PARENTING WELL TOGETHER: TESTING THE INDIRECT EFFECTS OF COPARENTING SUPPORT ON PARENTING STRESS THROUGH PARENTING SELF-EFFICACY FOR AT-RISK COUPLES RECEIVING CHILD WELFARE SERVICES.

by

MARK ERIC PETTIT

(Under the Direction of TED G FUTRIS)

ABSTRACT

Parenting stress is associated with many negative outcomes for parents and their children. Couples who receive child welfare services possess an increased risk for experiencing parenting stress due to the strain on their limited resources. A supportive coparenting relationship and parenting self-efficacy can affect perceptions of parenting stress. Data was collected from a racially diverse, at-risk sample of 247 heterosexual couples who were receiving child welfare services. Using an actor partner interdependence model, findings from the current study reinforce that when parents receive coparenting support, they are more likely to report less parenting stress. Further, this association is mediated by their parenting self-efficacy. These direct and indirect actor effects were found for both mothers and fathers, however no significant direct or indirect partner effects were found. Findings imply that parenting self-efficacy may be a mediating mechanism through which a supportive coparenting relationship can reduce the parenting stress for at-risk couples.

INDEX WORDS: parenting stress, coparenting, self-efficacy, at-risk couples, child welfare

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DEDICATION

First, this thesis is dedicated to the to all the couples and families who provided hours of their time to participate in our program. Without their willing participation we would not have been able to complete this project. Further, because of their contributions we will be able to continue the work to help couples and families within disadvantaged communities. Lastly, to all the project staff and volunteers who have worked countless hours over the past five years to provide services to families within our community in the fulfillment of the grant that funded this project.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Parenting stress is the strain associated with the day-to-day management of care for children. All parents will experience this strain, but not all will be overwhelmed by the demands of parenting, which ultimately depends on the individual perceptions associated with the stressors and the effort used to cope with them (Abidin, 1992; Deater-Deckard & Panneton, 2017; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When the demands of parenting exceed a parent's available resources to cope with the parenting stress, this can result in them feeling overwhelmed and experiencing the negative effects of parenting stress (Cooper, et al., 2009). Research has shown that being overwhelmed by parenting stress is associated with negative outcomes for parents and their children. In particular, parenting stress is linked to increased depressive symptoms (Thomason et al., 2014), decreased couple functioning (Berryhill et al., 2016), and an increased likeliness to engage in neglectful or harsh parenting practices (Barnhart & Maguire-Jack, 2016; Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Lee, 2013). Furthermore, parenting stress has been linked to increased parental conflict (Nomaguchi et al., 2017b) which can negatively impact children indirectly through the quality of parenting they receive (Camisasca et al., 2019; Turner & Kopiec, 2006). Considering the negative effects of being overwhelmed by parenting stress, the current study aims to advance our understanding of the process through which couples, especially at-risk couples, effectively manage parenting stress.

Research suggests that couples from disadvantaged communities posses an increased risk for experiencing parenting stress (Cooper et al., 2009). Receiving formal financial or child

welfare support (e.g. Medicaid, TANF, child protectives support services) can be an indicator of low-socioeconomic status and an increased risk for experiencing parenting stress. It was estimated that in 2018, that 13% of the United States' population (18% of all children) lived under the national poverty line, which at the time was the lowest percentage in a 5-year downward trend (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). Furthermore, on average, nearly one million families (1.7 million children) were receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) per month in 2018 (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2019). Approximately 39.7 million people (19.7 million households) participated in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) in 2018, which has been on slight decrease since its peak in 2015 (United States Department of Agriculture, 2020a). It was also estimated that in 2018 approximately 6.9 million people (5.2 million infants/children) participated in the Women Infants and Children (WIC) program (United States Department of Agriculture, 2020b). Considering the increased risk of experiencing parenting stress for couples engaged in child welfare services studying the process associated with parenting stress management can help equip these at-risk couples in managing the day-to-day care for their children.

Research has shown that the quality of the coparenting relationship between parents can affect each parent's capacity to effectively manage parenting stress. In fact, a supportive and less undermining coparenting relationship has been associated with lower parenting stress (Feinberg, 2002; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2016). However, research on these associations has often been limited to examining the perspective of mothers only (Barnhart & Maguire-Jack, 2016; Nomaguchi et al., 2017a) or has yielded varying results for mothers versus fathers (Durtschi et al., 2017). Further, research examining the mechanisms that explain how the coparenting relationship influences parenting stress is limited. One potential, albeit less studied mechanism,

is parenting self-efficacy. As parents receive support from their coparent this can positively influence their parenting self-efficacy, which can increase their capacity to effectively manage their parenting stress (Harmon & Perry, 2011; Raikes & Thompson, 2005). Guided by family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 2003), the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), the current study aimed to fill the gap in the literature by examining the association between coparenting support and parenting stress as mediated by parenting self-efficacy for at-risk couples engaged in the child welfare system.

Parenting Stress

When parents face the stressors associated with parenting, they employ coping methods that are dependent on appraisals informed by the resources that are available to manage those stressors (Abidin, 1992; Deater-Deckard & Panneton, 2017). According to the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), contextual factors can influence an individual's perceptions or appraisals of stressors, which consequently can determine how and what resources are used to cope with them (Camisasca et al., 2014; Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). When a stressor or series of stressors depletes the resources available for coping it could become overwhelming for the parents and lead to negative consequences for them and their children (Cooper et al., 2009). Access to resources can impact whether a parent can successfully manage their parenting stress; furthermore, when parents experience strain in other areas of their lives this can negatively impact their ability to cope with parenting stress.

Factors within the family, like romantic relationship status and quality, family composition, and the parent-child relationship can increase the difficulty of coping with parenting stress. One way this difficulty is demonstrated is through the potential financial strain

parents and families are exposed to. Studies using Fragile Families data have shown that parents with strained resources and in unstable relationships possess an increase risk to being overwhelmed by parenting stress (Berryhill et al., 2016; Durtschi et al., 2017). When parents have access to supplemental nonparental childcare support (e.g., sitter, nanny, relative), they are better equipped to manage their parenting stress because of the additional support they receive for managing parenting responsibilities (Craig & Churchill, 2018). Strained relationships within the family can increase the difficulty managing parenting stress. Research has highlighted how establishing new romantic relationships, and maintaining unhealthy and conflictual relationships, can elevate parenting stress (Cooper et al., 2009). Further, research has shown that stepparents in comparison to biological or adoptive parents possess an increased risk to experiencing parenting stress due to the challenge of establishing and maintaining their relationship with non-biological children (Shapiro, 2014; Shapiro & Stewart, 2011). Finally, the lack of experience in parenting or the sudden increase in parenting responsibilities that new and first-time parents experience can exacerbate the difficulties of managing parenting stress. Literature shows that new parents experience a great amount of parenting stress, which can strain the relationship between parents (Biehle & Mickelson, 2011; Epifanio et al., 2015). This strain has been attributed to a lack of parenting experience as well as to difficulty adjusting to the new responsibilities and routines of their role as parents, which can lead to the demands of parenting exceeding the resources of both time and energy (Glenn & McLanahan, 1982; McBride & Rane, 1998).

Previous research has typically examined parenting stress as a predictor of parenting and child outcomes (Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Crnic & Low, 2002; Goetz, et al., 2019; Rhoades et al., 2011). This focus of research has highlighted the negative associations of parenting stress and the importance of managing parenting stress in a healthy way. There has been some research

to highlight the antecedents of parenting stress (Berryhill et al., 2016; Ponnet, 2014), however there is still a dearth of research in this area. Further, mothers have historically been viewed as the primary caregiver and thus a majority of literature on parenting stress has focused mostly on mothers, and less on fathers (Nomaguchi, Brown, et al., 2017a; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020; Riina & Feinberg, 2012). However, the gradual societal change in Western culture shows that shifts in gender roles and parenting expectations have expanded the ways in which men parent their children, thus warranting greater attention to their unique experiences associated with parenting stress (Coontz, 2015; Kaplan & Knoll, 2019). Furthermore, although the mothers and fathers experience parenting stress individually, according to family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 2003) the way couples share resources and interact with each other necessitates the study of parenting stress from a dyadic context. There have been recent studies to examine parenting stress within the couple context. But these have focused on perceptions of parenting stress at the dyadic level having an impact on couple and family outcomes within a dyadic context (Durtschi et al., 2017; Le et al., 2017), so there is still very little known about the exact couple-level mechanisms contributing to parenting stress management. The current study aims to advance this line of research that directs more attention towards examining couple-level processes that might influence the individual perceptions of parenting stress.

Coparenting Support and Parenting Stress Management

Coparenting is the responsibility of caring for a child that is shared between two or more parents or parenting figures (McHale & Lindahl, 2011). Family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 2003) highlights how there is a mutual influence between the coparenting relationship and other relationships in the family like the romantic relationship between parents and the parent-child relationship (Feinberg, 2003). However, when considering the coparenting relationship between

people in a committed couple relationship, it is important to note that this relationship can be influenced by the characteristics and quality of the romantic relationship but is still uniquely separate from it (Cox & Paley, 2003; McHale & Lindahl, 2011). The multidirectional influence between the coparenting relationship and the couple relationship provides support for how the quality of the coparenting relationship can be indicative of how other parenting processes might change over time, including parenting stress (Choi & Becher, 2018; Nomaguchi et al., 2017a).

One way coparenting support can affect parenting stress is through the perceived additional support that each parent provides in managing parenting responsibilities. According to the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), parents who feel more supported by their coparent are more likely to appraise stressors associated with parenting as less overwhelming and more manageable. In contrast, when parents undermine each other in their coparenting roles, the additional stress and tension between parents can diminish their capacity to effectively manage their parenting responsibilities (Feinberg, 2003; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Research has reinforced these associations with married and unmarried couples from lower income, diverse samples (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2016; Solmeyer & Feinberg, 2011).

Despite the clear theoretical explanation for how coparenting support might influence perceptions of parenting stress, little empirical attention has focused on studying the exact mechanisms involved within this process. For example, parenting self-efficacy may act as a critical mediating factor linking coparenting support and parenting stress. A high quality coparenting relationship that is supportive and not undermining can influence parenting stress management through creating a psychologically safe environment that is affirming of parents in their parenting role. When facing overwhelming challenges in parenting, being in a supportive environment might empower parents in fulfilling their parenting responsibilities (Bandura, 1997;

Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2016). Hence, the current study examines parenting self-efficacy as a mediating mechanism through which coparenting support may influence perceptions of parenting stress.

Parenting Self-Efficacy

Parenting self-efficacy refers to a parent's own perception of their abilities to manage the responsibilities of caring for their children (Merrifield & Gamble, 2013). The transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) offers a perspective that highlights how when parenting responsibilities begin to build up, if parents feel more efficacious in their parenting role, they might feel better equipped and capable to meet the needs of their children and thus will not feel overwhelmed by stress. In a study with low-income mothers, it was found that more parenting self-efficacy was associated with less parenting stress (Raikes & Thompson, 2005). A study with Fragile Families mothers showed that parental support from the father as well as parenting self-efficacy were both, uniquely, significantly associated with less parenting stress (Harmon & Perry, 2011). Further, social learning theory (Bandura, 1997) would highlight that when parents feel more capable to accomplish their parenting tasks they are, in turn, more likely to actively engage in parenting behaviors. Consequently, parents who successfully engage in parenting behaviors are less likely to experience parenting stress (Shorey et al., 2019). When facing the stressful hassles of parenting, feeling capable to deal those challenges can help minimize the experiences and consequences of parenting stress for both mothers and fathers.

Social learning theory points to how parenting self-efficacy is cultivated through the support one receives (Bandura, 1997). When parents receive support from their coparent, this can help promote their parenting self-efficacy, which can influence their perceptions of parenting stress. In a study with non-resident fathers, Fagan et al., (2016) found that a more supportive

coparenting relationship predicted greater parenting self-efficacy and parent-child involvement. Using data with married and cohabitating couples, Merrifield and Gamble (2013) found that undermining coparenting relationships were associated with lower parenting self-efficacy for mothers and fathers. A supportive coparenting relationship can also facilitate greater parenting efficacy across the very stressful transition to new parenthood for both mothers and fathers (Biehle & Mickelson, 2011).

Despite the conclusive research showing a direct association between coparenting support and parenting self-efficacy, as well as parenting self-efficacy and parenting stress, to date no research could be found testing the instrumental role of parenting self-efficacy in mediating the effects of coparenting support on parenting stress among couples. Family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 2003) highlights how the interconnectedness of the couple would be integral to shaping parenting self-efficacy for each individual parent. It is also plausible that in addition to one's own parenting self-efficacy affecting their parenting stress, the couple's interconnectedness may result in each parent's self-efficacy also influencing their partner's parenting stress. When a parent is more efficacious and capable of fulfilling their parenting responsibilities this could help reduce their coparent's parenting stress because they know that their partner is capable of helping with parenting. The current study aims to elucidate these actor and partner effects among a sample of at-risk, married and unmarried, couples.

Current Study

Considering the increased risk of parents involved in the child welfare system for experiencing parenting stress, identifying additional supports for these families can help mitigate the negative effects associated with being overwhelmed by parenting stress. The present study explores the influence of coparenting support on the parenting stress of at-risk parents in couple

relationships, and whether parenting self-efficacy may mediate this association. Furthermore, this study uses an actor-partner interdependence model (APIM) to examine both the individual (actor effects) and couple processes (partner effects) associated with both mothers' and fathers' reports of parenting stress. First, regarding the direct actor effects, it is hypothesized that parents who report higher coparenting support at time 1 (T1) will also report at time 2 (T2) less parenting stress (hypothesis 1a) and more parenting self-efficacy (hypothesis 1b). Further, those who report more parenting self-efficacy at T1 will also report less parenting stress at T2 (hypothesis 1c). Next, the direct partner effects between the study variables will be tested. It is hypothesized that the individual reports of coparenting support at T1 will be positively associated with partner reports of parenting self-efficacy at T2 (hypothesis 2a), and individual reports of parenting self-efficacy at T2 will be negatively associated with partner reports of parenting stress at T2 (hypothesis 2b). Finally, the indirect actor effects and indirect partner effects will be examined. For the indirect actor effects, it is hypothesized that a parent's report of parenting self-efficacy at T2 will mediate the association between their own coparenting support at T1 and parenting stress at T2 (hypothesis 3a). For the indirect partner effects it is hypothesized that a parent's report of parenting self-efficacy at T2 will mediate the association between their partner's report of coparenting support and their own report of parenting stress (hypothesis 3b).

CHAPTER 2

METHOD AND ANALYTICAL PLAN

Method

Procedure

Participants included couples where at least one partner was engaged in child welfare support services (e.g. TANF, Medicaid, WIC, child protective services) and were either pregnant or caring for at least one child under the age of 18. Couples were recruited through referrals obtained from community organizations across a 12-county region in northeast Georgia to participate in a federally funded couple and relationship enrichment (CRE) program. All participants completed an initial screening to determine eligibility and interest in participating in the program, followed by a comprehensive registration process to collect participant demographic information and needs assessment. Between August 2016 and December 2019, 400 couples voluntarily enrolled in the program and consented to participate in the research study and were asked to complete a pre-assessment survey approximately three weeks before the program (Time 1: T1) and a post-assessment survey approximately six weeks following the program (Time 2: T2). All respondents were compensated $50 for completing the pre-assessment and $75 for completing the post-assessment. Of the 400 couples enrolled in the program, 153 couples were excluded from the final analytic sample (see Figure A1 in Appendix A). First, to employ an actor-partner interdependence model, data were required to be from distinguishable male/female dyads (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010), and thus same-sex couples (n = 12) were excluded from the study. Secondly, couples who did not respond or were missing study variables at T1 (n = 89) or

T2 (n = 52) were also excluded from the final sample. Analyses comparing the 247 retained couples with the 153 excluded couples showed only a few statistically significant differences across several demographic characteristics (see Tables A1, A2 and A3 in Appendix A). Compared to the final study sample, those who were excluded were less likely to attend the CRE program (100% vs 77%, respectively; $\chi^2 = 63.87$, $p = .00$) and less likely to graduate from the CRE program (82% vs 38%, respectively, $\chi^2 = 81.69$, $p = .00$). Further, compared to men in the final study sample, men who were excluded from the study were more likely to identify their race as "Other" (12% vs. 16%, respectively; $\chi^2 = 7.27$, $p = .03$), and were less likely to report receiving anything beyond a high school diploma or GED as their highest level of education (48% vs. 22%, respectively; $\chi^2 = 11.35$, $p = .02$). One-way ANOVAs comparing the final sample with those excluded on the study variables at T1, revealed only one significant difference: those excluded reported higher parenting stress at T1 (M = 2.98 vs. 3.22, respectively; $F = 5.62$, $p = .02$), and this difference was specifically found among men (M = 2.84 vs. 3.32, respectively; $F = 9.17$, $p = .00$). No statistically significant differences in demographic characteristics and study variables at T1 were found comparing women included versus excluded from the study.

Sample

Table 1 provides a demographic profile of the individual characteristics of the overall sample and a comparison between men and women, and Table 2 summarizes the couple-level characteristics of the final sample with a comparison between married and unmarried couples. Of the 247 couples in the current study, 145 (59%) were married and 102 (41%) were unmarried. On average, the couples were together 7.61 years (SD = 6.1; range = .42-35) at the time of enrollment. Participants ranged in age from 18 – 69 years old (M = 33.60, SD = 8.72) , the majority identified as either White/Caucasian (45%) or Black/African American (45%), and most

(34%) completed some education beyond high school. On average, the couples reported having 2.31 (*SD* = 1.17) children, and the majority (48%) reported an annual, household income of $24,999 or less, which falls under the federal poverty line for households of this size (United States Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.). Nearly all of the couples (88%) were receiving child welfare financial support services, 32% were receiving home visitation services, and 26% were involved in child protective services prior to enrolling in the CRE program. Statistically significant differences between men and women and between married and unmarried couples are summarized below in Table 1 and Table 2, respectively.

Table 1. Individual level d*emographic characteristics by gender and overall.*

Demographic Characteristics	Total Sample (*N* = 494)	Men (*n* = 247)	Women (*n* = 247)	*F*-value or χ^2 -value (*p*-value)
Age: *M* (SD)	33.60 (8.72)	34.99 (9.18)	32.20 (8.02)	12.94 (.00)
Race Primary: *n* (%)				2.53 (.28)
Caucasian/White	219 (44.3%)	114 (46.7%)	105 (43.0%)	
African American/Black	220 (44.5%)	102 (41.8%)	118 (48.4%)	
Other	49 (9.9%)	28 (11.5%)	21 (8.6%)	
Missing	6	3	3	
Education Level: *n* (%)				8.93 (.06)
Did not earn diploma	66 (13.6%)	35 (14.2%)	31 (12.9%)	
High School diploma or GED	159 (32.6%)	93 (37.8%)	66 (27.3%)	
Some college but no degree	98 (20.1%)	49 (19.9%)	49 (20.3%)	
Associates Degree/Vocational Certificate	75 (15.4%)	31 (12.6%)	44 (18.3%)	
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	89 (18.3%)	38 (15.5%)	51 (21.2%)	
Missing	7	1	6	
Employment Status: *n* (%)				79.11 (.00)
Unemployed	165 (33.4%)	48 (19.4%)	117 (47.4%)	
Temporary/Part-Time	99 (20.0%)	35 (14.1%)	64 (25.9%)	
Full-Time	230 (46.6%)	164 (66.4%)	66 (26.7%)	

Table 2. *Couple-level demographic characteristics by marital status and overall.*

Demographic Characteristics	Total Sample (N = 247)	Unmarried (n = 102)	Married (n = 145)	F-value or χ^2 -value (p-value)
Household Annual Income:				
n (Valid %)				20.89 (.00)
Less than $7,000	37 (16.7%)	24 (26.1%)	13 (10.0%)	
$7,000-$13,999	28 (12.6%)	15 (16.3%)	13 (10.0%)	
$14,000-$24,999	41 (18.5%)	18 (19.6%)	23 (17.7%)	
$25,000-$39,999	53 (23.8%)	20 (21.7%)	33 (25.4%)	
$40,000-$74,999	49 (22.1%)	14 (15.2%)	35 (26.9%)	
$75,000+	14 (6.3%)	1 (1.1%)	13 (10.0%)	
Missing	25	10	15	
Support Services:				
Welfare support services: *n* (%)	216 (87.4%)	94 (92.2%)	122 (84.1%)	4.41 (.04)
Home visitation services: *n* (%)	79 (32.0%)	34 (33.3%)	45 (31.0%)	0.25 (.62)
Child protective services: *n* (%)	65 (26.3%)	29 (28.4%)	36 (24.8%)	0.05 (.82)
Relationship Length (years):				
Range	.42-35	.42-13	.66-35	
M (*SD*)	7.81 (6.08)	4.21 (2.87)	10.33 (6.45)	69.59 (.00)
Total Number of Children in Household:				
Range	1-8	1-6	1-8	
M (*SD*)	2.31 (1.17)	2.16 (1.08)	2.41 (1.23)	2.50 (.12)
Children from Prior Relationships				
Either partner have children from prior relationship? Yes: *n* (%)	111 (44.9%)	59 (57.8%)	52 (35.9%)	11.69 (.00)
Number in Home: *M* (*SD*)	.97 (1.32)	1.17 (1.31)	.83 (1.32)	3.72 (.06)
Number not in Home: *M* (*SD*)	.73 (1.33)	.76 (1.21)	.71 (1.40)	.07 (.79)
Youngest Child Age (years):				
Range	.00-17	.00-17	.00-17	
M (*SD*)	3.57 (3.60)	2.97 (3.49)	3.99 (3.62)	4.88 (.03)
Oldest Child Age (years):				
Range	1-36	1-28	2-36	
M (*SD*)	10.77 (6.11)	9.36 (5.77)	11.71 (6.17)	6.36 (.01)
Parenting Experience: *n* (%)				
All children under 5-years-old? Yes: *n* (%)	92 (37.2%)	47 (46.1%)	45 (31.0%)	5.78 (.02)
Couple Attended at Least one Class Session				
Yes: *n* (%)	247 (100%)	102 (100%)	145 (100%)	--
Couple Graduated from Program (75% complete)				
Yes: *n* (%)	203 (82.2%)	78 (76.5%)	125 (86.2%)	3.88 (.05)

Measures

The measures in this study were taken from a larger survey designed to assess a variety of experiences of couples. The survey included several measures of individual well-being (e.g., depressive symptoms, self-care), couple relationship maintenance and quality, coparenting support, parenting behaviors and stress, and financial practices and distress. Since the main larger survey included multiple measures, to help reduce participant burden, informed decisions were made to select certain items from the established scales included in the survey without using all of the scales in their entirety. These choices were made based on the research of collaborators on the federal grant and published research using the original scales. Therefore, many of the scales described below are considered to be "adapted from" the original, established scale.

Coparenting Support. Twelve items were used to measure each parent's perceptions of the coparenting support they received from their partner at T1. Seven items were taken from the *Casey Foster Applicant Inventory-Applicant Coparenting Scale* (Cherry & Orme, 2011). Four items were from the *Coparenting Questionnaire* (Margolin et al., 2001). One item was created by the research team. Both scales have been used in many studies with similar samples and have been shown to be internally reliable and overall sound measures of coparenting support (Linares, et., 2010; Orme & Combs-Orme, 2014; Richardson & Futris, 2019). The items in this construct were designed to assess the individual's perception of their coparent's parenting behaviors and support (e.g., "my partner strongly supports my parenting efforts"). Response options were on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Some items were reverse-coded, and a mean score was computed so that a higher score represented that a parent perceived their partner as engaging in supportive coparenting behaviors (Men: $\alpha = .827$, Women:

α = .807). Table A4 in Appendix A summarizes the central tendency of response items for both men and women.

Parenting Self-Efficacy. Six items from the *Parenting Sense of Competence Scale* (Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978) were used to measure parents' beliefs about their abilities to fulfill their parenting role at T1 and T2. This scale has been used with similar samples and it has been found to be a reliable and statistically strong measure for parenting self-efficacy (Erdwins et al., 2001; Johnston, & Mash, 1989). The items measured attitudes associated to parenting (e.g., "I understand how my actions affect a/my child") as well as perceptions of capacity to handle parenting responsibilities (e.g. "When something is troubling a/my child, I am always able to figure it out"). Response options were on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). A mean score was computed so that a higher score indicated a higher level of parenting self-efficacy (Men, $\alpha = .834^{T1}$ and $.892^{T2}$; Women, $\alpha = .823^{T1}$ and $.866^{T2}$). Tables A5 and A6 in Appendix A summarize the central tendency of response items for both men and women at T1 and T2, respectively.

Parenting Stress. Ten items were used to measure the amount of stress that parents would associate with their parenting role. Items were from the *Parental Stress Scale* (Berry & Jones, 1995) which has been shown to be a reliable measure of parenting stress (Beaver & Belsky, 2012; Richardson & Futris, 2019; Shapiro & Stewart, 2011). The items in this scale were designed to assess the perceptions of strain associated with parenting with items like "The behavior of my children is often embarrassing or stressful to me." Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). A mean score was computed so that a higher score indicated a higher level of parenting stress (Men, $\alpha = .884^{T1}$ and

.908 [T2]; Women, α = .879 [T1] and .896[T2]). Tables A7 and A8 in Appendix A summarize the central tendency of response items for both men and women at T1 and T2, respectively.

Control Variables. Considering how individual and family characteristics might influence mothers' and fathers' perceptions of parenting stress, several variables were controlled. Control variables included each parents' age (in years), race, (0 = *White*; 1 = *non-White*), relationship status (1 = m*arried*; 0 = *unmarried*), step-parenting status (1 = *at least one parent is a step-parent*; 0 = *neither parent is a step-parent*), income (1 = *$7,000 - $13,999*; 6 = *$75,000+*), number of children in household (mean), and age of children (1 = *all children under the age of 5*; 0 = *at least one child over the age of 5*).

Analytical Plan

An actor-partner interdependence model allows for the examination of the factors associated with how both partners in a couple might influence outcomes for their self (actor effects) as well as the outcomes for their partner (partner effects) (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Fitzpatrick et al., 2016). An assumption that must be met to perform an APIM is that the data must be from empirically distinguishable dyads. Where it can be assumed that data from mothers and fathers are conceptually distinguishable this does not prove that their data is empirically distinguishable because some actor and partner effects can be essentially equal and could be used in place of the other (Kenny & Ledermann, 2010). To ensure that couples in this study were empirically distinguishable an omnibus test of distinguishability was conducted using Mplus version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2018). This test included a model with equality constraints that forced all parameters (e.g. means, variances, covariances) for the test variables to be equal among men and women. Poor model fit and significant chi-square value would confirm that

there is distinguishability among partners based on gender (Berryhill et al., 2016; Kenny et al., 2006).

Next, we estimated the unconditional APIM model which included direct and indirect actor effects, direct and indirect partner effects, and control variables. First, direct actor effects were tested to examine if individual perceptions coparenting support at T1 would predict their own parenting self-efficacy and parenting stress at T2 for both mothers and fathers. We also tested if one's parenting self-efficacy at T2 would predict their own parenting tress at T2 for both mothers and fathers. We controlled for parenting self-efficacy and parenting stress at T1 to determine if the effects between variables would be significant above and beyond the effects of their initial scores at T1.

Next, we tested whether the direct partner effects within the couple were significant, specifically if a participant's perception of coparenting support at T1 would predict their partner's parenting self-efficacy at T2. Further, we examined if a participant's parenting self-efficacy at T2 would predict their partner's parenting stress at T1. We also included the following covariances within this model: 1) mothers' reports of coparenting support at T1 with fathers' reports of coparenting support at T1, 2) mother's reports of parenting self-efficacy at T2 with father's reports of parenting self-efficacy at T2, and 3) mothers' reports of parenting stress at T2 with father's reports of parenting stress at T2.

After testing the direct effects, we used bootstrapping procedures to generate 5,000 resamples to examine the indirect actor effects and indirect partner effects within the same model. First, the indirect actor effect between individual perceptions of coparenting support and parenting stress through the mediation of parenting efficacy for both men and women were examined. Next, we examined the indirect partner effects of a partner's report of coparenting

support predicting their partner's parenting stress through their partner's reported parenting self-efficacy. This included examining the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals (CI) for the indirect actor effects and partner effects; which if these confidence intervals did not include zero, it was assumed that the significant indirect effects .05 level could be trusted (Mackinnon et al., 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

Goodness-of-fit indices were obtained to ensure that there was an adequate fit between the data and the model that was estimated. Acceptable fit indices included an insignificant chi-square test statistic, either the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) not exceeding a value of .05, and either the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) being greater than the value of .95 (Brown, 2015; Kenny, 2015). Modification indices produced by Mplus that did not violate the model conceptually were used to help obtain a better model fit.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics on test variables are summarized in Table 3. On average, participants reported moderate to moderately high scores on coparenting support at T1 with both men and women reporting that they *agree* or *strongly agree* that their partner was a supportive coparent (M_{men} = 5.49, M_{women} = 5.35 on a 1 to 7 scale). Participants also reported moderately high levels of parenting self-efficacy at T1 and T2, reporting either *agreeing* or *strongly agreeing* on feeling efficacious as a parent (M_{men} = 5.33^{T1} and 5.49^{T2}, M_{women} = 5.25^{T1} and 5.58^{T2} on a 1 to 7 scale). Next, participants reported moderately low levels of parenting stress at T1 and T2. On average, men and women *strongly disagreed* or *disagreed* that they perceived their parenting responsibilities as being stressful (M_{men} = 2.84^{T1} and 2.88^{T2}, M_{women} = 3.12^{T1} and 2.93^{T2} on a 1 to 7 scale). Paired sample t-tests comparing men's and women's scores revealed only one statistically significant difference: on average, women reported higher levels of parenting stress at T1 (t = 2.71, p = .01); complete paired sample t-test analyses results are provided in Table A9 in Appendix A. Bivariate correlations for all test variables were significant in the expected directions (see Table 3).

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics and correlations.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Coparenting Women T1	--									
2. Parenting Self-Efficacy Women T1	.350**	--								
3. Parenting Self-Efficacy Women T2	.344**	.676**	--							
4. Parenting Stress Women T1	-.356**	-.461**	-.376**	--						
5. Parenting Stress Women T2	-.372**	-.426**	-.513**	.736**	--					
6. Coparenting Men T1	.505**	.294**	.299**	-.189**	-.292**	--				
7. Parenting Self-Efficacy Men T1	.264**	.352**	.361**	-.270**	-.327**	.448**	--			
8. Parenting Self-Efficacy Men T2	.139*	.192**	.226**	-.156*	-.181**	.306**	.600**	--		
9. Parenting Stress Men T1	-.159*	-.250**	-.207**	.295**	.292**	-.366**	-.494**	-.371**	--	
10. Parenting Stress Men T2	-225**	-.290**	-.229**	.260**	.279**	-.327**	-.369**	-.359**	.623**	--
Mean	5.35	5.25	5.58	3.12	2.93	5.49	5.33	5.49	2.84	2.88
SD	1.07	0.97	1.01	1.21	1.22	1.05	0.96	1.07	1.16	1.25
Range	1.92-7.00	2.83-7.00	3.00-7.00	1.00-6.70	1.00-7.00	2.17-7.00	2.33-7.00	1.60-7.00	1.00-7.00	1.00-7.00
Skewness	-.54	.03	-.21	.26	.22	-.33	-.21	-.43	.34	.49
Kurtosis	-.04	-.69	-.88	-.44	-.50	-.55	-.14	.23	-.12	.14
Reliability	.807	.823	.866	.879	.896	.827	.834	.892	.884	.908

Note. *p<.05; **<.0. Correlations within the block represent partner effects.

Actor-Partner Interdependence Models

The constrained APIM included the equality constraints for men and women on all actor and partner effects. Fit statistics show that this model did not fit the data: $\chi^2(43) = 918.72$, $p < .001$; SRMR = 0.30 RMSEA = 0.29 ; CFI = 0.02; TLI = -0.00. This means that the constraints placed on these parameters indicate that the dyads within this sample are empirically distinguishable and the APIM can be estimated without using any equality (Kenny et al., 2006).

The unconstrained APIM was modeled which included the direct and indirect actor effects, direct and indirect partner effects, control variables, and bootstrapped confidence intervals. Because of the many parameters in this model and the modest sample the model fit was poor and the model could not be identified. None of the estimate coefficients for the control variables, besides the T1 controls for the test variables, were significant. Since the paths from theses controls were not significant and using up free parameters needed to identify the model they were dropped and the unconstrained model was then estimated again (see Figure 1). Fit statistics show that there was an acceptable fit for the data for this model: $\chi^2(20) = 40.66$, $p = .001$; SRMR = 0.05; RMSEA = 0.06; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.95.

All standardized parameter estimates and confidence intervals can be found in Table 4. All direct actor effects were found to be statistically significant. First, there were significant actor effects for participants' perception of coparenting support at T1 to their own reports of parenting stress at T2 for mothers ($\beta = -.24$, $p < .001$) and fathers ($\beta = -.25$, $p = .001$). Thus, with every increase of one standard deviation in coparenting support, mothers and fathers reported a decrease in parenting stress by -.24 and -.25 standard deviations, respectively. Further, there were significant actor effects from coparenting support to parenting self-efficacy for both mothers ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$) and fathers ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$). So for every increase in one standard

deviation of coparenting support, parenting self-efficacy increased by .24 standard deviations for mothers and .30 standard deviations for fathers. Lastly, there were significant actor effects from parents' reports of parenting self-efficacy to parenting stress for mothers (β = -.52, $p < .001$) and fathers (β = -.32, $p < .001$). This indicates that with every increase in standard deviation for parenting self-efficacy, parenting stress decreased by -.52 standard deviations for mothers and -.32 standard deviations for fathers. Examination of the direct partner effects revealed no statistically significant findings.

Last, bootstrapping methods were used to test the indirect effects. Specifically we found indirect actor effects from coparenting support to parenting self-efficacy to parenting stress for mothers (β = -.13, $p < .001$) , 95% CI [-0.23, -0.03]) and for fathers (β = -.09, $p = .01$, 95% CI [-0.19, -0.00]). In other words, as coparenting support increases by one standard deviation, parenting stress decreases by -.13 standard deviations for mothers and -.09 standard deviations for fathers through coparenting support's prior effect on parent self-efficacy. Thus, parenting self-efficacy was found to mediate the association between coparenting support and parenting stress. However, there were no significant indirect partner effects from a parent's perception of coparenting support to their partner's parenting self-efficacy and parenting stress for mothers (β =-.01, $p = .69$, 95% CI [-0.18, 0.01]) or fathers (β = -.08, $p = .02$, 95% CI [-0.04, 0.03]). Overall, the variables in this model explained 31% of the variance in mothers' parenting stress and 19% of the variance in fathers' parenting stress.

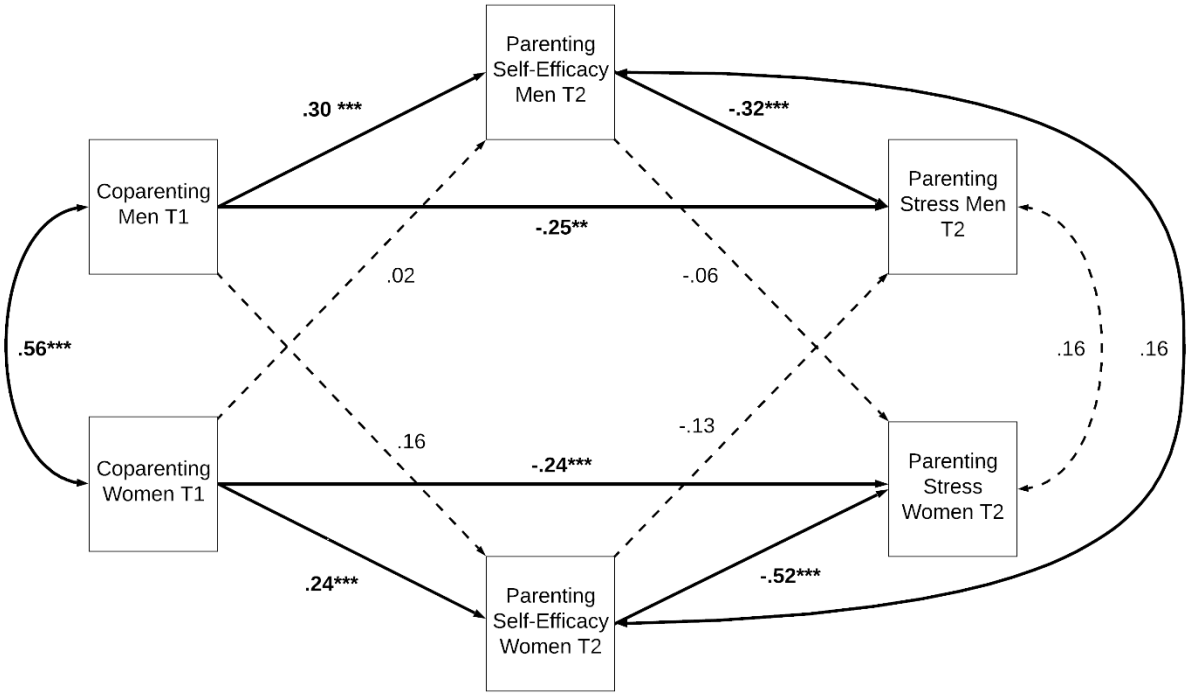

Figure 1. Unconstrained actor-partner interdependence model

Note: $\chi^2(20) = 40.66$, $p < .001$; *SRMR = 0.05; RMSEA = 0.06; CFI = 0.98; TLI = 0.95.*

Table 4. *Standardized parameter estimates for factor loadings and paths for the unconstrained APIM.*

Paths	β (*SE*)	*p*	95% CI
Actor Effects			
Coparenting Men^{T1} → Parenting Self-Efficacy Men^{T2}	**.30 (0.06)**	**.000**	**[0.14, 0.40]**
Parenting Self-Efficacy Men^{T2} → Parenting Stress Men^{T2}	**-.32 (0.07)**	**.000**	**[-0.50, -0.20]**
Coparenting Men^{T1} → Parenting Stress Men^{T2}	**-.25 (0.07)**	**.001**	**[-0.43, -0.12]**
Coparenting Women^{T1} → Parenting Self-Efficacy Women^{T2}	**.24 (0.06)**	**.000**	**[0.08, 0.35]**
Parenting Self-Efficacy Women^{T2} → Parenting Stress Women^{T2}	**-.52 (0.07)**	**.000**	**[-0.70, -0.40]**
Coparenting Women^{T1} → Parenting Stress Women^{T2}	**-.24 (0.06)**	**.000**	**[-0.40, -0.14]**
Partner Effects			
Coparenting Men^{T1} → Parenting Self-Efficacy Women^{T2}	.16 (0.07)	.013	[-0.01, 0.27]
Parenting Self-Efficacy Men^{T2} → Parenting Stress Women^{T2}	-.06 (0.06)	.308	[-0.22, 0.04]
Coparenting Women^{T1} → Parenting Self-Efficacy Men^{T2}	.02 (0.04)	.687	[-0.10, 0.09]
Parenting Self-Efficacy Women^{T2} → Parenting Stress Men^{T2}	-.13 (0.08)	.082	[-0.32, -0.01]
Covariation			
Coparenting Men^{T1} ↔ Coparenting Women^{T1}	**.56 (0.08**)	**.000**	**[0.36, 0.69]**
Parenting Efficacy Men^{T2} ↔ Parenting Efficacy Women^{T2}	**.16 (0.04)**	**.000**	**[0.04, 0.23]**
Parenting Stress Men^{T2} ↔ Parenting Stress Women^{T2}	.16 (0.07)	.000	[-0.02, 0.28]
Indirect			
Coparenting Men^{T1} → Parenting Self-Efficacy Men^{T2} → Parenting Stress Men^{T2}	**-.09 (0.03)**	**.001**	**[-0.17, -0.02]**
Coparenting Women^{T1} → Parenting Self-Efficacy Women^{T2} → Parenting Stress Women^{T2}	**-.13 (0.04)**	**.001**	**[-0.22, -0.03]**
Coparenting Men^{T1} → Parenting Self-Efficacy Women^{T2} → Parenting Stress Women^{T2}	-.08 (0.04)	.019	[-0.18, 0.01]
Coparenting Women^{T1} → Parenting Self-Efficacy Men^{T2} → Parenting Stress Men^{T2}	-.01 (0.01)	.688	[-0.04, 0.03]

Note. Although some p-values are significant for some paths, these cannot be trusted because the 95% confidence intervals includes '0'. All significant paths with acceptable confidence intervals have been set in 'bold' .

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CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the association between a supportive coparenting relationship and the parenting stress of at-risk couples receiving child welfare services, and if this association was mediated by parenting-self efficacy. The current study was unique in several ways. First, by including both mothers and fathers and using an actor-partner interdependence model the present study adds to the body of literature on parenting stress by highlighting significant effects within the dyadic context. Most studies that examine parenting stress focus specifically on mothers (Barnhart & Maguire-Jack, 2016; Nomaguchi et al., 2017a) but there is a necessity to examine parenting variables within the dyadic context considering the way couples interact can influence how they parent their children (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020; Riina & Feinberg, 2012). Further, our study was unique because of the focus on parenting stress as an outcome versus an indicator. While there is ample evidence reinforcing the negative outcomes associated with parenting stress, a large gap exists in the literature with regards to understanding the mechanisms that may help parents better manage their stress (Bronte-Tinkew et al., 2007; Thomason et al., 2014). Our findings suggest that both coparenting support and parenting self-efficacy are important contributors to how parents perceive their parenting stress, explaining nearly 31% and 19% of the variance in mothers' and father's, respectively, reports of parenting stress. Lastly, unique to our study was the inclusion of parenting self-efficacy as a mediator of the association between coparenting support and parenting stress. Whereas the association between coparenting support and parenting stress has been examined (Feinberg, 2002 ; Solmeyer

& Feinberg, 2011), the present study establishes parenting self-efficacy as a potential mediator for this association. The focus on the indirect effects associated with the perceptions of parenting stress highlight specific mechanisms involved with this process.

Our findings at the individual-level provide evidence for how a more supportive coparenting relationship and stronger parenting self-efficacy are important in influencing how stressful mothers and fathers perceive the challenges and demands of parenting. These results fully support hypotheses 1A and 1B, reinforcing the direct actor effects between parent's reports of coparenting support, parenting self-efficacy, and parenting stress. In particular, participants who perceived their partner as being more supportive as a coparent at time 1 were more likely to report less parenting stress at time 2. This finding aligns with the transactional theory of stress and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), suggesting a high-quality coparenting relationship can act as a resource for at-risk parents to minimize the deleterious effects of potential parenting stressors. As well, when parents reported high parenting self-efficacy at time 2, they were more likely to also report less parenting stress at time 2. Consistent with social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997), when parents feel more supported by their coparent they are more inclined to believe in their own abilities to fulfil their role as a parent and, in turn, less likely to feel overwhelmed by parenting responsibilities. These findings reinforce research that shows how the coparenting relationship is an important aspect of how parents cultivate parenting self-efficacy (Biehle & Mickelson, 2011).

Next, for our second hypothesis, it was hypothesized that parents' individual reports of coparenting support at time 1 will be directly and positively associated with their partner's reports of parenting self-efficacy at time 2 and each parent's individual reports of parenting self-efficacy at time 2 will directly and negatively impact their partner's perceptions of parenting

stress at time. However, these partner effects were not significant, thus each parent's own perceptions of their coparenting relationship and parenting self-efficacy are a stronger predictors of their own parenting stress.

Finally, with regards to our third hypothesis, support for the indirect actor effects (3a), but not the indirect partner effects (3b) was found. It was hypothesized that a parent's report of parenting self-efficacy at time 2 will mediate the association between their own coparenting support at time and parenting stress at time 2. We found that parenting self-efficacy did mediate the association between coparenting support and parenting stress. This finding provides a deeper understanding of the association between coparenting support and parenting stress through the mediation of parenting self-efficacy. A supportive coparenting relationship does impact parenting stress for parents and some of this association is explained by the indirect impact of parenting self-efficacy through mediation. The supportive coparenting relationship between mothers and fathers can create a psychologically safe environment for them helping them feel more capable the demands of parenting even if they begin to build up (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2016). Similar to the direct actor effects, the indirect partner effects were not significant. It was hypothesized that a parent's perception of their coparent would impact their own perceptions of parenting stress through the mediation of their own parenting self-efficacy.

Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions

Based on our findings we believe that there is merit to examining perceptions of parenting stress among couples. In particular we now know that the way couples support each other in their coparenting relationship might impact how they view their own parenting self-efficacy and their parenting stress. Intervention and prevention programs serving parents in the child welfare system (e.g., home visitation services) have primarily focused on parenting

behaviors and the negative outcomes associated with parenting stress. Working with couples to develop skills to be more supportive of each other in parenting could be a beneficial addition to programs like these. Further, our findings suggest that parenting self-efficacy may be an important mechanism that explains how the coparenting relationship may influence parenting stress. If parents do not feel supported and equipped to face their challenges in parenting, then they might have a difficult time with engaging in those parenting behaviors. Additionally, programs that focus on romantic relationships could benefit couples even more by including a focus on how the couple dynamics associated with the couple relationship might inform how parents support each other in their parenting.

Although this study does provide some insight on how coparenting and parenting self-efficacy might impact perceptions of parenting stress for at-risk couples, it is not without its limitations. First, despite the diversity among the sample on most demographic characteristics (e.g. race, education, employment) considering that this study included such a unique sample of parents who were receiving child welfare services, the findings are not generalizable to other populations. Because of the unique challenges faced by these families who receive child welfare services the stressors they are exposed to and the manner in which these families manage their resources are most likely unique. Future studies could benefit from comparing the association between these variables among families who had received child welfare services to those who had not. Another limitation was the data was collected from participants enrolled in a couples and relationship education program. It is possible that scores on the study variables at time 2 were influenced by the relationship maintenance and coparenting skills reinforced during the program. Future research with the current sample will examine changes in these variables from time 1 to time 2, and whether changes in coparenting support influence greater parenting self-

efficacy and, in turn, lower parenting stress, across time. Last, future research examining whether these associations are similar for married and unmarried couples may be warranted. Based on preliminary analyses comparing married (59%) and unmarried (41%) couples across the study variables, gender differences in reports of coparenting support and parenting stress at time 1 were detected for married, but not unmarried, couples (see Table A9 in Appendix A). Further, although not tested, there appears to be some between-group (married vs. unmarried) differences across the study variables (see Table A9), and the strength of the associations between the study variables, and especially the partner effects, appear to differ for married and unmarried couples (see Table A10 in Appendix A). It is possible that the way in which the coparenting relationship influences parenting efficacy and stress may depend on couples' commitment to their relationship, as reflected in their marital status.

Conclusions

In summary, the current study used an actor-partner interdependence model to examine the actor and partner effects associated with perceptions of parenting stress for a sample of at-risk parents defined by as those who receive child welfare support services. Parents within this unique population who are more likely to experience and become overwhelmed by parenting stress could benefit from interventions aimed at cultivating supportive coparenting relationships and parenting self-efficacy. As parents work together to support each other in their parenting efforts this can create a psychologically safe environment that is conducive to feeling more efficacious as a parent. Parents who are more efficacious as a parent have a greater capacity for managing their parenting responsibilities and thus how they might perceive their parenting stress.

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APPENDIX A

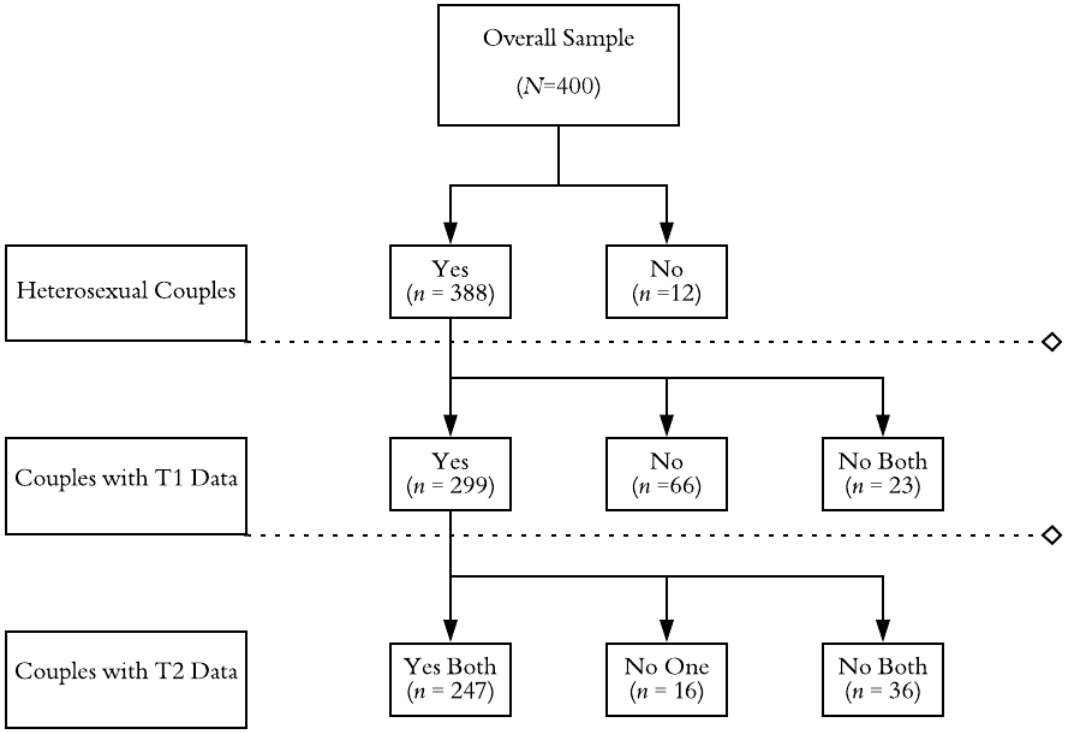

Figure A1. Inclusion decision tree.

Table A1. *Comparison of couple-level demographic characteristics for included and excluded couples.*

Demographic Characteristics	Included Couples (*n* = 247)	Excluded Couples (*n* = 153)	*F*-value or χ^2 -value (*p*-value)
Household Annual Income: *n* (Valid %)			2.28 (.89)
Less than $7,000	37 (16.7%)	28 (21.5%)	
$7,000-$13,999	28 (12.6%)	15 (11.5%)	
$14,000-$24,999	41 (18.5%)	21 (16.2%)	
$25,000-$39,999	53 (23.8%)	30 (19.6%)	
$40,000-$74,999	49 (22.1%)	30 (19.6%)	
$75,000+	14 (6.3%)	6 (3.9%)	
Missing	25	23	
Support Services:			
Welfare support services: *n* (%)	216 (87.4%)	129 (84.3%)	0.00 (.99)
Home visitation services: *n* (%)	79 (32.0%)	39 (25.5%)	0.36 (.55)
Child protective services: *n* (%)	65 (26.3%)	43 (28.1%)	0.00 (.98)
Relationship Length (years):			
M (*SD*)	7.81 (6.08)	7.38 (7.63)	0.32 (.57)
Total Number of Children in Household:			
M (*SD*)	2.31 (1.17)	2.46 (1.49)	0.00 (.98)
Children from Prior Relationships			
Either partner have children from prior relationship? Yes: *n* (%)	111 (44.9%)	69 (45.1%)	
Number in Home: *M* (*SD*)	.97 (1.32)	1.10 (1.45)	0.71 (.40)
Number not in Home: *M* (*SD*)	.73 (1.33)	.78 (1.77)	0.09 (.77)
Youngest Child Age (years):			
M (*SD*)	3.57 (3.60)	4.25 (3.93)	2.96 (.09)
Oldest Child Age (years):			
M (*SD*)	10.77 (6.11)	10.81 (6.01)	0.00 (.95)
Parenting Experience:			
All children under 5-years-old? Yes: *n* (%)	92 (37.2%)	107 (69.9%)	2.16 (.14)
Couple Attended at Least one Class Session			
Yes: *n* (%)	247 (100%)	117 (76.5%)	**63.87 (.00)**
Couple Graduated from Program (75% complete)			
Yes: *n* (%)	203 (82.2%)	58 (37.9%)	**81.69 (.00)**

Table A2. *Comparison of individual-level demographic characteristics for included and excluded couples.*

	Included Couples (n = 247)			Excluded Couples (n = 153)			F-value or χ^2 -value (p-value)	
Demographic Characteristics	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Men	Women
Age: *M* (*SD*)	33.60 (8.72)	34.99 (9.18)	32.20 (8.02)	33.62 (9.23)	35.05 (10.77)	32.44 (9.26)	0.00 (.95)	0.07 (.79)
Race Primary: *n* (%)							**7.27 (.03)**	3.24 (.20)
Caucasian/White	219 (44.3%)	114 (46.7%)	105 (43.0%)	96 (35.0%)	39 (31.5%)	57 (38.0%)		
African American/Black	220 (44.5%)	102 (41.8%)	118 (48.4%)	141 (51.5%)	65 (52.4%)	76 (50.7%)		
Other	49 (9.9%)	28 (11.5%)	21 (8.6%)	37 (13.5%)	20 (16.1%)	17 (11.3%)		
Missing	6	3	3	32	29	3		
Education Level: *n* (%)							**11.35 (.02)**	5.50 (.24)
Did not earn diploma	66 (13.6%)	35 (14.2%)	31 (12.9%)	41 (14.9%)	25 (19.8%)	16 (10.5%)		
High School diploma or GED	159 (32.6%)	93 (37.8%)	66 (27.3%)	108 (39.3%)	61 (48.4%)	47 (30.7%)		
Some college but no degree	98 (20.1%)	49 (19.9%)	49 (20.3%)	48 (17.4%)	14 (9.2%)	34 (22.2%)		
Associates Degree/Vocational Certificate	75 (15.4%)	31 (12.6%)	44 (18.3%)	49 (17.8%)	16 (6.5%)	33 (21.6%)		
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	89 (18.3%)	38 (15.5%)	51 (21.2%)	29 (10.6%)	10 (6.5%)	19 (12.8%)		
Missing	7	1	6	31	27	4		
Employment Status							1.81 (.61)	1.86 (.60)
Unemployed	165 (33.4%)	48 (19.4%)	117 (47.4%)	102 (36.6%)	30 (23.6%)	72 (47.4%)		
Temporary/Part-Time	99 (20.0%)	35 (14.1%)	64 (25.9%)	110 (39.4%)	78 (61.5%)	32 (21.0%)		
Full-Time	230 (46.6%)	164 (66.4%)	66 (26.7%)	67 (24.0%)	19 (14.9%)	48 (31.6%)		
Missing	--	--	--	27	26	1		

Table A3. *One-way ANOVAs for test variables comparing those who were included vs. excluded.*

	M (*SD*)		*F*-value or χ^2-value (*p*-value)
	Included Couples (*n* = 247)	Excluded Couples (*n* = 153)	
Total Sample			
Coparenting^{T1}	5.42 (1.06)	5.33 (1.06)	0.80 (.37)
Parenting Self-Efficacy^{T1}	5.29 (0.96)	5.18 (1.13)	1.74 (.19)
Parenting Self-Efficacy^{T2}	5.53 (1.04)	5.36 (1.06)	2.50 (.12)
Parenting Stress^{T1}	2.98 (1.19)	3.22 (1.13)	**5.62 (.02)**
Parenting Stress^{T2}	2.90 (1.23)	3.18 (1.22)	3.86 (.56)
Men			
Coparenting^{T1}	5.49 (1.05)	5.39 (1.00)	0.51 (.48)
Parenting Self-Efficacy^{T1}	5.33 (0.96)	5.22 (1.14)	0.88 (.35)
Parenting Self-Efficacy^{T2}	5.49 (1.07)	5.37 (0.98)	0.42 (.52)
Parenting Stress^{T1}	2.84 (1.16)	3.32 (1.20)	**9.17 (.00)**
Parenting Stress^{T2}	2.88 (1.25)	3.20 (1.16)	0.98 (.32)
Women			
Coparenting^{T1}	5.35 (1.07)	5.30 (1.10)	0.14 (.71)
Parenting Self-Efficacy^{T1}	5.25 (0.99)	5.16 (1.13)	0.63 (.43)
Parenting Self-Efficacy^{T2}	5.58 (1.00)	5.36 (1.09)	2.66 (.10)
Parenting Stress^{T1}	3.12 (1.21)	3.16 (1.08)	0.08 (.78)
Parenting Stress^{T2}	2.92 (1.22)	3.13 (1.12)	2.41 (.12)

Table A4. *Central tendency of coparenting support items at time 1 for included sample overall.*

	Overall (n = 247)			
	Men		Women	
Items	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)
1. My partner strongly supports my parenting efforts.	1-7	5.43 (1.36)	1-7	5.43 (1.36)
2. My partner has similar beliefs about how to parent children.	1-7	5.37 (1.45)	1-7	5.12 (1.49)
3. My partner says cruel and hurtful things about me in front of our child(ren). *	1-7	5.67 (1.58)	1-7	5.73 (1.64)
4. My partner has differing views on how to discipline children. *	1-7	4.71 (1.75)	1-7	4.56 (1.78)
5. My partner tries to get our child(ren) to take sides when we argue. *	1-7	5.96 (1.37)	1-7	6.16 (1.26)
6. My partner talks things over with me about our child(ren) every day.	1-7	5.22 (1.64)	1-7	5.01 (1.76)
7. My partner shares parenting responsibilities with me.	1-7	5.57 (1.39)	1-7	5.35 (1.58)
8. My partner argues with me about our child(ren). *	1-7	5.14 (1.62)	1-7	4.78 (1.84)
9. My partner works with me to solve problems specific to our child(ren).	1-7	5.65 (1.36)	1-7	5.38 (1.54)
10. My partner backs me up in parenting.	1-7	5.53 (1.46)	1-7	5.27 (1.62)
11. My partner undermines my parenting. *	1-7	5.39 (1.64)	1-7	5.35 (1.67)
12. My partner is a good parent.	1-7	6.24 (1.19)	1-7	6.00 (1.22)

Note. 1 = *Very strongly disagree*; 2 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Disagree*; 4 = *Mixed*; 5 = *Agree*; 6 = *Strongly agree*; 7 = *Very strongly agree*.
* Reverse coded

Table A5. *Central tendency of parenting self-efficacy items at time 1 for included sample overall.*

	Overall (*n* = 247)			
	Men		Women	
Items	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)
1. I understand how my actions affect a/my child.	2-7	6.15 (0.97)	1-7	6.37 (0.90)
2. I would make a fine model for a new parent to follow in order to learn what s/he would need to know in order to be a good parent.	2-7	5.32 (1.25)	1-7	5.37 (1.29)
3. Being a parent is manageable, and any problems are easily solved	1-7	4.62 (1.4)	1-7	4.36 (1.52)
4. When something is troubling a/my child, I am always able to figure it out	2-7	5.02 (1.29)	1-7	5.30 (1.26)
5. Considering how long I've been a parent, I feel completely confident as a parent.	1-7	5.41 (1.40)	1-7	5.08 (1.48)
6. I honestly believe I have all the skills necessary to be a good parent.	1-7	5.50 (1.41)	1-7	5.11 (1.43)

Note. 1 = *Very strongly disagree*; 2 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Disagree*; 4 = *Mixed*; 5 = *Agree*; 6 = *Strongly agree*; 7 = *Very strongly agree*.

Table A6. *Central tendency of parenting self-efficacy items at time 2 for included sample overall.*

	Overall (*n* = 247)			
	Men		Women	
Items	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)
1. I understand how my actions affect a/my child.	1-7	6.08 (1.09)	1-7	6.32 (1.01)
2. I would make a fine model for a new parent to follow in order to learn what s/he would need to know in order to be a good parent.	1-7	5.51 (1.33)	1-7	5.53 (1.30)
3. Being a parent is manageable, and any problems are easily solved	1-7	4.80 (1.50)	1-7	4.87 (1.59)
4. When something is troubling a/my child, I am always able to figure it out	1-7	5.26 (1.28)	2-7	5.67 (1.17)
5. Considering how long I've been a parent, I feel completely confident as a parent.	1-7	5.52 (1.34)	1-7	5.50 (1.41)
6. I honestly believe I have all the skills necessary to be a good parent.	2-7	5.71 (1.26)	2-7	5.58 (1.29)

Note. 1 = *Very strongly disagree*; 2 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Disagree*; 4 = *Mixed*; 5 = *Agree*; 6 = *Strongly agree*; 7 = *Very strongly agree*.

Table A7. *Central tendency of parenting stress items at time 1 for included sample overall.*

	Overall (*n* = 247)			
	Men		Women	
Items	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)
1. The behavior of my children is often embarrassing or stressful to me.	1-7	2.71 (1.55)	1-7	3.24 (1.78)
2. Having children has been a financial burden.	1-7	2.77 (1.66)	1-7	2.88 (1.67)
3. If I had it to do over again, I might decide not to have children.	1-7	1.85 (1.37)	1-7	1.83 (1.44)
4. I sometimes worry whether I am doing enough for my children.	1-7	4.32 (1.88)	1-7	4.74 (1.93)
5. Caring for children sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give	1-7	3.31 (1.90)	1-7	3.66 (1.99)
6. Having children leaves little time and flexibility in my life	1-7	3.61 (1.72)	1-7	3.87 (1.92)
7. I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent	1-7	2.67 (1.66)	1-7	3.17 (1.79)
8. Having children has meant having too few choices and too little control over my life.	1-7	2.49 (1.50)	1-7	2.62 (1.65)
9. It is difficult to balance different responsibilities because of my children.	1-7	2.61 (1.58)	1-7	3.08 (1.76)
10. The major source of stress in my life is my children.	1-7	2.04 (1.51)	1-7	2.15 (1.55)

Note. 1 = *Very strongly disagree*; 2 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Disagree*; 4 = *Mixed*; 5 = *Agree*; 6 = *Strongly agree*; 7 = *Very strongly agree*.

Table A8. *Central tendency of parenting stress items at time 2 for included sample overall.*

	Overall (*n* = 247)			
	Men		Women	
Items	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Range	*M* (*SD*)
1. The behavior of my children is often embarrassing or stressful to me.	1-7	2.77 (1.57)	1-7	2.71 (1.64)
2. Having children has been a financial burden.	1-7	2.78 (1.66)	1-7	2.73 (1.63)
3. If I had it to do over again, I might decide not to have children.	1-7	2.04 (1.48)	1-7	1.77 (1.29)
4. I sometimes worry whether I am doing enough for my children.	1-7	4.12 (1.91)	1-7	4.21 (1.97)
5. Caring for children sometimes takes more time and energy than I have to give	1-7	3.22 (1.88)	1-7	3.38 (1.97)
6. Having children leaves little time and flexibility in my life	1-7	3.50 (1.79)	1-7	3.70 (1.83)
7. I feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of being a parent	1-7	2.72 (1.62)	1-7	3.00 (1.70)
8. Having children has meant having too few choices and too little control over my life.	1-7	2.67 (1.63)	1-7	2.56 (1.53)
9. It is difficult to balance different responsibilities because of my children.	1-7	2.83 (1.63)	1-7	2.88 (1.65)
10. The major source of stress in my life is my children.	1-7	2.20 (1.62)	1-7	2.33 (1.66)

Note. 1 = *Very strongly disagree*; 2 = *Strongly disagree*; 3 = *Disagree*; 4 = *Mixed*; 5 = *Agree*; 6 = *Strongly agree*; 7 = *Very strongly agree*.

Table A9. *Paired samples t-tests between partners.*

	Mean (*SD*)		Mean Difference	*t*	*df*	*p*
	Men	Women				
All Couples (*N*=247)						
Coparenting T1	5.48 (1.05)	5.35 (1.07)	-0.14	-1.46	492	.15
Parenting Self-Efficacy T1	5.33 (0.96)	5.25 (0.97)	-0.10	-1.00	492	.32
Parenting Self-Efficacy T2	5.48 (1.07)	5.58 (1.01)	-0.09	-1.00	492	.34
Parenting Stress T1	2.84 (1.16)	3.12 (1.21)	0.29	**2.71**	**492**	**.01**
Parenting Stress T2	2.88 (1.25)	2.92 (1.22)	0.05	0.42	492	.67
Unmarried Couples (*n* = 102)						
Coparenting T1	5.45 (1.11)	5.35 (1.04)	0.10	0.86	101	.39
Parenting Self-Efficacy T1	5.25 (0.92)	5.41 (0.92)	0.12	1.10	101	.27
Parenting Self-Efficacy T2	5.66 (1.13)	5.70 (0.95)	-0.05	-0.33	101	.74
Parenting Stress T1	2.71 (1.14)	2.93 (1.19)	-0.22	-1.44	101	.15
Parenting Stress T2	2.72 (1.33)	2.76 (1.24)	-0.04	-0.25	101	.80
Married Couples (*n* = 145)						
Coparenting T1	5.51 (1.01)	5.34 (1.09)	-0.17	**2.06**	**144**	**.04**
Parenting Self-Efficacy T1	5.19 (0.96)	5.13 (0.99)	0.06	0.67	144	.50
Parenting Self-Efficacy T2	5.37 (1.01)	5.49 (1.05)	-0.12	-0.12	144	.22
Parenting Stress T1	2.92 (1.16)	3.26 (1.22)	-0.33	**-3.13**	**144**	**.00**
Parenting Stress T2	2.99 (1.18)	3.04 (1.20)	-0.05	-0.46	144	.65

Table A10. *Correlations of test variables by gender and marital status*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Coparenting Women T1	--	.314**	.351**	-.444**	-.459**	.416**	.193	.092	-.133	-.319**
2. Parenting Self-Efficacy Women T1	.377**	--	.658**	-.372**	-.390**	.337**	.071	.071	-.219*	-.283**
3. Parenting Self-Efficacy Women T2	.342**	.680**	--	-.233*	-.454**	.304**	.057	.057	-.139	-.112
4. Parenting Stress Women T1	-.304**	-.500**	-.452**	--	.638**	-.067	-.018	-.018	.095	.107
5. Parenting Stress Women T2	-.316**	-.436**	-.543**	.799**	--	-.318**	-.068	-.068	.084	.124
6. Coparenting Men T1	.572**	.278**	.307**	-.290**	-.281**	--	.463**	.341**	-.367**	-.379**
7. Parenting Self-Efficacy Men T1	.316**	.502**	.363**	-.377**	-.346**	.461**	--	.413**	-.416**	-.250*
8. Parenting Self-Efficacy Men T2	.177	.253**	.329**	-.236**	-.250**	.288**	.725**	--	-.261**	-.265**
9. Parenting Stress Men T1	-.177*	-.254**	-.237**	.416**	.428**	-.374**	-.534**	-.444**	--	.489**
10. Parenting Stress Men T2	-.158	-.278**	-.299**	.361**	.390**	-.292**	-.440**	-.425**	.723**	--

Note. *p<.05; **<.01. Correlations below the diagonal represent married couples, whereas those above the line represent unmarried couples. Correlations within the blocks represent partner effects.