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Parent–Child Relationships

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Relationships between parents and children are among the many close relationships that individuals experience throughout their life. Parent–child relationships are important because they are central to the lives of both parents and children, and provide one of the most important environments in which children develop as individuals and as functioning members of their culture (Hartup & Laursen, 1991).

In this chapter, we discuss special features of parent–child relationships against other kinds of close relationship. Consideration is given to issues of definition and conceptualization, especially about the core elements and dimensions of parent–child relationships. Included is a discussion of the distinction between interactions and relationships. Influences of the broader social context on parent–child relationships are outlined. The focus throughout is mainly on parent–child relationships from early childhood (about 3–4 years of age) through middle childhood (to about 12 years of age). Special attention is given to the child's contribution to parent–child relationships. Emphasis is placed on the active role of children, and therefore of parent–child relationships as bidirectional and co-constructed. Another emphasis in the chapter is on the diversity of parent–child relationships.

Throughout the chapter, the need to examine parent–child relationships at different levels is recognized. Dialectic tensions between personal/individual, interpersonal, and social or systems orientations have been noted (Levinger, 1994). This means that when discussing parent–child relationships, attention must be directed to the individuals as participants in the relationship, to the interpersonal aspects of the relationship, and to the broader social context and systems that influence parent–child relationships.

Some *themes* we develop are: (a) the definition and core dimensions of parent–child relationships remain in dispute, (b) parent–child relationships need to be seen as co-constructed, with due acknowledgment of the active role of children in this process, (c) the middle childhood period provides for a number of important developments in parent–child relationships, and (d) diversity is a strong feature of parent–child relationships.

Definitional Matters

Relationships

At the most basic definitional level there are issues such as "what is a personal relationship?" (e.g., Duck, Acitelli, Manke, & West, 1999), and "what are close relationships?". These definitional issues help in efforts to better understand parent–child relationships (Hinde, 1987, 1997). Included in Hinde's work has been an attempt to separate interactions and relationships, and to provide an overall model for the analysis and understanding of relationships.

Hinde's analysis of relationships. Hinde's analysis of relationships has been widely used in research on parent–child relationships. He argued that "a relationship involves a series of interactions over time between two individuals known to each other" (Hinde, 1987, p. 24). In turn, interactions involve a series of specific interchanges. Hinde's definition is part of a perspective that sees relationships as dialectically linked with interactions. Therefore, relationships comprise interactions, and two-way processes link relationships and interactions, so that interactions are in turn influenced by relationships.

Hinde's (1997) model of relationships was used to provide a structure for the present chapter. In this model, not only are relationships dialectically related to interactions, but interactions and relationships in turn arise out of psychological processes within individuals. Further, relationships influence and are influenced by the groups and broader society in which the individuals participate. Finally, relationships are influenced by the sociocultural structure of beliefs, values, and institutions, and by characteristics of the physical environment.

Hinde's model directs attention to the influence of characteristics and processes within individuals, in this case features of both parents and children. This suggests a consideration of how personal beliefs, values, and attitudes impact on parent–child relationships. It also directs attention to characteristics such as sex (parent and child), parent illness, such as depression, and child temperament and child disabilities as contributors to relationships.

Second, Hinde's model emphasizes the link between interactions and relationships. Although there has been general acceptance of the relationships/interactions distinction in research on parent–child relationships, there is a need for greater clarity on this matter. Researchers will often claim they are assessing parent–child relationships, but in fact study interactions only, and do not address issues about the extent to which or in what ways parent–child relationships are more than the sum of interactions.

This raises questions about what comprises relationships that could be over and above interactions. Relationships appear to be more global and long lasting than interactions, and relationships are usually defined and influenced by more than just the particular interactions. Features such as beliefs, values, commitment, goals, affect, and expectations are important in describing and understanding parent–child relationships. These features are not readily examined through specific observed interactions.

Interactions and interchanges occur at specific points in time. In contrast, relationships involve a past, present, and future. A passing comment to a stranger walking her dog is an

interaction, but by itself, this interaction is not part of a relationship. In the case of parents and children, interactions comprise individual elements in a continual flow of exchanges over time. Furthermore, each of the interactions, when considered alone, will have a specific theme or focus, for example, about the child's bedtime, or about their day at school. The relationship comprises large numbers of interactions, with different features or themes.

The research and theoretical literature on parent–child relationships appears to have directed little attention to questions about how interactions influence relationships and in turn how relationships influence interactions. Hinde (1997) emphasized the role of cognitive and affective process in the move from interactions to relationships, including expectations of relationships and interactions, and affective responses to interactions. For example, a harsh exchange and disagreement between parent and child in relationship terms needs to be seen in the context of expectations that the parent and child have of each other, their satisfaction with the relationship, and their affective response to the interaction (as well as to prior interactions of a similar kind). Researchers often include measures of both interactions and relationships, but then do not examine the link between these two levels of social complexity (e.g., Colpin, Demyttenaere, & Vandemeulebroecke, 1995).

In addition to factors at the levels of (a) psychological processes and individual behavior and (b) interactions and relationships, Hinde's (1997) model emphasizes a third level, (c) that included groups and society. It is at this level that ethnic and cultural influences are apparent as well as the ecological context such as the neighborhood. Throughout the chapter, factors at all three of these levels are discussed.

Before turning to an examination of parent–child relationships per se, two other areas of debate in the literature are helpful to consider in order to better understand these relationships. They are the nature of close relationships and the difference between "parenting" and "parent–child relationships."

Close relationships

Central among children's close relationships are those with their parent/s, and in understanding these relationships, it is helpful to consider in what ways this close relationship might differ from other close relationships.

Close relationships are associated with participants having strong influence on one another over an extended time period and in multiple ways (Berscheid & Peplau, 1983). Parent–child relationships display many of the core characteristics of close relationships. For example, they are relatively enduring, extending over time even without propinquity, usually have strong elements of emotional involvement and commitment, with mutual influence a powerful component of the relationship.

Although features of parent–child relationships overlap those of other close relationships, such as in the roles of affection and conflict, parent–child relationships have been argued to contain a number of unique characteristics (Maccoby, 1999). For example, Maccoby (1999) argued that parent–child relationships are not typical of "exchange" relationships because what children offer to their parents could not balance what parents provide. Further, they are not typical of "communal relationships" (Mills & Clark, 1994) because children typically do not take responsibility for their parents' welfare and young

children have a limited capacity to understand their parents' needs. Nevertheless, there are some communal elements in parent–child relationships, as shown in interactions that involve mutuality or synchrony.

Overall, it can be seen that parent–child relationships contain some elements of other types of close relationships. However, parent–child relationships are unique in a number of ways. The uniqueness appears to be especially associated with the level of commitment and obligation, in a relationship that contains aspects of asymmetry, but also where the child has considerable power. This matter of asymmetry and power will be revisited below in the discussion of dimensions of parent–child relationships.

Parenting versus parent–child relationships

Recent writing on parent–child relationships (e.g., Maccoby, 1999; Mills & Grusec, 1988) has emphasized the need to separate parenting per se from parent–child relationships. When parenting is the focus, attention is directed to matters such as parenting practices and styles (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Linked to styles, for example, is the discussion of different parenting patterns, such as authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive parenting (Baumrind, 1967, 1971). Parenting classified using one or other of these patterns might also be described in terms of the type of relationship that the parent has with the child. For example, an authoritarian parent would likely have a relationship with his/her child that involved demanding and controlling behavior from the parent. However, the child could either respond to this with compliance or with resistance. Therefore, once the child's side is considered, the overall relationship could be one of demandingness and compliance or of demandingness plus resistance and conflict. The point is that parenting considers mainly the parents' side of the equation, and if relationships are to be examined, then both parent and child need to be taken into account.

The importance of considering both the parent and child sides of relationships is also evident from the literature that deals with socialization. For example, Bugental and Goodnow (1998) as well as Parke and Buriel (1998) have much to say about parent–child relationships, but both chapters are written from a socialization perspective. In considering the family's role in socialization, parent–child relationships are central, but much of the emphasis is on the effects on the child of the relationship or of parents' behavior, goals, etc. That is, socialization focuses on parent's roles in influencing child behavior and development rather than on relationships per se.

Dimensions of Parent–Child Relationships

Parent–child relationships are complex and multidimensional. They vary over time, differ from the perspective of the parent and of the child, and differ from one situation to another, and so on. Depending on one's theoretical perspective, there are many ways to describe the central features or dimensions of parent–child relationships. For example, discussions of family relationships (e.g., Noller & Fitzpatrick, 1993) typically cover areas

such as affection, conflict, and power and control. When other close relationships are discussed (e.g., Canary & Emmers-Sommer, 1997), intimacy and control have been given special treatment. Duck (1992) emphasized communication, including verbal and non-verbal communication, as central elements in a relationship.

Hodges, Finnegan, and Perry (1999) raised connectedness/closeness and independence (autonomy) as major issues in parent–child relationships. Some of the key dimensions that Hinde (1997) highlighted include matters of reciprocity versus complementarity, conflict and power, and closeness. The discussion of closeness covered satisfaction and commitment.

Maccoby (1999) discussed important questions about the conceptualization of parent–child relationships in terms of intra-individual differences. The notion here is that within the overall parent–child relationship there are likely to be differences according to the context or domain of the interactions. For example, if the domain pertains to discipline, one set of "rules" or relationship qualities will be apparent. On the other hand, if the context is one of play and games, then another set of relationship characteristics will be appropriate. Contexts differ and the roles of parent and child are multiple. Thus, there are multiple parent–child relationships rather than *the* parent–child relationship.

A helpful scheme for examining the different dimensions of relationships is provided by the vertical/horizontal distinction (Hartup, 1989; Kochanska, 1992; Kuczynski, 1997; Russell, Pettit, & Mize, 1998). The same distinction can be drawn in terms of relationships qualities that display asymmetry versus symmetry (Hinde, 1997). Parent–child relationships have generally been assumed to be vertical. This is because parents have been considered to have greater knowledge and power than children. Accordingly, it is expected that parent–child relationships will be asymmetrical and complementary. In contrast, horizontal relationships are said to occur when there is reasonable equality between the partners (such as between peers), and therefore display symmetrical qualities. For example, Bugental and Goodnow (1998) quoted Youniss, McLellan, and Strouse (1994) in saying that "Peer relationships are marked by use of symmetrical reciprocity and guided by the overarching principle of cooperation by equals" (p. 102) and then contrasted this with the so-called unilateral authority or power asymmetry that is more characteristic of adult–child relationships.

The traditional view, therefore, is that parent–child relationships are typically vertical, asymmetrical, and complementary. There are two principle ways in which these vertical qualities are apparent. The first concerns relationships or components of relationships where parents are directive or controlling with their children. For example where parents instruct, correct, teach, or discipline their children. When these matters are the focus of the parent–child relationship, indeed parents and children are in complementary or asymmetrical roles. However, complementarity also can occur when parents are nurturing and supportive. Therefore, child-centered behavior, such as parents attempting to facilitate the interests and wishes of the child, also involve complementary and different roles. In this case, parents are being nurturant and the child is the recipient of the nurturance.

In contrast to a stress on complementary roles, recent writings have drawn attention to the possibility that parent–child relationships can contain more peer-like qualities (Bigelow, Tesson, & Lewko, 1996; Bugental & Goodnow, 1998; Kuczynski, 1997; Russell et al., 1998). In doing so, equality rather than complementarity is emphasized. Features of

parent–child relationships such as mutuality, synchrony, power sharing, and reciprocity become the focus. Terms generally used to characterize horizontal relationships are egalitarian, cooperative, symmetrical, fair, and collaborative. Throughout childhood, horizontal qualities such as these are increasingly evident, as children make greater contributions to relationships with parents. Two examples of horizontal qualities are power sharing and reciprocity.

Reciprocity, according to Hinde (1979), occurs when participants show similar behavior, either simultaneously or alternatively. Reciprocity has been described as a fundamental feature of human relationships (Gouldner, 1960; MacDonald, 1996), including parent–child relationships. By middle childhood, children are likely to reciprocate both positive and negative moods and behavior from parents. Children have power to accept or reject parental behavior and efforts at socialization or relationship formation. Some of this acceptance and rejection can be best conceived in terms of children displaying reciprocity.

Reciprocity between parents and children involving negative behavior and relationship qualities is likely to be associated with difficulties in the relationship. On the other hand, a system involving positive reciprocity and mutual cooperation has been argued to be a foundation for successful socialization (Kochanska, 1997). Maccoby (1992) and Kochanska (1997) described this system as a mutually binding, reciprocal, and mutually responsive relationship (Kochanska, 1997, p. 94).

Shared power is an especially significant indication of horizontal qualities in parent–child relationships. Child development from early through middle childhood means that parent–child relationships increasingly are open to possibilities for shared power. Shared power occurs, for example, when parent and child cooperate, negotiate, make joint decisions, argue about rules and then reach a compromise, and when they collaborate. To some extent "shared power" occurs because parents give up some of their power. Nevertheless, significant amounts of power also reside with the child in parent–child relationships. Mutuality is one way in which shared power has been investigated. For example, Lindsey, Mize, and Pettit (1997) studied mutuality in terms of the relative balance during parent–child play of (a) parent and initiations and (b) compliance to the other's initiations.

Clearly, there are a number of perspectives on the central dimensions of parent–child relationships. Dimensions to do with affection and closeness as well as control appear to be widely acknowledged. The vertical/horizontal distinction appears to provide helpful strategies for analyzing parent–child relationships. Nevertheless, while there is some consensus about the definition and core dimensions of parent–child relationships, much remains in dispute. This is an area of active debate and research.

Parent–Child Relationships as Bidirectional and Co-constructed

Although Bell argued strongly for an active role for children in socialization as long ago as 1968, recent authors continue to find it necessary to make the case for child effects, bidirectionality, or co-construction in relationships. Kuczynski and Lollis (in press), Kuczynski, Marshall, and Schell (1997), and Lollis and Kuczynski (1997), for example, recently proposed that research on parent–child relationships has been constrained by a set

of assumptions connected to what they called a "unilateral model of parent–child relations." In this model, there are assumptions that (a) influence flows from the parent to the child, (b) parents are considered active agents and children as passive, (c) parents and children are separate interacting individuals rather than connected through their relationship, and (d) there is an asymmetry in power, with most of the power residing in the parent. They attacked each of these assumptions. Their alternative model is based on equal agency, bidirectional causality, parent–child interactions occurring within a relationship context, and power as interdependent asymmetry. Similar arguments were developed by Mills and Grusec (1988).

At a conceptual level it is easy to make a case for parent and child effects, with relationships being jointly constructed. However, empirically it is more difficult to describe and measure the separate effects of parents and children or to articulate the processes and steps involved in the co-construction of relationships (A. Russell & G. Russell, 1992). One of the factors contributing to the empirical difficulties arises from the role of cognitive processes. For example, if a child is shy and parents undertake attempts to support the child's social endeavors, this might be described as a child effect (the parents are responding to the child's shyness). However, not all parents will respond in this way in Western cultures, and in other cultures shyness could be seen as not problematic. Clearly, parental perceptions and beliefs about children and shyness are implicated in their behavior and the type of relationship they develop with their child. When the role of parental cognitions is taken into account, the matter of who is shaping the relationship (the parent or the child) increases in complexity. The complexity is multiplied when child cognitions are added to the equation.

Current research should pay more attention to notions of bidirectionality and co-construction. There is a need for more sophisticated models of the way in which relationships are co-constructed over time. That is, we need to move beyond the finding that children have an impact on parents, and more to evidence about the construction of parent–child relationships using principles such as bidirectionality and co-construction.

When parent–child relationships are considered to be bidirectional or co-constructed, attention is drawn to (a) how characteristics of both parents and children contribute to the relationships and (b) the processes through which relationships are formed and maintained. In the present chapter, the role of individual attributes will be illustrated through a discussion of child characteristics in terms of sex and features such as ADHD, and parent characteristics such as sex and personality. Included is a discussion of how developmental changes in middle childhood have an impact on parent–child relationships.

Child characteristics: ADHD

Conclusions that parent–child relationships are bidirectional and co-constructed have often been drawn when the focus is on how child characteristics influence parent behavior and the relationship. A good example is provided by children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These children may exhibit overt behaviors including impulsivity and aggression, or more covert behaviors of stealing and property destruction with a midpoint of this overt-covert continuum being noncompliance lying (Hinshaw, Zuppan,

Simmel, Nigg, & Melnick 1997). Viewpoints differ about whether such behaviors are the result of inappropriate parenting, or whether difficulties in parenting and parent–child relationships arise from the behavior and characteristics of the child (Miller, Cowan, Cowan, Hetherington, & Clingempeel, 1993).

The middle-ground possibility is that relationships between parent and children with ADHD are bidirectional. This is shown in the coercive cycles that are evident in interactions between children with ADHD and their parents (Anderson, Hinshaw, & Simmell 1994; DeKlyen, Biernbaum, Speltz, & Greenberg, 1998). For instance, there is evidence that boys with ADHD are more noncompliant and controlling of their parents than their nonproblem peers. In turn, parents of boys with ADHD are more controlling and critical than the parents of nonproblem boys (Pelham et al., 1997). Along these lines, Pelham et al. (1997, p. 414) noted the importance of considering the "role of children's behavior in a reciprocal, transactional family system" citing several studies that indicate the "distressing effects that defiant child behavior has on immediate reactions and long term functioning of parents." Parents rated interactions with such children as being significantly unpleasant, resulting in feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, depression, and hostility. One mother reported: "My experience as a parent with him was one of being totally inept and frustrated, not knowing what to do for this child. It was not a happy experience" (Paltin, 1993, p. 225).

The role of child behavior is shown by the results of Anderson, Lytton, and Romney (1986) suggesting that mothers' behavior was influenced by the child's characteristics. Barkley's (1989) results also support this conclusion, where it was found that harsh and punitive parenting practices diminished significantly when the behavior of the child with ADHD was bought under control with medication. However, as Anderson et al. (1994, p. 249) suggest, "the acute shift in parental style induced by medication does not rule out the possibility that the child's negative, externalizing behaviors while unmedicated may have been shaped by parental coercion in earlier interactions."

The research on children with ADHD provides evidence of apparent child effects on parents. When this is combined with findings such as those dealing with cycles of coercion, there is support for conclusions about the co-constructed nature of parent–child relationships.

Relationships with boys and girls

Among the individual characteristics often assumed to have an impact on parent–child relationships is the child's sex. Research (Russell & Saebel, 1997) and theoretical treatments such as psychoanalytic theory (Chodorow, 1978; Washburn, 1994) have highlighted differences in parents' relationships with boys and girls. In an analysis of 116 studies containing both mothers and fathers and boys and girls as subjects that were published in four leading developmental journals over a 4-year period, Russell and Saebel (1997) noted that 36 studies reported some sex-of-child differences in relationships. This suggests that differences in relationships with sons and daughters are relatively prominent in the research. Supporting this, in a meta-analysis of mothers' language behavior with boys and with girls, Leaper, Anderson, and Sanders (1998) outlined evidence of greater amounts of talk with girls than with boys and more supportive speech with girls than with boys. This result was

interpreted as consistent with a greater emphasis by parents on verbal interaction and affiliation with daughters than with sons and points to differences in the qualities of relationships with boys and with girls, partly along the lines of gender expectations.

A conclusion that there are some differences in parent–son and parent–daughter relationships should not be taken to imply that this arises simply because parents are responding to differences in the characteristics (e.g., behavior or personality) of boys and girls. This type of difference could also arise from parental expectations and socialization goals.

Child development and parent–child relationships

Parent–child relationships evolve and change throughout childhood (Ambert, 1997; Collins & Russell, 1991; Maccoby, 1984), partly as a consequence of, and in response to, child development. Selman (1980), Ambert (1997), and Collins, Harris, and Susman (1995) provide accounts of some of the developmental changes during this period that impact on parent–child relationships.

Selman (1980) set out a developmental framework for children's understanding of relationships, including stages in conceptions of parent–child relationships. From early childhood through middle childhood, for example, it would be expected that children might move from Stage 1 through to Stages 2 and 3. In Stage 1, children identify with parental views and opinions and they accept parental knowledge. Parents are viewed as "knowing best." In Stage 2 children conceive of parental advice as guidelines rather than as an absolute authority. Reciprocal feelings now define love between parent and child, and there is an appreciation of the other's intentions. There is an awareness of the quality of the emotional tie between parent and child. In Stage 3, children are able to take a third-party perspective and consequently better appreciate the complexities of the parental role. Children in this stage consider that it is important that parents foster psychological competence and maturity, and they expect parents to provide for self-esteem and to help with psychological concerns. These children also are sensitive to parents' psychological needs and are expected to show respect. Therefore, in this stage children appreciate the needs of parents to be respected and acknowledged as a source of authority, and become aware of differences in the needs and expectations of parents and children. They also gain a sense of fairness and are sensitive to whether they believe they are being treated fairly.

Selman's analysis of developmental changes has a number of implications for parent–child relationships. The move away from acceptance of parental authority, for example, opens the way for areas of dispute between parents and children, with a need for a better appreciation of each other's viewpoint and the use of perspective taking skills. Smetana (1989) showed that by about ages 11 and 12 there were a number of issues that generated conflict between parents and children. These included matters such as homework, not getting along with others (such as siblings), and choice or timing of activities (e.g., how much time is spent on the telephone or watching TV). This illustrates that by late middle childhood parent–child relationships typically incorporate aspects of dispute and negotiation. Children's conception of fairness, albeit limited, also becomes a source of dispute and negotiation, for example about how they are treated in the relationship, especially vis-à-vis siblings. Throughout middle childhood, reciprocity is a stronger feature of parent–child

relationships (Collins & Russell, 1991). From parents' viewpoint, the need for respect from a maturing individual becomes an important factor in the relationship.

Collins et al. (1995) provide an account of some of the normative changes in children during middle childhood. They note a growth in cognitive competence, with increased capacity for solving problems and resourcefulness, and conclude that these changes necessitate adjustments in parenting and the relationship. Part of the change is that parent–child relationships during middle childhood are less oriented to disciplinary situations than in earlier years. Collins et al. (1995) and Ambert (1997) note the expanding social worlds and networks of children during middle childhood. Relationships with peers increase in importance, with a consequent change in the significance of relationships with parents. Also at this age Ambert (1997) mentions the increased significance that children's exposure to television has for parent–child relationships.

It can be seen that child development from early childhood through middle childhood engenders associated changes in parent–child relationships, with an increased role for reciprocity, greater importance of perspective taking from both parent and child, and a reduced focus on discipline, with greater emphasis on persuasion and negotiation. Overall, the parent–child relationship is increasingly part of an expanding network of relationships for the child.

Parent characteristics: Children's relationships with mothers and fathers

A substantial empirical (see Collins & Russell, 1991; Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998; Parke, 1995) and theoretical (e.g., Chodorow, 1978; Washburn, 1994) literature is now available about differences between mother–child and father–child relationships. The degree to which these relationships differ is under dispute, and recognition needs to be given to similarities as much as to differences. Similarities between mothers and fathers, or at least the absence of differences, is a more usual finding than differences. For example, Russell and Saebel (1997) examined 116 studies of parent–child relationships that included both sexes of parents and children published in four major developmental journals over a 4-year period and found that only 16 studies reported significant differences between mother–child and father–child relationships. When such differences were found they tended to be for measures dealing with closeness/cohesion and affect (greater in relationships with mothers) (Leaper et al., 1998; Russell & Saebel, 1997). In addition, differences have been noted in terms of (a) more frequent interactions with fathers than with mothers, and (b) interactions with mothers being more around caregiving and with fathers more around play and recreation, especially with sons (Collins & Russell, 1991).

It can be seen that the extent and significance of differences in children's relationships with mothers and fathers remains in dispute. There is the further possibility that relationships are differentiated by both sex of child and sex of parent. This suggests that the four dyads of mother–son, mother–daughter, father–son, and father–daughter could involve relationships that are somewhat distinct. Despite frequent claims about the distinctness of these four relationships, however, the evidence in support of the proposition is limited (Russell & Saebel, 1997). Nevertheless, it remains an intriguing possibility worthy of further consideration.

Parent characteristics: Personality and relationships with children

It might be expected that parent–child relationships would vary according to the personality of parents and of children. This proposition has been tested to some degree in terms of parents' personality. For example, Russell (1997) examined links between parent personality and mothers' and fathers' observed warmth and affection directed to their early school-aged children during a home observation. Personality was assessed using a self-report questionnaire containing 50 items pertaining to positive personality traits, for example, appreciative, loves children, patient, and confident. Positive personality was significantly related to observed warmth and affection (positive association) only for dyads containing mothers and sons. For mother–daughter, father–son, and father–daughter dyads this correlation was negative and not significant. These results suggest that parents' positive personality characteristics were expressed in relationships with their children only for mothers with sons. This result is partially consistent with those of Belsky, Crnic, and Woodworth (1995) who found that mothering was predicted more strongly and consistently by personality than was fathering with first-born sons over the first 2 years.

Russell's (1997) and Belsky et al.'s (1995) results need to be interpreted in the context of multiple determinants of parent–child relationships. For mothers, it appears that their personality could be a factor in relationships with their children, but not so for fathers. The latter means that factors other than personality could be important for father–child relationships. In Russell (1997), for example, evidence was obtained that fathers were more likely to be warm and affectionate when their children displayed positive characteristics. This suggests that at least one of the factors affecting father–child relationships is the degree to which the child displays positive qualities such as involvement and warmth. The other side of this situation is that fathers might be especially reactive to disruptive or difficult behavior from their child.

Kochanska, Clark, and Goldman's (1997) results are also relevant here. They examined mothers with children from toddler to preschool age and found that mothers high on negative emotionality (e.g., depression, anxiety, and neuroticism) and disagreeableness (e.g., angry, aggressive/hostile) displayed more negative affect with their children and were more power-assertive and less nurturant. These results point to some important ways that mothers' personality is likely to impact on relationship with their children. In this case, the evidence suggests that negative aspects of personality are associated with mothers forming more vertical relationships with their children, with less responsiveness and warmth.

It appears, therefore, that recent evidence is pointing to a role for parents' personality in relationships with their children, but mainly for mothers. An implication is that influences on father–child relationships are likely to arise from factors other than their personality.

Parent–Child Relationships in Context: Neighborhood, Social, Ethnic and Cultural Factors

Families are part of larger social groups that can be described in social, ethnic, or cultural terms. These larger groups provide a context for families that in turn influences parent–child relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Hinde, 1997; Parke & Kellam, 1994; Tudge, Gray, & Hogan, 1997). Research in this area has included the impact on parent–child relationships of work (Crouter, 1994), stress, formal, and informal support mechanisms (Parke & Buriel, 1998), and the marital relationship (Dunn et al., 1999). From the child's perspective, their school attendance brings experiences and relationships with others (especially peers) that should have an impact on parent–child relationships. Overall, therefore, it is apparent that parent–child relationships need to be understood as connected with other relationships and influences both inside and outside of the family. For present purposes, only a selective treatment can be provided of the wider context, and it will be based on a brief mention of the neighborhood and ethnic/cultural differences.

Neighborhoods

An important recent emphasis in the literature on parenting, child development, and parent–child relationships has been on neighborhood characteristics (e.g., Parke & Buriel, 1998; Sampson, Morenoff, & Earls, 1999). Sampson et al. (1999) examined "neighborhood effects" in terms of the social mechanisms that might mediate neighborhood structural effects on the lives of children. This research emphasized the network of relationships within neighborhoods and how these impact on children's relationships and development. It was apparent that characteristics of the neighborhood (in terms of links with other parents) are an influence on parent–child relationships.

Parke and Buriel (1998) included neighborhoods as part of a discussion of ecological determinants of family socialization strategies. It is possible to extend ideas of socialization strategies to incorporate elements of parent–child relationships. For example, Parke and Buriel refer to a study by O'Neil and Parke (1997) where it was "found that when mothers and fathers perceived their neighborhoods as dangerous and low in social control, they placed more restrictions on their fourth-grade children's activities" (Parke & Buriel, 1998, p. 493). It could be inferred from this result that when families live in neighborhoods perceived as dangerous, parent–child relationships might focus more on issues about where children spend their time, with whom they spend their time, and matters relating to self-protection.

Ethnic and cultural influences on parent–child relationships

In recent years, there has been increasing interest in ethnic and cultural differences in parent–child relationships. This has arisen partly from an increase in international research in different cultures and ethnic groups (Hart, Nelson, Robinson, Olsen, & McNeilly-

Choque, 1998; Ingoldsby & Smith, 1995; Lancy, 1996), but partly from greater attention to migrant groups in countries such as the United States (Parke & Buriel, 1998). It is clear that there is a need to move beyond a white middle-class view of parent–child relationships and to incorporate either ecological or systems perspectives in attempts to understand differences in parent–child relationships. In addition, there is a need to recognize that there are cultural differences even among so-called Euro-American cultures.

Parke and Buriel (1998) use "ethnicity" to refer to an "individual's membership in a group sharing a common ancestral heritage based on nationality, language, and culture" (p. 496), with "culture" referring to "shared values, behaviors, and beliefs of a people that are transmitted from one generation to the next" (p. 496). Research on different ethnic and cultural groups has revealed profound differences in parent–child relationships. These differences show that it is critical to set parent–child relationships in the context of cultural values, beliefs, and practices. Further, this research emphasizes the diversity in parent–child relationships.

Parke and Buriel (1998) discuss a number of ethnic groups, including American Indians, Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans. Each group displays unique features that serve to reinforce views about the importance of cultural factors in parent–child relationships. For example, the role of extended kin systems in African-American families has a clear impact on relationships within families, the roles of parents and extended kin, and the relationships that children have with parents and related adults. Parke and Buriel (1998) note that in multigenerational households, mothers are primary caregivers, followed by grandmothers and fathers. Further, grandmothers tend to increase the moral-religious emphasis in the family. It is apparent, therefore, that parent–child relationships in African-American families where grandmothers are coresident are influenced by the role of grandmothers. This suggests that both the content (such as issues that are the focus of discussion and negotiation) and style of children's relationships with their mothers and fathers will be affected by the presence and role of the grandmother.

An important finding from recent research on African-American families has been that ostensibly similar relationship qualities could have different meaning and significance from what has been found in white middle-class families. Some of this can be illustrated around the role of authoritarian relationships and practices. Kelley, Power, and Wimbush (1992) described the disciplinary style of African-American parents as more parent-centered (with an emphasis on parental authority, and obedience) than child-centered. However, the interpretation of this finding has to take into account not only the context of many African-American families, but cultural factors as well. With respect to the context, Kelley et al. (1992) noted that obedience could be adaptive in dangerous neighborhoods and serve as a means of highlighting the need to following rules in a society where family members are part of a disadvantaged group with low power.

It can be seen that African-American parent–child relationships might be characterized as relatively vertical. However, these vertical qualities should be interpreted differently from their occurrence in white middle-class families. For example, in African-American families, harsh discipline has been found to covary with warmth and a nurturing relationship more than in white families (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997a, b). Further, as Parke and Buriel (1998) note, although African-American parents may use physical discipline, this is rarely coupled with withdrawal of love from children. These findings point to

vertical relationships in which the parent-centered components are combined with positive aspects of relationships with children, rather than rejection that is often assumed to be present if white parents are harsh and parent-centered. This conclusion is supported by evidence that harshness of discipline is related to externalizing problems in European-American children, but not in African-American children (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997a, b; Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996). Potentially parallel findings to those of Deater-Deckard and colleagues on links between harsh discipline and externalizing behavior in African-American children have been obtained by Chao (1994) on immigrant Chinese families.

It can be seen that recent research on African American and immigrant Chinese families highlight not only ethnic and cultural differences, but also show the importance of cultural factors in shaping parent–child relationships and in providing meaning to parent and child behavior in their relationships.

Conclusions

The present discussion of parent–child relationships was informed by a model that incorporates several levels of analysis (Hinde, 1997; Levinger, 1994), from psychological processes to individual behavior and characteristics, to interactions and relationships through to system and ecological factors. An understanding of parent–child relationships requires an appreciation of factors at each of these levels. Attention was directed to some problematic matters in the current literature on parent–child relationships. In particular, there remains some dispute about the core dimensions of parent–child relationships. We argued here for the value of the vertical/horizontal distinction as a basis for understanding parent–child relationships. Second, although there is increasing recognition of a perspective that emphasizes these relationships are bidirectional and co-constructed, this emphasis has still to be fully accepted in the literature. Third, it was evident that there is considerable evolution of parent–child relationships from early childhood through middle childhood. We documented some aspects of child development over this period and showed how this development is likely to have an impact on parent–child relationships. Finally, we noted a number of broader ethnic and cultural factors linked to differences in parent–child relationships. The latter discussion helped to highlight the considerable diversity in normative parent–child relationships.

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