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Postdivorce Coparenting Typologies and Children's Adjustment

The authors performed a cluster analysis on data from 270 divorced or separated parents to classify their perceived coparental relationship with their ex-spouse and test if parents' perceptions of their children's postdivorce adjustment differed based on their perceptions of their postdivorce coparental relationship. The cluster analysis resulted in three types of coparenting relationships: cooperative and involved, moderately engaged, and infrequent but conflictual. Despite the expectation that children fare better if their divorced parents' develop a cooperative coparenting relationship, the authors found that parents' reports of their children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors and their social skills did not significantly differ by type of postdivorce coparental relationships. Results, therefore, suggest that the direct influence of postdivorce coparenting on children's adjustment may not be as robust as predicted in the literature.

Although parental divorce can be associated with maladjustment among children and adolescents (see Amato, 2001, 2010; Lansford,

2009), children are expected to demonstrate better adjustment when their parents develop and maintain a cooperative coparental relationship (Emery, Otto, & O'Donohue, 2005; Whiteside, 1998). In a cooperative postdivorce coparenting relationship, parents put aside their own conflicts to effectively coordinate their child(ren)'s caregiving. Such an arrangement is expected to reduce children's exposure to interparental conflict, allow children to feel supported and cared for by both of their parents, and increase the contact children have with nonresidential parents (Ahrons, 2007; Sobolewski & King, 2005; Whiteside, 1998). Despite the belief that cooperative postdivorce coparenting benefits children, there have been few direct tests of the associations between postdivorce coparenting and children's postdivorce adjustment (Sigal, Sandler, Wolshik, & Braver, 2011; but see Amato, Kane, & James, 2011). Therefore, the actual benefits that cooperative postdivorce coparenting has for children's adjustment are relatively unknown. In this study we address this gap by testing if divorced or separated parents' perceptions of their children's postdivorce adjustment differ based on parents' reports of their postdivorce coparental relationship.

Children's Adjustment to Parental Divorce

Parental divorce affects children's well-being by introducing strains on family resources and relationships (Amato, 2000; Kelly & Emery, 2003; Lansford, 2009). For example, parental divorce is associated with less effective parenting

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Key Words: postdivorce coparenting, divorce, child adjustment, cluster analysis.

(Martinez & Forgatch, 2002), parental depression (Lorenz, Wickrama, Conger, & Elder, 2006; Wood, Repetti, & Roesch, 2005), and loss of economic well-being for women and children (Sayer, 2006; Sun & Li, 2002). Previously, researchers have documented that children who have experienced a parental divorce evidence more externalizing behaviors (e.g., behavior problems, substance use; Lansford et al., 2006; Martinez & Forgatch, 2002; Sun, 2001), internalizing behaviors (e.g., anxiety and depressive symptoms; Amato, 2001; Cavanagh, 2008; Lansford et al., 2006; Strohschein, 2005), and lower academic achievement (Lansford et al., 2006; Potter, 2010; Sun & Li, 2001). These adjustment problems appear to be more common shortly after parental divorce and become less severe over time (Lansford, 2009). There is substantial variation, however, in how children react to these stressors as well as in the severity of any problems they experience. Most children demonstrate resiliency; fall into normal ranges for psychological and cognitive functioning; and grow up to be healthy, functioning adults (Ahrons, 2007; Amato, 2010; Emery, 1999).

Children's adjustment to parental divorce depends upon several factors including their relationships with their nonresidential parents, exposure to interparental conflict, and the predivorce family environment. Children adjust better when nonresidential parents continue to play a supportive and instrumental role in their lives (Amato & Gilberth, 1999). For example, the use of warm, responsive, and effective parenting by nonresidential parents can improve children's behavioral and emotional adjustment following divorce (Fabricius & Lucken, 2007; King & Sobolewski, 2006; Martinez & Forgatch, 2002). On the other hand, exposure to new or continued interparental conflict is associated with poorer adjustment (Amato, 2006, 2010; Amato & Afifi, 2006; Fabricius & Luecken, 2007). Finally, the effect of divorce on children's adjustment depends, at least in part, on predivorce family environments (Barber & Demo, 2006; Strohschein, 2005; Sun & Li, 2001). Ending high-conflict marriages, for example, may benefit children, but ending low-conflict marriages may put children at risk (Booth & Amato, 2001). Additionally, families in the process of divorce but who have not yet physically separated may provide fewer psychosocial resources to their children, which can lead to children experiencing adjustment

problems prior to separation that often continue after their parents' legally divorce (Strohschein, 2005; Sun & Li, 2002).

Given that parental divorce is associated with a host of child well-being indicators, it is important to identify conditions in which parental divorce is associated with child adjustment (Amato, 2010). Based on the reviewed literature, children should evidence more positive adjustment when they maintain close positive ties with their nonresidential parents and are exposed to less interparental conflict. A cooperative postdivorce coparenting relationship is expected to ensure that children are provided with that type of environment (Sigal et al., 2011).

Postdivorce Coparenting

Even following parental divorce, parents and their children make up a family system; therefore, the behaviors and dynamics that occur in the parental subsystem are expected to affect the child subsystem (Adamson & Pasley, 2006). Postdivorce coparenting refers to divorced parents' ongoing interactions, although not necessarily face-to-face, regarding decisions about their child(ren)'s care, activities, and needs (Kelly & Emery, 2003; Markham, Ganong, & Coleman, 2007; Sobolewski & King, 2005). Coparenting is distinct from parenting behaviors as it refers to the ways parents coordinate the care of their children rather than behaviors directed at children (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006; Sigal et al., 2011). Therefore, it is possible for divorced parents to engage in limited coparenting but still engage in warm and supportive parenting.

Postdivorce coparenting is typically described in terms of how frequently parents communicate regarding their child(ren)'s care, the degree to which they cooperate to coordinate their child(ren)'s care, and the frequency and severity of interparental conflicts over child(ren)'s care (Adamsons & Pasley, 2006; Ahrons, 1994; Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990).

Previously, researchers have used data about postdivorce cooperation, communication, and conflict to identify distinct patterns of postdivorce coparenting (see Ahrons, 1994; Amato et al., 2011; Maccoby et al., 1990). Although these studies used different analytical techniques (e.g., cluster analysis and factor analysis), they

have identified several common patterns. One pattern involves frequent communication about their child(ren)'s caregiving needs, infrequent disagreements regarding caregiving, and few attempts to undermine each other's parenting. Coparenting relationships matching this description have been labeled as "cooperative coparenting" (Amato et al., 2011; Maccoby et al., 1990), "perfect pals," and "cooperative colleagues" (Ahrns, 1994). A second identified pattern involving moderate to frequent caregiving conflict, moderate communication regarding their child(ren)'s needs, and little caregiving coordination has been labeled as "conflicted" (Maccoby et al., 1990), "parallel parenting with some conflict" (Amato et al., 2011), "angry associates," and "fiery foes" (Ahrns, 1994). Divorced parents in this pattern are not disengaged from one another as they continue to communicate, but the result of this communication appears to be coparenting conflict rather than cooperation. Therefore, their caregiving can be described as parallel rather than coordinated (Amato et al., 2011; Maccoby et al., 1990). A third identified pattern describes divorced parents who appear to have stopped communicating with one another regarding their child(ren)'s care and make few, if any attempts, to coordinate their child(ren)'s care. Coparenting relationships matching this description have been labeled as "single parenting" (Amato et al., 2011) and "disengaged" (Maccoby et al., 1990). Last, Maccoby and colleagues (1990) identified a pattern they labeled as "mixed." It was characterized by high communication and high conflict regarding their child(ren)'s needs. The high degree of communication and conflict may result in children witnessing parents' fights and arguments (Maccoby et al., 1990).

Despite the expectation that positive postdivorce coparenting relationships are beneficial for children's adjustment (see Emory et al., 2005; Whiteside, 1998), there have been few specific tests of its associations with children's postdivorce adjustment (Sigal et al., 2011). Amato and colleagues' (2011) found adolescents' postdivorce adjustment was generally the same regardless of whether parents engaged in cooperative coparenting, parallel coparenting, or single parenting (i.e., when nonresident parents had little to no involvement with their child). They did report, however, that when parents had a cooperative coparental relationship

adolescents' reported fewer externalizing behaviors and more positive relationships with their fathers during young adulthood than when parents did not have a cooperative coparental relationship. Although Ahrns (1994) and Maccoby and colleagues (1990) conducted follow-ups of the children in their studies, neither directly compared the well-being of children based on parents' postdivorce coparenting typologies. Nevertheless, results from these follow-ups supported the premise that reduced conflict and hostility between divorced parents as well as supportive relationships with nonresidential parents contributed to adolescent and young adult children having better family relationships and well-being (Ahrns, 2007; Buchanan, Maccoby, & Dornbusch, 1996).

Person-Versus Variable-Oriented Approaches

Recently researchers have begun to utilize person-oriented data analysis techniques to examine how family relationships and dynamics affect individual family members' well-being (e.g., Crouter, Bumpus, Davis, & McHale, 2005; Meteyer & Perry-Jenkins, 2009). Person-oriented techniques such as cluster analysis utilize multiple variables simultaneously to identify typologies, patterns, or groups of individuals within a larger sample who share similar profiles (Distefano, 2012; Henry, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 2005). In the study of postdivorce coparenting relationships, a variable-oriented approach would involve testing if different aspects of coparenting (e.g., conflict, communication, and cooperation) are each related to children's adjustment, whereas a person-oriented approach would involve testing if children's adjustment is different for those whose parents have similar levels of conflict, communication, and cooperation. In this study we performed a cluster analysis on divorced parents' reports of the communication, conflict, and cooperation in their coparental relationship with their ex-spouse to identify typologies of postdivorce coparental relationships.

The Current Study

Prior research generally supports the belief that experiencing a parental divorce affects children's adjustment. It is widely believed that cooperative coparenting between divorced parents is associated with fewer adjustment

problems in children (Emory et al., 2005; Whiteside, 1998). Yet the limited empirical research presents a mixed picture of the effects that postdivorce coparenting has on children's adjustment. For example, Amato and colleagues (2011) found only 2 of the 12 adolescent and young adult outcomes they studied differed based on divorced parents' coparenting relationship. In this study we sought to clarify this picture by examining if parents' perceptions of children's psychological, behavioral, and social well-being was associated with divorced parents' perceptions of their coparental relationship. Specifically, we tested two hypotheses. First, we will be able to derive empirically and conceptually meaningful typologies of postdivorce coparenting behavior. Second, parents will perceive that their children are better adjusted (i.e., less internalizing and externalizing behavior but greater social skills) when they also perceive that they engage in cooperative coparenting.

Although previous researchers have identified postdivorce coparenting typologies, we believe that we are the first to do so using measures specifically designed to assess different aspects of coparenting relationships (e.g., communication, cooperation, and conflict). The absence of specific assessments of multiple aspects of divorced parents' coparenting relationship has resulted in having fewer dimensions available to describe coparenting patterns (cf. Maccoby et al., 1990) or using single items to represent different aspects of coparenting (cf. Amato et al., 2011). Therefore, this study may more accurately represent parents' perceptions of their postdivorce coparenting relationship and make it more likely that we can detect associations between postdivorce coparenting and children's adjustment.

METHOD

Sample

Data used in this study are from a larger investigation of postdivorce coparenting relationships. Participants were recruited from individuals who participated in a court-ordered, cooperative coparenting education program in a midwestern state between March 1998 and April 2004. In the circuit courts of this state all divorcing couples who have at least one minor child must participate in a postdivorce education course.

Parents who agreed to participate in the study were mailed a packet that contained a self-report survey that asked them to respond to their own, their ex-spouses', and a target child's behavior. The target child was predetermined to be the divorced couple's youngest child between ages 3 and 18. Parents received one of four packets based on the parent's sex and the target child's age. Differences between the four packets were (a) the pronouns used to describe the ex-spouse and (b) asking parents different questions to assess the social skills, internalizing behaviors, and externalizing behaviors of younger (age 3–11 years) versus older (age 12–18 years) children. Participants were asked to complete the survey and return it, via mail, to the researchers. For more on the data collection procedures, see Markham et al. (2007).

A total of 327 parents returned the study packets. Missing data were handled in two ways. First, listwise deletion was used for parents who skipped entire scales or did not provide data used as control variables (e.g., income, years separated). Second, mean replacement was used when a parent had a missing value on an item that was used to compute a scale variable. The imputed value was determined by computing the individual parents' mean response on the items they had completed for a given scale. Although mean replacement is common in the social sciences, it is generally not recommended because it can reduce sample variability and bias parameter estimates. The effects of mean replacement are not as problematic, however, when it is used to estimate only a few missing values (McKnight, McKnight, Sidani, & Figueredo, 2007). Mean replacement was only used when a parent had missing responses on no more than two of the items on a given scale. We recognize that this process may have reduced sample variability but believe this risk is outweighed by increased sample size. After accounting for missing data, the sample was further limited by removing the parents who did not have their child spend the night at least once a month. The final sample consisted of 270 parents. There were three significant differences between parents included and those excluded from the final sample. Compared to parents excluded from the final sample, parents in the final sample had younger children ($t = 2.09, p < .05$), had greater coparenting communication ($t = -2.03, p < .05$), and had greater coparenting cooperation ($t = -3.06, p < .01$).

Sample Demographics. Most parents were mothers (65.9%), White (96.7%), average age 37.7 years (range of 23–52), had attended at least some college (64.5%), and reported an annual household income of \$30,000 or greater. Parents had been married an average of 10.6 years (range of 0–27 years) prior to divorce and at the time of data collection had been divorced an average of 3.3 years (range of 0–16 years), less than one half (40%) were repartnered. Target children were approximately equally split between females (51.5%) and males (48.5%), and the average child was age 8.6 years (range of 3–18). In most cases (73.3%) the participating parent and his or her ex-spouse shared joint legal custody of the target child (the legal preference in the state where the data were collected).

Measures

Postdivorce Coparenting. Coparenting cooperation was measured with the six-item coparenting cooperation subscale of the Coparenting Questionnaire (CQ; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001; $\alpha = .86$). Sample items were “I tell my ex-spouse lots of things about our child” and “I share the burden of discipline with my ex-spouse.” Parents responded to each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*). Coparenting cooperation scores were computed by summing across the items; higher scores reflect parents’ perceptions that they engage in more cooperative coparenting with their ex-spouses. Coparenting conflict was measured with the four-item coparenting conflict subscale of the CQ (Margolin et al., 2001; $\alpha = .67$). The conflict subscale uses a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*) to assess the degree to which divorced parents disagree about standards for their child’s behavior and disagree about parenting practices. Sample items were “I undermine my ex-spouse’s parenting” and “I argue with my ex-spouse about our child.” Coparenting conflict scores were computed by summing across the items; higher scores reflect more conflict over coparenting. Coparenting communication was measured by the 10-item Coparental Interaction Scale (CIS; Ahrons, 1981; $\alpha = .95$). The CIS uses a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *never* to 5 = *always*) to assess how often divorced parents discuss child care and parenting issues. Sample items were “child-rearing problems” and “major decisions

regarding our child’s life.” Coparenting communication scores were computed by summing across the items; higher scores reflect parents’ perceptions that they and their ex-spouses engage in more frequent positive coparenting communication.

Children’s Postdivorce Adjustment. Social skills were measured with 26 items from the social skills scale of the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Gresham & Elliot, 1990; $\alpha = .88$), which assess how often children engage in a variety of social behaviors. Due to the range of the target children’s ages in this study, two versions (form 1 = children in Grades K–6; form 2 = children in Grades 7–12) of the SSRS were used. Only those items that were common across the two forms were used to compute children’s social skills scores. This resulted in dropping 12 items from form 1 and 14 items from form 2. The SSRS uses a 3-point Likert-type scale (0 = *never* to 2 = *very often*). Scores were computed by summing across the items; higher scores reflect a higher level of social skills. Internalizing behavior was measured with five items from the internalizing subscale of the SSRS (Gresham & Elliot, 1990; $\alpha = .77$). As with the social skills scale, only items that were common across the two SSRS forms were used; one item was dropped from each form. These items assess how often children engage in a variety of internalizing behaviors (e.g., acts embarrassed, lonely, or anxious). Internalizing scores were computed by summing across the five items; higher scores reflect more internalizing behaviors. Externalizing behavior was measured with the 6-item externalizing subscale of the SSRS (Gresham & Elliot, 1990; $\alpha = .80$). These items assess how often children engage in a variety of externalizing behaviors (e.g., fighting, bullying, or arguing). Externalizing scores were computed by summing across the items; higher scores reflect more externalizing behaviors.

Control Variables. We included five control variables that have previously been shown to affect postdivorce coparenting and children’s postdivorce adjustment (see Amato, 2010; Lansford, 2009). Parent and child sex were coded as 1 = male and 0 = female. Child age represents the target child’s age in years. Length of time since separation was measured by the item; “How many years have you been separated from your ex-spouse?” Household income was

Table 1. Postdivorce Coparenting Variables and Child Outcomes: Correlations and Descriptive Statistics (N = 270)

Variable	M (SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Coparenting cooperation	16.55 (4.77)	–						
2 Coparenting conflict	10.17 (3.07)	–.14*	–					
3 Coparenting communication	29.11 (10.82)	.76***	–.20**	–				
4 Child age	8.61 (3.97)	–.17**	–.08	–.11	–			
5 Years separated	3.33 (2.62)	–.23**	–.00	–.26***	.37***	–		
6 Child externalizing	3.54 (2.37)	–.01	.25**	–.03	–.12	–.05	–	
7 Child internalizing	2.47 (2.01)	–.09	.17**	–.15*	.24***	.18**	.37***	–
8 Child social skills	35.08 (7.35)	.10	–.18**	.12	.11	.01	–.54***	–.35***

Note: M = mean, SD = standard deviation,

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

measured with an item that asked respondents to select which of eight categories (*less than \$10,000–\$70,000 or more*) described their annual household income.

RESULTS

Correlations

A correlation matrix was used to explore the associations among the individual coparenting variables and the child outcomes (Table 1). Coparenting cooperation was not associated with parents' reports of any of the child outcomes; however, coparenting conflict and communication were. Coparenting conflict was positively associated with parents' reports of children's externalizing, $r = .25$, $p < .01$, and internalizing, $r = .17$, $p < .01$, behavior as well as negatively associated with children's social skills, $r = -.18$, $p < .01$. Coparenting communication was negatively associated with children's internalizing behavior, $r = -.15$, $p < .05$. These correlations support the expectation that children will experience fewer adjustment problems when their parents engage in less coparenting conflict and more coparenting communication.

Postdivorce Coparenting Cluster Analysis

Postdivorce coparenting clusters were identified using agglomerative hierarchal clustering in SPSS, which is appropriate when the optimal number of clusters is unknown (Henry et al., 2005). In agglomerative hierarchal clustering every participant is initially treated as an individual cluster. At successive steps, similar clusters are combined. We used the Ward's method to assign clusters and the squared Euclidean

distance procedure to assess the differences between clusters. The coparenting variables (i.e., communication, cooperation, and conflict) were standardized as z scores so each had an equal weight in the analysis (Norusis, 2009). The optimal number of clusters was determined by changes in the agglomeration schedule, which suggested a three-cluster solution was appropriate.

Table 2 shows each cluster's mean scores on the coparenting variables. The first cluster had the highest coparenting communication and cooperation scores and the lowest coparenting conflict score. We labeled this cluster "cooperative and involved coparenting," and it comprised approximately 31% of the sample. This cluster is similar to the cooperative coparenting pattern identified by Amato et al. (2011) and Maccoby et al. (1990). The second cluster had coparenting communication and cooperation scores that were significantly lower than the first cluster but significantly higher than the third cluster. Its coparenting conflict score was significantly higher than the first cluster but significantly lower than the third cluster. We labeled this cluster "moderately engaged coparenting," and it comprised approximately 45% of the sample. Parents in this cluster are maintaining a coparental relationship but are less active than the "cooperative and involved" coparents. This cluster is similar to the parallel (Amato et al., 2011) or mixed (Maccoby et al., 1990) patterns identified in prior studies. The third cluster had the lowest coparenting communication and cooperation scores and the highest coparenting conflict score. We labeled this cluster "infrequent but conflictual coparenting," and it comprised approximately 24% of the sample. The low coparenting communication and

Table 2. Differences in Coparenting Typologies Coparenting Communication, Cooperation, and Conflict (N = 270)

	Postdivorce coparenting typology			<i>F</i> (<i>df</i>)	Significant differences ^a
	Cooperative and involved (CI; <i>n</i> = 83)	Moderately engaged (ME; <i>n</i> = 122)	Infrequent but conflictual (IC; <i>n</i> = 65)		
Coparenting communication	40.98	27.78	16.48	322.09 (2, 267)***	CI > ME, IC*** ME > IC***
Coparenting cooperation	21.29	16.66	10.31	341.63 (2, 267)***	CI > ME, IC*** ME > IC***
Coparenting conflict	8.83	10.40	11.46	15.53 (2, 267)***	CI < ME, IC*** ME < IC*

Note: ^aDifferences based on Tukey's post hoc comparisons. **p* < .05, ****p* < .001.

cooperation scores indicates that these parents engage in limited coparenting, but when they do, it is conflictual. This cluster may represent a version of disengaged coparenting (Maccoby et al., 1990) combined with Ahrons' (1994) fiery foes.

Children's Postdivorce Adjustment

To determine if parents' perceptions of their children's internalizing behavior, externalizing behavior, and/or social skills were associated with their perceptions of their postdivorce coparenting relationship, we conducted a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) which controlled for parent and child gender, child age, years separated, and income. Results indicated there was not a significant multivariate effect for coparenting typology (Wilks's $\lambda = .97$, $F = 1.22$, *ns*; Table 3). Regardless of parents' postdivorce coparenting relationship, they perceived that their children engaged in similar amounts of internalizing and externalizing behaviors and had similar social skills.

DISCUSSION

Although parental divorce has been shown to negatively affect children, there is considerable variation in how children adjust to their parents' divorce (Amato, 2010; Lansford, 2009). Children are expected to fare better when their parents develop a cooperative coparental relationship (Emory et al., 2005; Sigal et al., 2011), yet research specifically testing that expectation is minimal. In this study we found that divorced parents' reports of their children's internalizing and externalizing behaviors and social skills were similar regardless of the type of coparenting relationship.

Table 3. MANCOVA Testing the Differences in Parents' Reports of Children's Adjustment (N = 270)

	Postdivorce coparenting typology		
	Cooperative and involved (CI; <i>n</i> = 83)	Moderately engaged (ME; <i>n</i> = 122)	Infrequent but conflictual (IC; <i>n</i> = 65)
Child externalizing	3.34	3.61	3.68
Children's internalizing	2.05	2.67	2.57
Children's social skills	36.28	34.84	33.98
Wilks's lambda	.97		

Using cluster analysis we identified three patterns of postdivorce coparenting, supporting the expectation that divorced parents develop different patterns of communication, coordination, and conflict regarding childrearing following divorce. In this study, 31% of parents were classified as having a cooperative coparenting relationship with their ex-spouse, similar to prior studies (cf. Amato et al., 2011). We also identified a pattern highlighted by moderate coordination, communication, and conflict between divorced parents (45% of the sample) as well as a pattern that evidenced less frequent, but often highly conflictual interactions between divorced parents (24% of the sample). Although we identified three clusters, these clusters are likely not exhaustive of all the potential patterns of postdivorce coparenting. For example, unlike prior studies, we did not identify a parallel pattern where parents have little to no communication or cooperation. Postdivorce coparenting

relationships, however, are expected to become more parallel over time (Maccoby, Buchanan, Mnookin, & Dornbusch, 1993) and the majority of our sample had been divorced 3 years or fewer, possibly reducing the likelihood of identifying a parallel group.

Despite the expected benefits of cooperative postdivorce coparenting for children, there have been few empirical tests of the associations between postdivorce coparenting and children's adjustment. Our results, as well as those of Amato and colleagues (2011) and Bronstein, Stoll, Clauson, Abrams, and Briones (1998), appear to suggest that parents' perceptions of postdivorce coparenting has limited direct effects on their perceptions of their children's adjustment. Although we did find significant bivariate correlations between postdivorce coparenting conflict and communication and children's adjustment, these associations were not found when the data were examined in a multivariate fashion. Parents' perceptions of children's internalizing behavior, externalizing behavior, and social skills do not significantly differ between the three postdivorce coparenting clusters. Our results, therefore, suggest that the impact of postdivorce coparenting on children's adjustment may not be as robust as predicted in the literature (Emery et al., 2005; Whiteside, 1998).

The available research has primarily examined direct associations between postdivorce coparenting and children's adjustment. When postdivorce coparenting is viewed within the context of family systems theory, however, the influence of postdivorce coparenting on children's adjustment may be more indirect than direct. For example, Ahrons (2011) suggested that the main benefits of cooperative coparenting are a reduction in children's exposure to interparental conflict and improved relationships between children and nonresidential parents. In their review of postdivorce coparenting literature, Sigal and colleagues (2011) suggested that it is parenting behavior, rather than the coparenting relationship, that has the greatest direct impact on children's adjustment. Further, research based on family systems theory routinely finds that parents' relationship quality indirectly affects children's adjustment through its influence on parenting behaviors (Benson, Buehler, & Gerard, 2008). Consistent with an expectation that postdivorce coparenting indirectly influences children's adjustment,

postdivorce coparenting has shown associations with parenting behaviors (DeGarmo, Patras, & Eap, 2008), contact between children and nonresidential parents (Sobolewski & King, 2005; Whiteside & Becker, 2000), and divorced parents' satisfaction with each other (Bonach, 2009; Madden-Derdich & Leonard, 2002). These domains may function as the mechanisms through which divorced parents ongoing coparental efforts affect children. For example, postdivorce coparenting conflict appears to increase nonresidential father's use of harsh discipline (DeGarmo et al., 2008), which is typically associated with lower child well-being (Amato & Fowler, 2002). To fully test how postdivorce coparenting influences children's adjustment, future research should examine these potential indirect paths. In this study, we lacked measures of participants' parenting behaviors, thus preventing us from testing potential indirect effects.

Implications for Practice

Postdivorce coparenting education is a common legal requirement for divorcing or separating parents. For example, 46 states provide access to postdivorce education programs with a majority of states mandating participation (Pollet & Lombreglia, 2008). Most of these programs focus on assisting parents in developing/practicing cooperative coparenting (Blaisure & Geasler, 2006; Shifflet & Cummings, 1999). Although this is a worthy goal, not all parents can achieve this type of coparental relationship; our results support the notion that divorcing parents can effectively rear children even when coparenting is limited or conflictual. Most divorced parents appear to coparent reasonably well, but for those parents who are not able to do so, children's functioning may depend on parents' individual parenting skills and parent-child relationship quality. We do not suggest that family life educators abandon a focus on developing and maintaining cooperative coparenting relationships, but our findings suggest that educators and clinicians should place greater emphases on helping parents enact effective childrearing behaviors in their own households (parallel childrearing) in the face of divorce-related stressors. Family life educators should be comfortable dissuading parents' fears that if they cannot establish a cooperative coparental relationship their children will be

seriously harmed. Some parents may have legitimate concerns about developing a coparental relationship with their ex-spouse (e.g., if they were victims of physical or psychological abuse during the marriage) but may feel pressured to do so if told it will benefit their child. Other parents may find that their ex-spouse is unwilling to communicate and/or coordinate caregiving. Finally, postdivorce education programs may benefit by broadening their focus to educate parents about the myriad divorce-related stressors that they and their children are likely to experience (Amato et al., 2011). Programmatic focus on divorced parents' coparental relationship may leave parents less prepared to address other stressors (e.g., mental health, economic strains, and residential transitions).

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of this study include the use of specific coparenting scales, the use of cluster analysis, and assessing multiple domains of child well-being. In this study we assessed specific aspects of the coparenting relationship (i.e., communication, cooperation, and conflict) that are expected to underlie the foundation of how divorced parents' coordinate their children's caregiving. Prior studies have not always utilized scales specifically designed to assess coparenting behavior (cf. Amato et al., 2011). This study also benefits from the use of cluster analysis to represent the multidimensional nature of coparenting relationships in a more nuanced manner than examining multiple interactions within a regression model (see Henry et al., 2005). Lastly, we tested the associations among postdivorce coparenting and several important domains of child well-being. Although child well-being can be conceptualized in many ways, the domains studied here have routinely been shown to be important indicators of future well-being.

The results of this study also should be viewed within the context of its limitations. First, the study relies on cross-sectional data. This precludes us from making any conclusions regarding the stability of parents' postdivorce coparenting typologies, children's adjustment, or the causal effect postdivorce coparenting has on children's adjustment. Children often evidence adjustment problems prior to their parents' divorce (Amato, 2006), therefore to fully test the effects of postdivorce coparenting,

researchers need data on children's adjustment prior to and following their parents' divorce, which we did not have. The study also uses a relatively homogenous sample comprised mostly of well-educated White mothers, who had all taken part in a brief postdivorce education program. Additionally, due to missing data from some participants, the subsample we used had slightly higher coparenting cooperation and communication scores than the overall sample. Divorced parents who are experiencing severe ongoing ex-spousal conflict may be less likely to participate in this type of research. We feel, however, that the similarity in the pattern of findings between our sample and the national sample used by Amato et al. (2011) strengthens the likelihood that the findings are not due to the sample being more cooperative than divorced parents in general. Our data also are only from one of the divorcing parents, so we may not be getting the full picture. For example, one parent may view their relationship as cooperative while the other views it as conflictual. In future studies, data should be collected from both parents to create a more accurate picture of the coparenting relationship. Our data are also limited by the only rating of children's adjustment coming from one parent. Others (e.g., teachers) may provide a different picture of children's adjustment. Parents may under-report children's problem behaviors or overestimate their social skills. On the other hand, they may over-report problem behaviors if trying to make a point about the ill effects of the other parent's influence on the child. Future research would benefit from obtaining external ratings of children's adjustment and from having children's report of their adjustment. Despite these limitations, our study adds understanding of the nature of postdivorce coparenting.

CONCLUSIONS

Cooperative coparenting is typically viewed as an adaptive response to parental divorce or separation, and many mandatory postdivorce education classes promote developing cooperative coparenting relationships to improve children's adjustment. We found different patterns of coparenting behaviors, some of which did not involve cooperative coparenting behaviors. This would be particularly troubling if we had found differences in children's adjustment between the three patterns of postdivorce

coparenting identified in this study. Although our research progresses the field's understanding of the associations between parents' postdivorce coparenting relationships and how parents' perceive their children's adjustment, the available body of literature is still not developed enough to make definitive statements about how these ongoing interactions between divorced parents affect children. Additional research is needed to examine indirect paths between postdivorce coparenting and children's adjustment. In the meantime, it may be appropriate for divorce education curricula to emphasize strengthening parent-child relationships, individual parenting skills, and preparing children for divorce.

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