics in premarital prevention approaches. Eighty-six engaged couples completed questionnaires assessing demographics, personality and the relative importance of premarital program characteristics. The results indicate that leader characteristics, content, and topics such as communication, finances, and problem-solving are the most important elements of premarital counseling to couples. Differences based on gender and risk level are reported. Suggestions are made for more effective recruitment of couples for premarital counseling.

---

## BOOKS IN PRESS

---

Epstein, N.B., & Baucom, D.H. (in press). Enhanced Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Couples : A Contextual Approach. The American Psychological Association.

Enhanced Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Couples expands the boundaries of cognitive behavioral therapy with a framework that goes beyond partners' moment-to-moment interactions and takes into account the personal characteristics of the two individuals, their dyadic interactions, and influences of the couple's interpersonal and physical environment. This groundbreaking text moves beyond a focus on dysfunctional aspects of relationships to provide an equal emphasis on the contributions of positive behavior, cognitions, and emotions. In addition, individuals' discrete behavioral, cognitive, and affective responses are viewed within the context of broader relationship patterns and themes such as boundaries, distribution of power, and investment of oneself in the relationship. Chapters explore interventions for modifying behavior, cognitions, and deficits or excesses in emotional responses, ways to address individual psychopathology, strategies for assisting couples in coping with environmental demands, and approaches for enhancing relationship strengths.

Feeney, J.A., Hohaus, L., Noller, P., & Alexander, R.P. (2001). **Becoming Parents: Exploring the Bonds Between Mothers, Fathers, and Infants.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This book describes a longitudinal study of married couples going through the transition to parenthood. The couples were followed from the second trimester of pregnancy until the babies were six months of age. A control group of couples not expecting a baby was also included in the study. The study explores, in detail, the effects of first-time parenthood on individuals and their attachment relationships. Using interviews, questionnaires and diaries, we were interested in assessing parents' perceptions of stress, coping and well-being, their developing relationships with their

infants, and their ways of relating to close friends, family members and each other. The book provides a wealth of information about the diverse experiences of couples going through this very important transition. The changes that couples described in their relationships ranged from a sense of increased closeness and partnership to concerns about the lack of intimacy and affection. A unique aspect of the study was the potential to explore the implications of attachment security for the couple relationship and for partners' general psychological well-being during this life stage.

Noller, P & Feeney, J.A. (Eds.) (in press). **Understanding Marriage: New Developments in the Study of Couple Interaction.** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This edited volume focuses not only on conflict and negative interaction, but also on the processes by which couples maintain happy and constructive relationships. Some of the interesting issues explored include: how we can access spouses' thoughts and feelings as they interact with each other, whether husbands are really less empathic than wives, what are the varied ways that couples deal with the inevitable disappointments, and what factors within individuals or their relationship place couples at risk of marital distress. Relationship researchers from communication, social psychology, and clinical psychology contributed to this book. The book is divided into six sections: the effect of cognition on interaction patterns; understanding the importance of positive interaction; coping with disappointment criticism and betrayal; power conflict and violence in marital interaction; marital interaction at important transition periods; and interventions for strengthening relationships.

*END OF THIS NEWSLETTER*  
 Contact Susan anytime about doing a piece for the Fall Newsletter!  
 (sstanton@email.unc.edu)