Clarifying the Association Between Mother-Father Relationship Aggression and Parenting

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January 7, 2015

* This research is supported by the Center for Family and Demographic Research, Bowling Green State University, which has core funding from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) (R24HD050959-01).

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ABSTRACT

Although much research has investigated consequences of relationship aggression for parenting, longitudinal examination of couple-level data is limited. Further, studies have largely focused on the association between fathers' perpetration and mothers' parenting, ignoring consequences of mothers' perpetration for fathers' parenting as well as implications of relationship aggression perpetration for one's own parenting. Analyses using a sample of married or cohabiting couples from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (N = 1,112) show that fathers' relationship aggression is related to more parenting stress for both parents, fathers' less engagement with children, and mothers' more frequent spanking. Yet, these associations disappear in fixed-effects models except for the effects of fathers' aggression on their parenting stress. Mothers' aggression is related to more stress for both parents and fathers' frequent spanking, but these associations disappear in fixed-effects models. In sum, the previously claimed association between relationship aggression and parenting appears to be largely due to selection factors.

Key words: family systems theory, gender, parenting, relationship aggression, stress

The quality of parenting and the stressfulness that often accompanies parenting play important roles in influencing child outcomes (Abdin, 1992; Amato & Fowler, 2002; Simons et al., 2002). Thus, family scholars have long investigated factors that influence the quality of parenting (Belsky, 1984; Buehler & Gerard, 2002) as well as parenting stress (Deater-Deckard, 2004; Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2014). On the basis of family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997), prior research has emphasized the role of mother-father relationship quality in shaping the character of parenting practices and parenting stress (Carlson, Pilkauskas, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2011; Deater-Deckard, 2004; Erel & Burman, 1995; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). In particular, empirical studies have shown that tension, hostility, conflict, or aggression in the mother-father relationship is related to more parenting stress (Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 1998; Owen, Thompson, & Kaslow, 2006; Renner, 2009; Taylor, Lee, Guterman, & Rice, 2010) and more ineffective parenting, including less engagement, more inconsistency, and greater harshness (Edleson, 1999; Holden & Ritchie, 1991; Ritchie & Holden, 1998; Taylor, Cuterman, Lee, & Rathouz, 2009). Although scholars have conceptualized the adverse nature of relationship quality in various ways, such as marital conflict, marital discord, relationship aggression, and intimate partner violence (IPV) (Erel & Burman, 1995; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000), we call it "relationship aggression" as a broader term that is inclusive of emotional, physical, or economic abuse with a large range of intensity.

Despite the large volume of studies in this area, prior research is limited at least in three ways. First, most research on the associations between relationship aggression and parenting focus on mothers' victimization—i.e., fathers' aggression—and mothers' parenting stress and quality of parenting (Gustafsson & Cox, 2012; Holden & Ritchie, 1991; Postmus, Huang, & Mathisen-Stylianou, 2010; Taylor et al., 2009), overlooking the fact that community and

population studies consistently find that women are as likely as men to be perpetrators of aggression and violence in intimate relationships (Johnson, Giordano, Manning, & Longmore, 2014; Melander, Noel, & Tyler, 2010; Renner & Whitney, 2010; Whitaker, Haileyesus, Swahn, & Saltzman, 2007). Although knowledge of conflict and aggression within romantic relationships in general has developed tremendously in the past two decades (Anderson, 2010), research on the consequences of relationship aggression on parenting continues to be lacking.

Second, most prior research has relied on cross-sectional data (e.g., Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 1998; 2000; 2001; Taylor et al., 2010). Even though recent studies used longitudinal data (Gustafsson & Cox 2012; Huang et al., 2010; Postmus, Huang, & Mathisen-Stylianou, 2010), these studies typically linked relationship aggression at an early wave to parenting outcomes at a later wave without adequately controlling for factors that might be related to both relationship aggression and parenting outcomes. For example, it could be that parents who lack interpersonal skills or have attained lower levels of education are more likely to be a perpetrator of relationship aggression, while the same characteristics are related to less engagement with their children (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Thus, a research design such as a fixed-effects model that can rule out potential selection effects (Allison, 2009) is necessary to advance our understanding of the link between relationship aggression and parenting outcomes.

Third, little research has examined gender differences in consequences of relationship aggression for parenting and parenting stress. Research has shown that, despite great strides toward gender equality in some areas, such as access to college education, both parenting and dynamics in heterosexual intimate relationship remain gendered (England, 2010). It is possible that consequences of relationship aggression for parenting outcomes may differ for women and

men. We examine two contrasting predictions—the "gendered parenting" perspective and the "gender in intimate relationship" perspective—as to whether mothers' or fathers' parenting is more likely than the other to be influenced by relationship aggression based on prior research (Holden & Ritchie, 1991; Palazzolo, Roberto, & Babin, 2010; Taylor et al., 2010).

In this paper, we address these limitations, using couple-level longitudinal data from Waves 3 and 4 in the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study (FFCWS). We examine the associations between mothers' or fathers' aggression—reported by the other partner—and three aspects of parenting of mothers and fathers, including frequency of engagement with children, and frequency of spanking, and parenting stress. To examine whether the associations are due to selection factors, we compare results from fixed-effects models that control for unmeasured characteristics with those from random-effects models—i.e., the models that prior research primarily used.

BACKGROUND

Family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997) posits that marital relationship and parenting are interdependent with each other. Earlier studies have examined the link between marital quality and parenting broadly (Erel & Burman, 1995; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). More recently, research has focused on IPV and its consequences for parenting stress and parenting behavior (e.g., Postmus, Huang, & Mathisen-Stylianou, 2010; Taylor et al., 2009, 2010). Both lines of research have conceptualized the link into two contrasting hypotheses. The first perspective is the spillover hypothesis. It posits that higher levels of relationship aggression are related to more parenting stress and poorer parenting (Erel & Burman, 1995). Scholars have suggested different spillover mechanisms. Some suggest that there is a direct transfer of mood, affect, or behavior from one relationship to another. Negativity, stress, or frustration in the

mother-father relationship may be carried over into their interactions with their children (Holden & Ritchie, 1991; Murray et al., 2012; Palazzolo, Roberto, & Babin, 2010; Renner, 2009; Taylor et al., 2010). Others emphasize the role of stress, conceptualizing mother-father relationship aggression as a stressor that could lead to poorer psychological well-being, which, in turn, may lead to ineffective parenting (Gustafsson & Cox, 2012; Postmus, Huang, & Mathisen-Stylianou, 2010). The second perspective is the compensatory hypothesis, which contends that couple aggression is related to better parenting—more engagement and less harshness. Parents whose intimate partnership is conflictual and less affectionate may try to be highly involved in their relationship with their children to obtain affection and closeness (Brody, Pillegrini, & Sigel, 1986). Empirical studies generally support the spillover hypothesis, showing a positive association between relationship aggression and parenting stress and poorer parenting practices, (Erel & Burman, 1995; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). A few studies showed findings that support the compensation hypothesis, however (e.g., Levendosky, Huth-Bocks, Shapiro, & Semel, 2003). DeVoe and Smith's (2002) qualitative study suggests a nuanced implication of IPV victimization for spanking: Some mothers consciously avoid using physical punishment in order to teach children not to use physical forces.

Past research has several limitations that obscure our understanding of the link between relationship aggression and parenting. First, most research uses cross-sectional data. Even recent studies that used longitudinal data did not control for outcome variables in an earlier time period (Gewirtz, DeGarmo, & Medhanie, 2011; Tajima et al., 2011). Such research design does not address the issue of selection. In fact, there are a number of characteristics that may be related to relationship aggression, parenting stress, and parenting behavior. These include: poverty, unemployment, work-family conflict, child health, the number of children, and relationship

status (Anderson, 2010; Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2014; Ritchie & Holden, 1998; VandeWeerd, Coulter, & Mercado-Crespo, 2011). Furthermore, there may be other unobserved characteristics such as mothers or fathers' antisocial personality or lack of interpersonal skills which are related to both relationship aggression and less effective parenting (Simmons, Lehmann, & Dia, 2010). The present analysis carefully controlled for these background characteristics using fixed-effects models.

Second, prior research has largely focused on the association between fathers' perpetration of relationship aggression—i.e., mothers' victimization—and mothers' parenting experience. Yet, recent research has shown that women are as likely as men to be aggressive toward their intimate partner physically or verbally (Anderson, 2010). Thus, it is important to examine how mothers' aggression relates to fathers' parenting. In addition, it is possible that mothers' or fathers' perpetration of relationship aggression may affect their own parenting stress and practices. We expect that similar to victimization, relationship aggression perpetration will be related to more parenting stress and less effective parenting through direct spillover of negative mood and frustration. Holden and Ritchie (1991) found that fathers who perpetrate IPV are less effective in parenting. Using unique couple-level data, the current study examined how maternal and paternal perpetrations of relationship aggression are related to their own as well as the other parent's parenting stress and practices.

Third, little research has examined gender differences in the role of relationship aggression in influencing parenting. Prior research provides two contrasting predictions regarding how mothers and fathers may differ in the link between intimate partner aggression and parenting practices and stress. One is the gendered parenting perspective. Research has shown that mothers often play the primary role in parenting, managing their children's daily

routines, whereas fathers tend to be "mothers' helpers" (Fox, 2009). Thus, fathers' participation in parenting tends to be greatly affected by mothers' encouragement or "gatekeeping" (Fagan & Barnett, 2003; Sobolewski & King, 2005). These ideas suggest that men's parenting is more vulnerable to relationship aggression of the mother of their children (Erel & Burman, 1995). In contrast, the other perspective, the "gender in intimate relationship" perspective, contents that women are more likely than men to pay attention to the well-being of their relationship and are more likely to be distressed by poor relationship quality (Anderson, 2010). These ideas suggest that women's parenting may be more vulnerable to relationship aggression of the father of their children than men's parenting. Empirical findings are inconsistent. Erel and Burman's meta-analysis (1995) reported that there was little gender difference in the magnitude of the association between relationship quality and parenting. In contrast, Krishnakumar and Buehler (2000), also based on a meta-analysis, reported that fathers' parenting is more strongly influenced by relationship aggression than mothers' parenting. Past research is limited in that most studies relied on one person's report, usually the mother. The present analysis uses couple-level data, which allows us to examine gender differences in the link between relationship aggression perpetration and victimization.

THE PRESENT STUDY

This study examines the association between relationship aggression and parenting among married or cohabiting couples. We examine how mothers' and fathers' aggression toward the other parent is related to their own and the other parent's parenting. For parenting outcomes, we focus on frequency of engagement in activities with children, frequency of spanking children, and parenting stress, indicators that are commonly used as important aspects of parenting (Holden & Ritchie, 1991; Simmons, Lehmann, & Dia, 2010; Taylor et al., 2009; Taylor et al.,

2010). There has been a debate over conceptualization of spanking. Although some researchers regard spanking as ineffective or harsh parenting, citing research findings that spanking is related to poorer child adjustments (e.g., Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Gershoff, 2002), other research has shown that it depends on the contexts (Lansford et al., 2004; McLoyd et al. 2002; Simons et al, 2002). As found in Simons and colleagues' (2002) study, spanking remains considered a legitimate form of discipline in some communities; and in such communities, spanking is not related to children's poorer adjustments. In such context, a decline in frequency of spanking could reflect more lax parenting. We examine parenting stress and parenting practice as separate outcomes, because some research has shown that parenting stress has a direct effect on children's behaviors (Huth-Bocks & Hughes, 2008), although others suggest that parenting stress could be a mediator (Owen, Thompson, & Kaslow, 2006; Postmus, Huang, & Mathisen-Stylianous, 2012). By using fixed-effects models, we carefully control for factors that are related to both relationship aggression and parenting. We have two contrasting hypotheses on gender differences. First, on the basis of the gendered parenting perspective, we expect that the association between relationship aggression and parenting will be stronger for fathers' parenting than mothers' parenting. Second, on the basis of women's relationship orientation perspective, we expect that the association will be stronger for mothers' parenting than fathers' parenting.

METHOD

Data

Data for the present analysis were drawn from the Waves 3 and 4 of FFCWS. Started between 1998 and 2000, the FFCWS is a stratified, multistage, probability sample of 4,898 children, of which 3,712 were born to unmarried parents (Reichman et al., 2001). Mothers were selected from 75 hospitals in 20 cities with populations of at least 200,000. Approximately 5% of

the sampled births were ineligible for the study, including those mothers who did not speak English or Spanish well enough to understand the survey; those who were putting the child up for adoption; and those who were too ill after giving birth to participate. The baseline interviews were conducted in the hospital soon after the child's birth (W1). Wave 2 (W2), Wave 3 (W3), Wave 4 (W4), and Wave 5 (W5) interviews were conducted by telephone when the child was one, three, five, and nine years old respectively. We used data from W3 and W4 only, because W1 did not include any questions on relationship aggression and W2 did not include questions asking fathers about mothers' physical aggression questions. We first selected cases where the focal child's mother and father both participated in W3 and W4 and had the national weights, which would adjust the sample to be representative of those in urban areas (n = 1,782). Then we limited the sample to those who were married or cohabiting in both waves (*n* = 1,112). The W3 and W4 data were pooled into one data set (N = 2,224 person years).

The average age for fathers in the sample was 31.1 years (Table 1). Racial/ethnic compositions included 44% White, 17% Black, 32% Hispanic, and 2% other race. Night-teen percent of fathers did not complete a high school degree, 21% had a high school diploma, 33% had some college education, and 27% had a Bachelor's degree or more. Attrition analyses indicate that White fathers were more likely to be retained at W3, as were those with higher education, and those who reported being married at W1. We examined whether patterns of results would differ for fathers who were excluded from the sample with no significant differences. Similarly, White mothers were more likely to be retained at W3, as were black mothers, those with higher education, and those married at W1.

[Table 1 around here]

Measures

Fathers' and mothers' engagement with children was the average of four questions that asked fathers and mothers how many days a week the father would (a) sing songs or nursery rhymes; (b) read stories; (c) tell stories; or (d) play inside with the child. Responses ranged from 0 to 7 days per week. Fathers and mothers who did not see the child in the past month were coded 0. The same measure was used in other studies (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Ryan, Kalil, & Ziol-Guest, 2008). The correlation between father's and mother's relationship aggression was $\gamma = .229$, $p < .001$ (data not shown).

Fathers' and mothers' frequency of spanking was measured based on two questions. Fathers and mothers were asked whether they spanked their children in the previous month because their children were misbehaving or acting up. If they answered "yes", they were asked how often they spanked their children. A measure of frequency of spanking was created for fathers and mothers respectively where 0 = *none*, 1 = *only once or twice*, 2 = *a few times*, 3 = *a few times*, 4 = *every day or nearly every day in the past month*. Because very few percent of parents reported "every day", we combined them with "a few times". Thus, More than a half of mothers and fathers use spanking as a method of discipline (data not known), and frequency of spanking is positively related to engagement with children ($\gamma = .195$, $p < .001$ for fathers; $\gamma = .076$, $p < .001$ for mothers), suggesting that spanking is a normative method of discipline among parents in the present sample.

Fathers' and mothers' parenting stress was the average of four questions, (a) "Being a parent is harder than I thought it would be"; (b) "I feel trapped by my responsibilities as a parent"; (c) "I find that taking care of my child(ren) is much more work than pleasure"; (d) "I often feel tired, worn out, exhausted from raising a family" (1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *agree*, 4 = *strongly agree*). These four items were derived from the JOBS Child Outcome

Survey by Child Trends, Inc. and Abdin's Parent Stress Inventory (Abidin, 1995; Hofferth, Davis-Kean, & Finkelstein, 2014). Our alpha reliability coefficients were comparable to those obtained by Abidin (1995) and Hofferth et al. (2014).

Fathers' and mothers' perpetration of relationship aggression (W3 and W4) was measured as the average of seven questions that were asked for the other parent: (a) "S/He insults or criticizes you or your ideas"; (b) "S/He tries to keep you from seeing or talking with your friends or family"; (c) "S/He tries to prevent you from going to work or school"; (d) "S/He withholds money, makes you ask for money, or takes your money"; (e) "S/He slaps or kicks you"; (f) "S/He hits you with a fist or an object that could hurt you"; and (g) "S/He tries to make you have sex or do sexual things you don't want to do" (1 = *never*, 2 = *sometime, 3 = often*). Past research has used these items in FFCWS to measure relationship aggression or IPV (e.g., Postmus, Huang, & Mathisen-Stylianous, 2012; Taylor et al., 2009; 2010). As supplemental analyses (data not shown), we examined measures of relationship aggression excluding physical violence (items e, f, g in the above list) to examine whether findings would vary depending on the intensity of aggression with little difference in patterns of findings.

Several control variables were included. First, we controlled for several employment characteristics that are related to parenting stress (Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2014). *Current employment status* (W3 & W4) was measured as dummy variables. Following other research that used 60 hours as the cut-point for overwork for fathers (Crouter et al., 2001), five dummy variables were created including "not employed," "employed part-time (< 35 hours per week)," "employed full-time (35 to 44 hours per week)" (reference), "employed full-time with extended hours (45 to 59 hours per week)," and "employed full-time with overwork (60 hours or more per week)". For mothers, because very few worked 60 hours per week or more, four dummy

variables were created including “not employed”, “employed part-time (< 35 hours per week)”, “employed full-time (35 to 44 hours per week)” (reference), and “employed full-time with overtime (45 hours or more per week)”. *Workplace inflexibility* (W3 & W4) was the average of three questions (α = .57 for fathers and α = .63 for mothers) including: (a) “My shift and work schedule cause extra stress for me and my child”; (b) “Where I work, it is difficult to deal with child care problems during working hours”; (c) “In my work schedule I have enough flexibility to handle family needs (reverse coded)” (1 = *never,* 2 = *sometimes, 3 = often,* 4 = *always*). We created four dummy variables including (a) never (reference), (b) sometime, (c) often or always, and (d) non-employed. Father’s incarceration history (W3 & W4) was measured as a dichotomous variable where those who had ever been incarcerated were assigned 1s and others were assigned 0s. *Income-to-poverty ratio* (W3 & W4) was a FFCWS constructed variable measured based on the father’s report. *The number of children* under age 18 in household (W3 & W4) was measured based on the mother’s report as a continuous variable. *Child’s health* (W3 & W4) was a categorical variable ranging from 1 = *poor* to 5 = *excellent* measured as the mother’s report. *Relationship status* (W3 & W4) reflected whether mothers were married (reference), cohabiting, dating, divorced/separated and currently single, or repartnered to another individual. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for variables in the analyses.

Analytical plan

To examine the association between fathers’ and mothers’ relationship aggression and parenting outcomes, we used the pooled data set to estimate random-effects and fixed-effects models (Allison, 2009; Johnson, 1995). A random-effects model, which is a standard regression model typically used in prior research, examines variations across individuals in the sample. In contrast, a fixed-effects model focuses on the within-person variation while controlling for time-

invariant unmeasured characteristics—i.e., selection factors—are related to both relationship aggression and parenting outcomes, although it does not control for time-varying unmeasured characters (Allison, 2009; Nomaguchi & DeMaris, 2013). The Hausman tests of differences in the coefficients between random-effects and fixed-effects models were significant for all models (data not shown), suggesting that fixed-effects models would be more appropriate than random-effects models (Allison, 2009). Missing cases were imputed using multiple imputations in SAS with five iterations (Allison, 2002).

RESULTS

Table 2 shows results from random-effects models (Model 1) and the results from fixed-effects models (Model 2) for the associations between fathers' or mothers' relationship aggression and three aspects of mothers' parenting. The time-invariant variables were not included in the fixed-effects models, but they were controlled nevertheless. First we considered fathers' relationship aggression. Note that prior research has largely focused on the association between fathers' aggression and mothers' parenting experiences. In the random-effects models, fathers' relationship aggression was related to mothers' more frequent spanking and more parenting stress, as found in some of the prior studies (e.g., Murray et al., 2012; Owen, Thompson, & Kaslow, 2006; Taylor et al., 2009), although it was not related to mothers' engagement with children. In the fixed-effects models, however, fathers' aggression was not related to any of the three parenting outcomes. These results suggest that the association between father aggression and mothers' more frequent spanking and more parenting stress found in the random-effects model were largely due to unobserved characteristics that were related to both father aggression and mothers' spanking or parenting stress.

Next we examined mother relationship aggression, which has been rarely examined in prior research. The results from the random-effects models, mothers' relationship aggression was related to mothers' own higher levels of parenting stress, although it was not related to mothers' parenting practices either engagement with children or frequency of spanking. Again, the association between mothers' aggression and their parenting stress disappears in the fixed-effect model, suggesting that it was due to selection factors. Further, in the fixed-effects model, in which unobserved characteristics that were related to both mothers' relationship aggression and mother spanking, increased mother relationship aggression was actually related to decreased frequency of spanking.

[Table 2 around here]

Now we turn to the results for the associations between relationship aggression and fathers' parenting, which little prior research has examined. Models 1 and 2 in Table 3 present the results from random-effects and fixed-effects models, respectively, for the associations between fathers' or mothers' relationship aggression and three aspects of fathers' parenting. Again, we first examined fathers' relationship aggression. Fathers' aggression was related to fathers' less engagement with their children, consistent with findings by Holden and Ritchie (1991). Fathers' aggression toward mothers was also related to fathers' more parenting stress. The results from the fixed-effects models revealed that the former—i.e., the association between father aggression and father engagement—was due to selection factors. That is, fathers who were harsh toward their spouse/partner were also less likely to be engaged with their children due to some unobserved characteristics. In contrast, the latter—i.e., the association between father aggression and father parenting stress—remained significant in the fixed-effects model, suggesting a direct link between the two. Finally, we examined whether mothers' aggression was

related to fathers' parenting outcomes. The results from the random-effects models show that mothers' aggression was related to fathers' more frequent spanking and more parenting stress. Yet, both relationships were due to selection effects, according to the results from the fixed-effects models.

[Table 3 around here]

In sum, we found that fathers' relationship aggression was related to mothers' more frequent spanking and more parenting stress, but these associations were due to selection factors. Mothers who were harsher toward their spouse/partner were more likely than those who were less harsh to report higher levels of parenting stress, again due to selection factors. Fathers' relationship aggression was related to fathers' less engagement with their children and mothers' more parenting stress, but both relationships were also due to selection effects. The only direct association remained in the fixed-effects models was the association between fathers' relationship aggression and fathers' increased parenting stress. Another direct association found in the analyses was the association between mothers' relationship aggression and mothers' decreased frequency of spanking.

To examine the robustness of the associations found above, we examined a couple of supplemental analyses (data not shown). First, we conducted the same models using non-physical violence measure of relationship aggression to examine whether the associations would depend on the intensity of relationship aggression. The patterns of the findings were very similar. Second, because the prevalence of relationship aggression varies by age (Johnson et al., 2014), we examined whether patterns of the association would vary by age. Again we found little difference. Third, we examined mothers' and fathers' aggressions in separate models with very similar patterns of findings.

DISCUSSION

Family scholars have long investigated the link between relationship aggression and parenting. The present analysis advanced knowledge in this area by using fixed-effects models with longitudinal data that controlled for other factors that could be related to both relationship aggression and parenting. In addition, while many studies focused on fathers' relationship aggression and its consequences for mothers' parenting, we examined whether fathers' relationship aggression is related to fathers' own parenting, a neglected, but important question, given the increasingly critical role that fathers' parenting participation plays in influencing child outcomes (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). Further, we examined how mothers' relationship aggression was related to fathers' and mothers' parenting, which, again, little prior research has examined, despite the fact that mothers are also perpetrators of relationship aggression (Renner & Whitney, 2010).

With regard to the link between paternal relationship aggression and mothers' parenting, the commonly examined association in prior research in this area, our findings from the random-effects models are consistent with prior findings. Specifically, we found that fathers' relationship aggression is related to mothers' more frequent spanking and more parenting stress, as found in many prior studies (e.g., Hazen et al., 2006; Murray et al., 2012; Owen, Thompson, & Kaslow, 2006; Taylor et al., 2009). Yet, these associations are not significant once unobserved characteristics are held constant in the fixed-effects models. In short, our results suggest the importance of considering selection bias.

Another contribution of the present analysis is that we examined the associations between paternal relationship aggression and paternal parenting experiences. Again, we found significant associations in the random-effects models, but most of them disappeared in the fixed-effects

models. Specifically, father aggression was related to less paternal engagement with their children, which is consistent with Holden and Ritchie (1991) who found that fathers who perpetrate IPV were less effective in parenting. Yet, our findings suggest that this association is not direct, but due to some unobserved factors. We did find a direct association between father aggression and fathers' parenting stress. The finding appears to support the spillover perspective, which indicates that fathers carry over their negative mood or harshness in the relationship domain into their mood in the parenting domain. Another possibility is that the association is due to maternal gatekeeping—mothers may try to shield their children from aggressive fathers, which makes it more difficult for fathers to participate in parenting, a factor that is related to more parenting stress (Nomaguchi & Johnson, 2014).

We also examined the association between mother aggression and parenting, which again prior research has ignored even though it has been increasingly important to understand mother aggression and its consequences (Anderson, 2010). Although we found that mothers who are harsher toward their spouse/partner are more likely than those who are less harsh to report higher levels of parenting stress, this association is again due to selection factors. It could be that mothers who tend to have unrealistic expectations for others in interpersonal relationships—either spouses or children—may be more likely to be controlling or harsh in intimate relationships and more likely to be stressed out in parenting (Shapiro, 2014). One finding that emerged after selection factors are controlled for is that mother aggression is related to decreased frequency of spanking. As discussed earlier, although some scholars regard a decline in spanking as more effective parenting, it could be interpreted as an increase in lax parenting, if spanking is used as a legitimate tool of discipline (Simons et al, 2002). Given that more than half of parents in the sample spanked their children at least once in the previous month, spanking appears to be a

normative method of discipline among parents of the present sample. If so, our finding may indicate that mothers provide their children with less discipline when they become harsher toward or more controlling of their spouse/partner.

Unlike our predictions, the findings of the present analysis do not show clear patterns of gender differences. After selection factors are taken into account, for both mothers and fathers, their own aggression, not their spouse/partner's aggression, is related to their parenting experience, in the area of discipline for mothers and in terms of stress associated with the parenting role for fathers. Our findings suggest the importance of examining the effects of perpetrating relationship aggression on their own parenting effectiveness for mothers and fathers alike.

The present analysis has limitations that future research should address. First, measures of parenting are limited. Inconsistency in discipline and monitoring, such as TV or bed time rules, may be better measures of parenting that have direct effects on child outcomes and that could be affected by mother-father relationship aggression (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). Second, the present analysis showed associations, but did not permit us to draw conclusions about the causal direction of the relationship between relationship aggression and parenting outcomes. Third, the FFCWS data included mothers with children aged three to five and we do not know whether the same patterns will be found for mothers and fathers with younger or older children. Finally, although the FFCWS focused on an urban, disadvantaged population and thus future research using a nationally representative sample of U.S. parents is warranted.

To conclude, the present analysis suggests that it is critical to consider selection biases in order to better understand the associations between relationship quality and parenting. Controlling for unobserved characteristics, we found no association between father aggression

and mothers' parenting. Our study also suggests that it is not victimization but perpetration of relationship aggression that might have direct influences on mothers' and fathers' parenting ability and emotional experience. We find that, after controlling for selection factors, consequences of aggression in the intimate relationship for behavior and emotional experiences in the parenting role vary little by gender.

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Table 1. Means (Std) for Variables in the Analysis (N = 1,112)

Time variant variables		
Fathers' Relationship Aggression (1 - 3)	1.10	(0.16)
Mothers' Relationship Aggression (1 - 3)	1.13	(0.18)
Parenting outcomes		
Father engagement (0 - 7)	3.60	(1.89)
Mother engagement (0 - 7)	4.77	(1.75)
Father spanking (0 - 3)	0.62	(0.90)
Mother spanking (0 - 3)	0.73	(0.94)
Father parenting stress (1- 4)	2.03	(0.71)
Mother parenting stress (1- 4)	2.26	(0.64)
Controls:		
Fathers' employment		
Unemployed	0.08	
Employed part-time	0.07	
Employed full-time	0.41	
Employed full-time plus	0.32	
Overworked	0.13	
Work-family conflict none	0.28	
Work-family conflict some	0.42	
Work-family conflict a lot	0.22	
Father ever in jail	0.17	
Income-to-poverty ratio	3.44	(3.87)
Mothers' employment		
Unemployed	0.44	
Employed part-time	0.18	
Employed full-time	0.29	
Overworked	0.08	
Work-family conflict none	0.22	
Work-family conflict some	0.26	
Work-family conflict a lot	0.07	
# of children < 18	2.31	(1.17)
Child health	4.50	(0.88)
Cohabiting (vs. Married)	0.16	

Time invariant variables		
Fathers' age at W3	31.08	(6.32)
Fathers' race at W1		
White	0.44	
Black	0.17	
Hispanic	0.32	
Other race	0.07	
Fathers' education at W1		
< high school	0.19	
High school	0.21	
Some college	0.33	
College graduates	0.27	

Table 2. Coefficients from OLS Regressions and Fixed-Effects Models for Mothers' Parenting Among Married or Cohabiting Parents (N = 1,112)

	Mother Engagement						Mother Spanking						Mother Stress					
	Model 1 Random Effects			Model 2 Fixed Effects			Model 1 Random Effects			Model 2 Fixed Effects			Model 1 Random Effects			Model 2 Fixed Effects		
	b	*SE*		*b*	*SE*		*b*	*SE*		*b*	*SE*		*b*	*SE*		*b*	*SE*	
Fathers' aggression	-.308	.192		.274	.290		.289	.116	*	.119	.186		.294	.076	**	.144	.118	
Mothers' aggression	.199	.179		.102	.260		-.107	.107		-.342	.167	*	.149	.070	*	.136	.108	
Fathers' employment																		
Unemployed	-.258	.119	*	-.297	.161		-.002	.071		-.022	.105		.047	.048		.061	.066	
Employed part-time	-.464	.124	**	-.496	.161	**	-.094	.080		-.133	.123		.208	.049	**	.206	.066	**
Employed full-time+	-.111	.065	*	-.169	.085	*	-.018	.041		-.068	.056		.067	.026	*	.089	.035	*
Overworked	.712	.097	**	.878	.128	**	-.001	.060		-.052	.082		.098	.040	*	.144	.052	**
WFC some	-.059	.068		-.027	.088		-.118	.045	**	-.128	.062	*	-.026	.027		-.054	.035	
WFC a lot	-.135	.094		-.162	.121		.117	.057	*	.188	.081	*	-.095	.036	**	-.156	.049	**
Father ever in jail	.107	.121		.544	.339		.042	.070		-.662	.224	**	-.057	.049		-.043	.148	
Income-to-poverty ratio	-.008	.010		-.011	.014		-.004	.006		.001	.009		-.009	.004	*	-.012	.006	*
Mothers' employment																		
Unemployed	.155	.103		.244	.137		-.093	.058		-.137	.098		.233	.038	**	.183	.057	**
Employed part-time	.005	.117		-.041	.158		-.136	.063	*	-.156	.099		.135	.040	**	.110	.060	
Overworked	.308	.123	*	.313	.181		-.082	.078		-.065	.124		-.035	.049		-.032	.070	
WFC some	.092	.076		.264	.	**	-.021	.		-.076	.		.102	.	**	.075	.	

					101			047			064			030	*		040	
WFC a lot	.034	.132		.153	189		-.107	074		-.195	104		.141	048	**	.061	065	
# of children < 18	-.005	.033		.090	058		-.035	019		-.103	036	*	.058	014	** *	.075	024	**
Child health	.293	.121		.214	095		-.060	025	*	-.063	033		-.037	048		-.035	033	
Cohabitation	-.229	.110	*	-.573	208	**	-.124	063		.224	130		.103	043	*	.277	083	***
Father's age	-.026	.009	**				-.017	005	** *				.003	003				
Black	-.295	.146	*				-.112	084					-.089	059				
Hispanic	-.462	.143	**				-.375	079	** *				-.029	054				
Other race	-.690	.231	**				-.308	134	*				.157	093				
< High school	-.116	.153					-.155	086					-.043	059				
Some College	.257	.144					.015	082					-.027	057				
College degree	.322	.165					-.239	094	*				.084	065				
W4	-.661	.041	** *	-.712	049	** *	-.140	025	** *	-.089	031	*	-.077	016	** *	-.069	020	***

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Notes: Omitted reference categories include: full-time employed, no WFC, married, White, and high-school diploma.

Table 3. Coefficients from OLS Regressions and Fixed-Effects Models for Fathers' Parenting Among Married or Cohabiting Parents (N = 1,112)

	Father engagement						Father spanking						Father Stress					
	Model 1 Random Effects			Model 2 Fixed Effects			Model 1 Random Effects			Model 2 Fixed Effects			Model 1 Random Effects			Model 2 Fixed Effects		
	b	*SE*		*b*	*SE*		*b*	*SE*		*b*	*SE*		*b*	*SE*		*b*	*SE*	
Fathers' aggression	-1.100	.220	**	-.271	.337		.071	.116		.286	.182		.321	.079	**	.330	.118	**
Mothers' aggression	-.296	.210	*	-.556	.298	*	.326	.102	**	.230	.161		.358	.071	**	.153	.106	
Fathers' employment																		
Unemployed	.236	.147		.360	.200		.060	.077		.074	.116		.108	.052	*	.074	.071	
Employed part-time	-.584	.139	**	-.726	.194	**	.167	.075	*	.114	.118		-.074	.049		-.081	.064	
Employed full-time+	-.288	.077	**	-.356	.098	**	-.062	.041		-.158	.054	**	.000	.027		.018	.036	
Overworked	.199	.112		.345	.146	*	.065	.056		.065	.081		.057	.039		.095	.052	
WFC some	-.045	.082		-.020	.102		.003	.041		-.033	.068		.101	.027	**	.071	.035	*
WFC a lot	-.137	.119		-.189	.140		.181	.053	**	.154	.084		.258	.035	**	.168	.048	***
Father ever in jail	-.068	.138		-.193	.390		.078	.071	*	-.525	.225	*	.068	.050	*	-.209	.154	
Income-to-poverty ratio	-.006	.011		.003	.016		-.006	.006		.004	.009		-.003	.004		-.004	.006	
Mothers' employment																		
Unemployed	.016	.132		.116	.191		-.148	.064	*	-.166	.101		.019	.048		-.039	.059	
Employed part-time	-.289	.148		-.374	.199		-.337	.062	**	-.483	.095	**	-.106	.052		-.174	.062	**
Overworked	.414	.145	**	.646	.196	**	.052	.105	*	.260	.124	*	-.003	.071		.037	.096	
WFC some	.312	.099	**	.437	.116	**	-.035	.055		-.036	.069		-.098	.035	**	-.131	.044	**
WFC a lot	.230	.140		.399	.185	*	-.143	.073		-.089	.104		.031	.050		.009	.078	
# of children < 18	-.102	.037	**	.025	.068		.038	.018	*	.063	.035		.044	.013	**	.048	.023	*
Child health	.398	.106	**	.365	.115	*	.070	.034	*	.083	.034	*	-.012	.018	*	-.011	.020	
Cohabitation	-.316	.127	*	-.971	.232	**	-.147	.062	*	-.056	.132		.002	.043		-.116	.081	

						*			**									
Father's age	-.020	.012					-.017	.004	*				-.002	.003				
Black	.014	.162					-.096	.079					-.074	.059				
Hispanic	-.347	.159	*				-.208	.074	**				-.169	.059	**			
Other race	-.426	.261					-.341	.121	**				.169	.099				
									**									
< High school	-.169	.170					-.321	.080	*				.033	.061				
Some College	.126	.169					.057	.077					-.116	.059	*			
College degree	.382	.196					-.122	.087					.069	.068				
			**			**			**			**			**			
W4	-.559	.059	*	-.608	.062	*	-.251	.025	*	-.233	.032	*	-.108	.017	*	-.112	.021	***

* p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001

Note: Omitted reference categories include: full-time employed, no WFC, married, White, and high-school diploma.