COPARENTING, MATERNAL GATEKEEPING, AND FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN FAMILIES WITH RESIDENT FATHERS

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INTERPARENTAL RELATIONSHIP & FATHERING

• Mother-father relationship plays an integral role in father-child relationship

• Doherty et al. (1998) model of responsible fathering

• Cummings et al. (2004) “fathering vulnerability hypothesis”

• Townsend’s (2002) “package deal”
MATERNAL GATEKEEPING

• BELIEFS AND BEHAVIORS THAT INHIBIT COLLABORATION BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN IN FAMILY WORK
  ALLEN & HAWKINS (1999)

• BEHAVIOR ENGAGED IN BY MOTHERS WITH THE INTENT OR EFFECT OF ENCOURAGING OR DISCOURAGING FATHERS’ INVOLVEMENT IN CHILDREARING

  • GATE CLOSING

  • GATE OPENING
GATEKEEPING AND FATHERING

• GATEKEEPING AS A MEDIATOR

GATEKEEPING AND FATHERING

• GATEKEEPING AS A MODERATOR

- Fathers’ beliefs about fathers’ roles only predict their observed involvement in family interaction if mothers don’t close the gate

Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2008, Journal of Family Psychology
### GATEKEEPING AND COPARENTING

#### SAME CONSTRUCT
- Gatekeeping defined by its effects: focus on behavior
- Gatekeeping is distinct from its predictors
- Gate opening and gate closing a lot like support/undermining
- Favor observations

#### DIFFERENT CONSTRUCTS
- Gatekeeping defined by its origins: includes beliefs
- Gender plays a central role in gatekeeping
- Fathers cannot gatekeep
- Favor self-reports
ISSUES WITH THE GATEKEEPING CONSTRUCT

• Is gate opening “good” gatekeeping?

  Yes
  • If mothers can close the gate, they can also open it
  • When reported, associated with greater father involvement

  No
  • Still controlling
  • When observed, associated with lower father involvement
  • Observations and self-reports do not match

ISSUES WITH THE GATEKEEPING CONSTRUCT

• Are the most involved fathers those who experience both low levels of gate closing AND low levels of gate opening?

• Does gate opening promote father involvement, but in limited ways?

• Are fathers’ perceptions of gate opening key to its effects?
KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT GATEKEEPING

• New Parents Project
  • To examine correlates and consequences of maternal gatekeeping behavior
  • 182 dual-earner primiparous different-gender couples followed over the transition to parenthood (2008-2010)
  • Assessed at third trimester of pregnancy, 3, 6, & 9 months postpartum
  • Self-report, time diary, and observational methods
KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT GATEKEEPING

- Does gatekeeping stem primarily from beliefs about parent and gender roles?
  - In the New Parents Project:

  **Gate Closers**
  - Poor psychological functioning
  - Unrealistic expectations for partners’ parenting
  - Couple relationship less stable

  **Gate Openers**
  - More religious
  - Couple relationship more stable

- Beliefs about parent and gender roles **NOT** associated with maternal gatekeeping
KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT GATEKEEPING

- Is gatekeeping associated with father involvement?
  - In the New Parents Project, at 9 months postpartum:
    - Observations of maternal gatekeeping behavior
    - Time diaries to assess father involvement
KEY QUESTIONS ABOUT GATEKEEPING

- Do fathers play a role in gatekeeping?

Mother perceptions of partner parenting efficacy are rooted in general beliefs AND fathers’ own parenting self-efficacy expectations

Schoppe-Sullivan et al., SRCD 2011
KEY QUESTIONS: SUMMARY

• Does gatekeeping stem primarily from beliefs about parent and gender roles?
  • NO, other factors are just as if not more important

• Is gatekeeping associated with father involvement?
  • YES, but... it’s not always how we assume

• Do fathers play a role in gatekeeping?
  • ABSOLUTELY, this is not all “in the mother’s head”
GATEKEEPING: HOW DOES IT MATTER?

- Programs designed to encourage father involvement can only go so far without consideration of mothers
- But, increasing skill and competence of fathers may be useful
- Programs focusing on coparenting should affect gatekeeping as well
- But, strategies for avoiding and handling gatekeeping could be emphasized
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