



Good Partners, Good Parents: Parent Relationship Satisfaction Predicts Parenting Efficacy for Young Children

Meng-Ting Chen¹ · Gao-Xian Lin² · Chieh Lu³ · Yen-Ping Chang³ 

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Abstract

Both maternal and paternal parental involvement are critical for child development. What is unclear, nonetheless, is how parents' own relationships contribute to the growth of children. Addressing the question, we predicted marital satisfaction strengthens parenting efficacy, making parental involvement more effective in increasing children's functioning. To test the hypothesis, we analyzed a nationally representative large-sample survey of 3-year-olds ($N = 2164$), wherein their language, cognitive, social, and emotional development, maternal and paternal parental involvement, as well as the marital satisfaction of the parents were assessed. The results supported the predictions by showing the critical role of fathers—the mother parents through the father in a satisfying marriage, more than she does in a dissatisfying marriage, and their young children subsequently grow better when their parents are satisfying partners. Together, the findings reveal potential mechanisms through which well-being may be passed down from one generation to the next.

Keywords Child development · Parental involvement · Marital satisfaction · Parent relationship

✉ Yen-Ping Chang
ypc@EricaLab.com

Meng-Ting Chen
montine729@gmail.com

Gao-Xian Lin
gao-xian.lin@uclouvain.be

Chieh Lu
chiehlu.psy@gmail.com

¹ Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling, National Taiwan Normal University, 162, Heping E. Rd. Sec. 1, Da-an Dist, Taipei City 106308, Taiwan

² Institut de Recherche en Sciences Psychologiques, Université Catholique de Louvain, Place du Cardinal Mercier 10, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

³ Department of Educational Psychology and Counseling, National Tsing Hua University, 521 Nanda Rd., East Dist, Hsinchu City 300193, Taiwan

Introduction

“The importance of parental involvement in children’s learning has never been in doubt (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002).” Classic work has shown that mothers’ involvement in their children’s early ages contributes significantly to the children’s immediate functioning as well as future well-being (see Bornstein, 2015, for a review). Recently, emerging research further indicates that fathers’ contributions may make a considerable difference for the children, too (see Lamb, 2010; e.g., Wilson & Prior, 2011). Some studies even suggest that fathers’ involvement matters more than does that of mothers (e.g., Updegraff et al., 2001). As such, whether the mother or the father is the critical parental figure has received special attention in early childhood education.

To help advance the literature, we take a different approach to the issue, not comparing the mother and the father as seeming competitors. Instead, our work starts by treating the family¹ as an integrated system, in which both parents and their children compose an inter-dependent structure. We ask, under what condition would this machine as a whole run the most efficiently in facilitating children’s well-being and functioning? Specifically, it is argued that the wellness of the relationship between parents can be one such facilitator of their parenting efforts for children and, as a result, the children’s growth. Put differently, we propose that the happier the mother and the father as partners, the more effective the two as parents.

Overall, the current paper is organized as follows. We first summarize the literature on the influences of maternal and paternal involvement on young children’s functional development. Subsequently, we bring in the relationship between the parents and argue why the quality of parent relationships matters for the extent to which parental efforts translate to child development, or shortly, parenting effectiveness. Supporting our prediction, we report an empirical test of the hypothesis in a large nationally representative sample of children aged three ($N = 2164$), in the children’s cognitive, language, social, and emotional development. We conclude the research by discussing the theoretical and practical implications of the findings for the cross-generational inheritance of well-being and flourishing.

Parental Involvement and Child Development

Mothers are traditionally the focus in early childhood education; their involvement has been documented over again as impactful for their young children’s growth. To name a few examples, it was found that mothers’ internal models of interpersonal relationships forecast their young children’s early emergent literacy (Bus & van Ijzendoorn, 1988) as well as problem-solving competency (Crowell & Feldman, 1988). Pianta et al. (1997) also reported that the quality of mother-child interactions at home predicts preschoolers’ social adjustment and concept development at

¹ In the present research, by family, we only refer to heterosexual homogamous family, because it is how family is defined in the secondary data we used.

school. Lastly and potentially most critically, research indicated that how mothers approach the issue of parenting influences how their children approach emotions, conscience, and moral evaluation as early as age four (Laible & Thompson, 2000). In the meantime, compared to the focus on mothers, Lamb (1975) described fathers as the “forgotten contributors to child development” in the 70s. In the 80s, Bowlby also noted that most studies on child development and well-being focused on the interactions between mothers and their children, without the fathers in the picture (Bowlby, 1982).

Although not always under the spotlight, fathers are gradually receiving research attention in recent years; emerging evidence suggests that they might play a critical role, too. Specifically, Cabrera et al. (2000) suggest that paternal involvement is “trending” in modern societies as well as in academic research, as it forecasts several of children’s positive outcomes. From the perspective of children, it has also been shown that children who report more positive relationships with their fathers experience less psychological distress (Barnett et al., 1992). Most relevant to our current investigation, a wealth of literature has now indicated that paternal involvement is specifically linked with children’s intellectual development, psychological adjustment, social competence, as well as academic achievement (e.g., Sarkadi et al., 2008; Flouri & Buchanan, 2003; Barger et al., 2019).

To help advance both perspectives in the literature, instead of comparing the mother’s and the father’s parenting contribution, we seek to integrate both parents in the family by examining familial factors that the two persons share and may facilitate their parenting effectiveness—here defined as the degree to which a parent’s involvement in interaction with their children in their daily life results in the children’s cognitive, language, social, and emotional development. That is, for some parents, this exchange rate of parenting efficiency might be high and their efforts fruit, while for others, the rate might be low and parenting seems futile no matter how hard one tries.

In addition, we focus not on testing the differences between the parents as two individuals, but on finding similarities between these two pieces of the same machine. Our work, consequently, aims at the whole family and, specifically, asks when this system would operate the most smoothly and translate the most parenting efforts into children’s development. Below, we detail why we believe a satisfying relationship between the mother and the father (i.e., marital satisfaction) may be one such facilitator of parenting.

Marital Satisfaction and Child Development

A few lines of existing research support the proposed idea that children develop better in a loving family, and parents’ relationship is a crucial determinant of such an atmosphere. To begin with, extensive research has documented that, phenomenologically, parents’ marital discord forecasts their children’s developmental difficulties and even disorders. The premise of these studies is the spillover hypothesis (see Engfer, 1988): Patterns of interactions and emotional displays in the parents’ relationship may “spill over” to shape the parent-child relationship

into a similar manner and, as a result, affect child development in the family. Supporting this proposal, Katz and Woodin's (2002) observational study demonstrated that, among all types of marital communication they analyzed, the hostile-detached type (in which both parents use more negative, listening-speaking-style behavior when discussing their continuing disagreements) forecasts the worst consequences for the children, such as behavioral problems. Moreover, this deteriorating effect may not only be cross-sectional but also longitudinal: Katz and Gottman (1993) showed that couples' mutually hostile communication patterns (where both of them use a negative communication style) when their children are five years old predict the children's problematic externalizing behaviors three years later.

Looking closely, one major reason why marital discord is associated with developmental challenges may be that it worsens parenting practices. Bolstering the idea, Belsky's (1984) seminal theoretical paper has long suggested that parent relationship is one of the most critical contextual factors that give parenting resources for each of both parents. Empirically, Chang et al. (2004) has also reported that harsh parenting fully mediates the negative predictability of marital quality on child externalizing behavioral problems. From a systematic point of view, negative parent relationships may further translate into negative co-parenting relationships (Van Egeren, 2004), wherein both parents fail to coordinate their childrearing efforts and to parent as a team (McHale, 2007). Subsequently, the two would be less capable of handling parenting stress in an efficient and resourceful manner *through each other* and, as a result, prone to negative parenting behavior. In line with the reasoning, Pedro et al. (2012) have documented that marital satisfaction is associated with partners' better parenting practices, such as those with more emotional support, as well as less rejection and attempts to control children. Given that parenting efficacy is generally measured by how much parenting investment can realize in children's development, it is then understandable that Hosokawa and Katsura (2017) have further discovered that destructive conflicts in co-parenting first predict harmful parenting practices (e.g., corporal punishment), which forecast children's lack of social skills later.

Finally, not only are dissatisfying relationships between parents detrimental for their children's growth, satisfying relationships between parents may be a further active ingredient beneficial for the children. It is because enjoyable parent relationships may imply a different parent-child interaction pattern that may promote children's development. Supporting this position, a nine-month longitudinal study has revealed that not only may positive communication between newlyweds predicts their marital satisfaction, but the reverse casualty may also exist, too (Lavner et al., 2016). That is, marital satisfaction may induce later positive couple communication, which, for couples with children, may well manifest in positive parenting. Moreover, Allemand et al. (2007) have discovered that individuals' dispositional forgiveness only translates into actual episodic forgiveness when the individuals are in satisfying relationships with those who are to be forgiven. The effect in fact changes signs for unhappy relationships. With the finding that forgiveness between romantic couple members is associated with their effective parenting alliance (Gordon et al., 2009), enjoyable parent relationships may then contribute to the goal of parenting—the development of children (see Teubert & Pinquart, 2010).

The Current Research

Overall, if romantic social partners communicate and collaborate more efficiently when feeling safe and open to positive changes, it is likely that parental partners—parents—may do the same, too, in happy and enjoyable partnerships, where one of their major shared tasks is parenting. Parents in satisfying relationships may see their parental investment realize in their children's growth more than may parents in dissatisfying relationships, even if both groups put in the same amount of effort. A happy relationship between the parents would imply a better exchange rate between parental involvement and child development, so to speak. Consequently, we hypothesized that marital satisfaction positively moderates—strengthens—the positive effect of parental involvement on child development.

We tested the hypothesis using a large, nationally representative public survey dataset with Taiwanese young children aged three ($\pm$ six months). The children's development in the cognitive, language, social, and emotional domain, as well as their parents' relationship satisfaction and parental involvement, were assessed. With ethnic Chinese as its majority population, Taiwan is a highly industrialized democratic society where parenting practices and expectations of child development have been shaped together by Chinese familism and Western individualism (e.g., Fung et al., 2017; Lan, 2018; Wu & Chiang, 2015). The prevalence of nuclear families and substantial parental involvement make it a suitable context for testing the current hypothesis. We first conducted the analysis on the overall parental involvement in a family, and then explored the unique effects from the mother and from the father.

Finally, it might be worth noting that our research differs from much of the literature in that we examined the moderating but not the mediating role of parent relationship. As reviewed, past studies have documented that high-quality marriage may facilitate child development (e.g., King et al., 2014), implying a direct influence of the former on the latter. What is unclear, however, is how this happens, that is, the familial dynamics through which marital satisfaction contributes to children's growth. To fill in the gap, the present research sought to address the question by showing that the pattern of parent interactions may change parenting efficacy, which then impacts the functioning of children *even if* the parents put in the same amount of effort and are involved in parenting to the same extent. Simply put, marital satisfaction may *moderate* the effects of parental involvement on child development.

Method

Data Source

We used the measures included in the project “Kids in Taiwan: National Longitudinal Study of Child Development and Care (KIT): KIT-M36 at 36 months old” (Archive # D00168) to test the hypothesis. The KIT project was a large-scale ($N = 2164$; 48.57% girls), stratified-sampling, nationally representative survey (of Taiwan) of young children born between 4/1/2013 and 3/31/2014 and aged three

years old at the survey time ($M = 35.93$ months old, $SD = 0.68$). The data of KIT were publicly available on the website of Survey Research Data Archive, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. Readers may refer to the website for more information about KIT (e.g., about sampling, demographics etc.).

Measures

Children's Cognitive Development The Behavioral Rating Inventory of Cognitive Development for 2-5 Year Olds (BRICD; Wang et al., 2015) was used to assess children's cognitive development. It is a parent rating scale designed to assess young children's memory and executive functions. The questionnaire is composed of 24 four-point Likert scale items. Past research indicates that the items have high internal consistency (full-scale Cronbach's $\alpha = .96$, memory $\alpha = .95$, attention-executive functioning $\alpha = .87$) as well as good criterion-related validity ($r = 0.86$; Wang et al., 2015). In the current research, we used the average score of the full questionnaire; the higher the score, the more advanced a child's cognitive development.

Children's Language Development The Inventory of Language Development for 0-6 Years Old Children (ILD; Liu et al., 2018) was used to assess children's language development. The questionnaire is composed of 18 parent-report, 4-point Likert-type items that measured young children's language expression, comprehension, and writing emergence. Past research indicates that the items have high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > .90$), test-retest reliability ($> .80$), as well as good criterion-related validity ($r = 0.61$ – 0.82 ; Liu et al., 2018). In the current research, we used the average score of the full questionnaire; the higher the score, the more advanced a child's language development.

Children's Social and Emotional Development We used the social and emotional development questionnaire (Chang, 2019) included in KIT to assess children's social and emotional development. The questionnaire is composed of 28 parent-report, 5-point Likert-type items among which 13 are on the social and 15 are on the emotional domain; past research indicates that the items have high internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$ for both domains; Chang, 2019). In the current research, we studied the two domains independently, and used the average score of the subscales; the higher the score, the more advanced a child's development.

Maternal and Paternal Involvement We used the parental involvement questionnaire (Chang, 2019) included in KIT to assess the parenting efforts of surveyed children's mothers and fathers. The questionnaire was answered twice in each survey, once for the mother and a second time for the father. The questionnaire includes five items, measuring how much 1) the child's father/mother takes care of the child's basic needs such as food and clothing, 2) teaches the child about life routines and manners, 3) helps the child with their learning activities, 4) cares about and responds positively to the child, and 5) plays with the child. Respondents answer these questions on a scale of four levels of frequency—rarely, sometimes, often, or very often.

The internal consistency of the items was high in the present source dataset (maternal involvement Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$, father $\alpha = .92$). We used the average score of the questionnaire; the higher the score, the more involved a parent.

Parent Relationship Satisfaction The KIT survey assessed parent relationship satisfaction with one comprehensive, 4-point Likert-type item: "I [the one parent answering the survey] am satisfied with my marriage." The higher the score, the more satisfying the relationship. Because there was only one item here, the measure's internal consistency could not be calculated. Nonetheless, similar single-item relationship-satisfaction measures have been used widely in the broader relationship science (e.g., Erol & Orth, 2014; Fuller-Iglesias, 2015; Bõthe et al., 2017), supporting the reliability and validity of the approach.

Results

The below report of results is organized as follows. First, we present the demographics of participants, the basic descriptives of key variables, as well as the correlations between demographics and the variables of interest. We studied the correlations to identify and control for potential confounding factors in the following main analyses.

For testing our hypothesis, we show the estimation of the composite, mother-and-father-together predictability of parental involvement for each domain of children's development and, critically, the estimation of the moderation effect of parent relationship satisfaction on the effect of parental involvement. This later moderation tested the hypothesis of the present research; the analysis was conducted by regressing each domain of child development onto the average of standardized maternal and paternal involvement, standardized relationship satisfaction, as well as the cross-term of both at once. The demographics found to be significantly associated with any of the four domains of development were controlled for in the regression.

In addition, beyond testing the hypothesis, we performed two sets of exploratory analyses to investigate the differences between maternal and paternal involvement. First, the composite parental involvement in the regression model above was replaced first by maternal involvement, and then a second time by paternal involvement. We had no prediction about which parent drove the findings in the overall-effect analysis, except that at least one of the two would.

Second, we combined the mother- and the father-specific analysis above in one regression, in order to explore both parents' unique contributions for their children as well as the unique moderation they received from relationship satisfaction. Again, there was no specific prediction for this analysis; it was for an exploratory purpose and the findings are discussed.

Descriptives

The descriptives of participant demographics and key variables of the present research are shown in Table 1. Here, child sex was coded 1 for girls and 2 for boys.

Table 1 Descriptives of Variables

Variable	Min.	Max.	M	SD	<i>r</i> with			
					(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Child sex	1	2	1.49	.500	.03	.01	-.02	-.05*
Age								
Child (m.)	34.20	38.18	35.93	0.68	.14*	.13*	.09*	.09*
Mother (y.)	19.95	52.62	34.35	4.60	.07*	.06*	.00	-.01
Father (y.)	20.18	62.83	37.21	5.38	-.06*	-.05*	-.07*	-.07*
Education								
Mother	1.00	6.00	4.25	1.15	.31*	.22*	.11*	.08*
Father	1.00	6.00	4.27	1.23	.28*	.21*	.10*	.10*
Household income (m.)	1.00	26.00	9.29	4.35	.24*	.19*	.10*	.11*
Child development								
Cognitive (1)	1.00	4.00	2.65	0.50				
Language (2)	1.00	4.00	2.94	0.51				
Social (3)	1.00	5.00	3.49	0.65				
Emotional (4)	1.00	5.00	3.57	0.63				
Parental involvement								
Composite	1.00	4.00	3.39	0.52				
Maternal	1.00	4.00	3.75	0.47				
Paternal	1.00	4.00	3.04	0.81				
Relationship satisfaction	1.00	4.00	3.33	0.59				

*: $p < .05$; m. and y. denote month-s/ly and year-s/ly, respectively

Child age was in months and parent age was in years. Parent education was coded as 6 levels from 1 to 6, for elementary school or less, junior high school, vocational or senior high school, two-year college, four-year college or Bachelor's degree, and Master's degree or higher. Lastly, household income was monthly income in Taiwanese dollars coded as 26 levels from 1 to 26, for none, less than 10k, 10 to less than 20k, 20 to less than 30k... 190 to less than 200k, 200 to less than 300k, 300 to less than 400k, 400 to less than 500k, 500k to less than 1m, and 1m or more.

As can be seen in Table 1, our data were precise in child age, showing less than a month in its *SD* as well as less than 0.1-month discrepancy from three years old. Meanwhile, parent age was diverse and ranged widely—especially considering that all their children aged three—from 20 to 53 years old for mothers and 20 to 63 for fathers. Similarly, household income ranged widely from none to more than one million Taiwanese dollars a month (i.e., more than 400-thousand U.S. dollars a year). Both parents' education also ranged from elementary school or less, to Master's degree or higher. Given that elementary- and junior-high-school education are mandatory in Taiwan, this means that our data had even covered those who violated the law. Reflecting the representativity of demographics, all variables of interest in the current research likewise spread across the entire scales of theirs with means sitting near the middle of the scales. Together, we then believed that the data were informative both quantitatively in terms of the sample size, as well as qualitatively

in terms of the kinds of families surveyed. Finally, as expected, maternal and paternal involvement was significantly positive ($r = .218, p < .001$), and all aspects of demographics (including child sex) were significantly associated with some if not all domains of child development. We hence controlled for all the demographics in the following analyses.

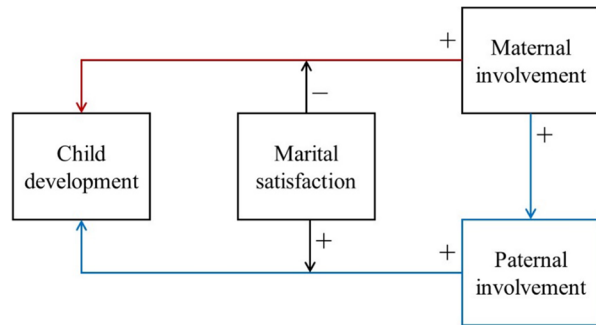
Main Hypothesis Tests

As planned, we regressed each domain of child development on standardized average of maternal and paternal involvement, standardized satisfaction of their relationship, the involvement-satisfaction interaction, as well as control demographics of child sex, child, mother, and father age, mother and father education, and family income. The results (detailed in Supplementary Tables 1 to 4) showed that, as expected, both parental involvement and parent relationship satisfaction significantly positively predicted all domains of cognitive, language, social, and emotional development of children ($p \leq .001$). Importantly, it was found that parent relationship satisfaction significantly strengthened the effects of parental involvement on language ($B = 0.02, SE = 0.01, \beta = 0.05, t = 2.09, p = .037$) and social development ($B = 0.04, SE = 0.01, \beta = 0.06, t = 2.55, p = .011$), and was trending in strengthening the effects of parental involvement on cognitive ($B = 0.02, SE = 0.01, \beta = 0.04, t = 1.75, p = .080$) and emotional development ($B = 0.02, SE = 0.01, \beta = 0.04, t = 1.70, p = .089$). These findings severed as preliminary evidence for the hypothesis that parental efforts are more effective when the relationship between the parents is more enjoyable. In addition, we discovered indications that this general moderation of parent relationship might influence different domains of development differently: It is more apparent in the language and the social domain than in the cognitive and the emotional one. To further explore the phenomenon, we then looked at mothers' and fathers' contributions closely and separately. The analysis is reported below.

Exploratory Analyses

Exploring the patterns of maternal and paternal involvement individually, some unanticipated results emerged. Unlike the effects of composite involvement, those of maternal involvement (detailed in Supplementary Tables 5 to 8) were not at all moderated by parent relationship satisfaction in any of the four domains of child development ($p \geq .172$). That is, maternal involvement predicted child development in a static fashion not conditioned to the relationship between the mother and the father. By contrast, the effects of paternal involvement on child development (detailed in Supplementary Tables 9 to 12) were significantly strengthened by parent relationship in all of the cognitive ($B = 0.03, SE = 0.01, \beta = 0.07, t = 3.22, p = .001$), language ($B = 0.04, SE = 0.01, \beta = 0.08, t = 3.67, p < .001$), social ($B = 0.06, SE = 0.01, \beta = 0.10, t = 4.32, p < .001$), and emotional domain ($B = 0.04, SE = 0.01, \beta = 0.08, t = 3.20, p = .001$). These findings consequently suggested that the composite effects of parental involvement documented above were particularly driven by increased efficacy of fathers' parenting in their happy relationships with their

Fig. 1 Conceptual depiction of the findings. *Note:* The results indicate that marital satisfaction weakens the red path—the direct effect of maternal involvement on child development. At the same time, marital satisfaction strengthens the blue path—the indirect effect of maternal involvement on child development through paternal involvement



partners. Mothers, on the other hand, seemed not affected by such relationships. To validate this theoretical conjecture, we hence investigated maternal and paternal involvement separately as two variables, yet together in the same set of analyses.

The results (detailed in [Supplementary Tables 13 to 16](#)) indicated that, again, the effects of paternal involvement on all four domains of child development were positively moderated by parent relationship satisfaction ($p \leq .007$) as hypothesized; the effects of maternal involvement, in comparison, was now even significantly *weakened* by relationship satisfaction in all developmental domains ($p \leq .044$), seemingly contradicting our predictions. Nonetheless, it might be worth noting that these findings delineated the unique as opposed to the hypothesized total moderating effects of relationship satisfaction on mothers' and fathers' parenting effectiveness, because both parents' variables were in the model together. In other words, considering the above evidence that mothers' efficacy by itself was not a function of parent relationships, as depicted in Figure 1, what we found here was a *statistical suppression* (Martinez Gutierrez & Cribbie, [in press](#)) revealing that happy relationships between both parents decreased the leverage of mothers' direct influences on their children's growth (the red path) but, at the same, increased that of their indirect influences through fathers' contributions (the blue path). Put differently, satisfying relationships between the mother and the father, although not affecting the total quantity of child development that mothers' parenting translated into, did potentially change the quality of the process: In less enjoyable relationships, the mother parented alone; in more enjoyable relationships, she parented with and, actually, via the father, in all of the cognitive, language, social, and emotional domain. Given that fathers parented better in more enjoyable relationships, the big picture of familial dynamics that the current research painted was therefore that, when the relationship is satisfying and the father is capable, the mother lets him help (her) and it is helpful (for their children).

Discussion

When would parenting be the most effective and contribute to child development the most? Aware of other possibilities, we propose that the better the quality of the relationship between the mother and the father, the more their involvement in parenting

would realize in their children's growth. In line with the prediction, our first set of analyses of a nationally representative large-sample survey indicates that parent relationship satisfaction significantly forecasts the effects of mother-father composite parental involvement in a family on child development in the language and the social domain, and marginally significantly forecasts the same effects in the cognitive and the emotional domain.

Looking closely, we however found in the first set of exploratory analyses that these moderating effects of marital satisfaction only exist for the father, significantly in all four developmental domains studied. For the mother, the effects are non-significant across the board. The composite strengthening effects of parent relationship quality are therefore seemingly solely driven by changes in the father.

To explore the phenomenon further and integrate the two parents in the family, in the second set of exploratory analyses, we examined the *unique* moderating effects of marital satisfaction on the mother's and the father's individual parenting efforts. The results show that, similarly, marital satisfaction *uniquely* tightens the links between fathers' involvement in the cognitive, language, social, as well as emotional development of their children. By contrast, it *uniquely* loosens the associations between mothers' efforts in all four domains of growth. Regarding the finding that the *total* moderating effects on mothers' involvement are neither positive nor negative (revealed in the first set of exploratory analyses), what we discovered is consequently that, in an enjoyable and satisfying marriage, the mother parents *through* the father more than she does in a lower-quality marriage. The parenting efficacy attributable to the mother may thus be constant (revealed in the first set of exploratory analyses), although working via a different familial dynamic (revealed in the second set of exploratory analyses). With the father's effectiveness being bolstered by parent relationship quality (revealed in both sets of exploratory analyses), young children subsequently grow better when their parents are happier partners (revealed in the first set of exploratory analyses).

Implications

Familial Dynamics The present work may shed light on the literature in a few ways. To begin with, we document a different role of marital satisfaction in the association between parenting and child development. It is known that parent relationship quality predicts parental involvement and investment (e.g., Planalp et al., 2013), which—as also seen in the current study—subsequently predicts child development (e.g., Feldman et al., 1990). In other words, previous research has suggested a *mediation* relation from marital satisfaction, to parental involvement, and finally children's growth (Belsky, 1984). Indeed, Fishman and Meyers (2000) have found that mothers who experienced better marital satisfaction would be more involved with their children, which in turn was associated with lower child psychological distress.

Building off this line of research, our current work further reports that there exists a *moderation* relation between marital satisfaction, parental involvement, and child development. That is, not only is high-quality parent relationship an initiator of the beneficial effects of parental involvement on children's growth; it may facilitate such

a process of benefiting the children, making it smoother and more efficient. Specifically, the results indicate that this facilitation might emerge when happy marriage opens the door for the mother to share her child-rearing duties that can be fulfilled more easily by the father, to the father: simply, letting the right *guy* do the work. Consequently, we suspect that people generally allocate parental obligations in their families in a suboptimal manner, putting too much on mothers while forgetting that fathers can help, too. This is not only unhealthy for the mothers, but also detrimental for the families' parenting efforts and the children's development across domains, as we report in the present research.

Spill-Over Effect Secondly, the present study echoes with the research on the spill-over hypothesis (Engfer, 1988), showing not only whether but also how parent relationship quality may spill over to affect children's well-being. In the literature, it is suggested that macro parental involvement, the overall quantity of parenting, is composed of micro-moments of parenting practices that vary in *quality* (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004). In other words, if the practices are low-quality, even if there are many such moments accumulated, the general parenting investment may still be in vain and result in a lack of growth in the children.

By contrast, one interpretation of our findings is that enjoyable relationships between parents may prevent their parenting practices from deteriorating (as reported by Belsky, 1984, and King et al., 2014) and, subsequently, safeguard the development of their children. For theory, this interpretation represents a possible mechanism underlying the spill-over effect, which we suggest that future research verifies. For application, our results point to how not only to passively stop negative parent interactions from spilling over but also to actively pass on positive, satisfying quality in parents' relationships to nourish the well-being of their children.

Parental Mental Health Our research also provides implications for parental mental health. Recent decades have seen that parents not only build higher goals for parenting but indeed involve more in the work than did previous generations (Faircloth, 2014; Lan, 2018). One impact of the changes is parental burnout—a parenting context-specific syndrome that consists of overwhelming exhaustion related to one's parental role, emotional distancing from one's children, and losses of parental fulfillment (Roskam et al., 2018). This stressful parenting condition has been denoted as one of most worrying syndromes in the current world (Grueber et al., 2020; Mikolajczak et al., 2019). It is prevalent (e.g., the prevalence could be as high as 8% in US; Roskam et al., 2018) and may lead to severe consequences such as harm to the physical and mental health of the concerned parents as well as the risk of neglectful and violent parental behavior for the children (e.g., Mikolajczak et al., 2019).

According to the balance between the risks and resources for parental burnout theory (Mikolajczak et al., 2019), parental burnout occurs when parents do not have sufficient resources to restore the balance from risk factors in the parenting context. Among all risk factors, parental overinvolvement has been nominated as one most detrimental (see Hubert & Aujoulat, 2018). Given our results that satisfying parent relationships may bolster parenting efficacy (and may thus reduce overinvolvement),

happy marriage may then present a potential solution to parental burnout that future studies might want to look into.

Chinese Parenting With a nationally representative sample of Taiwan, a culturally Chinese country, our findings implicate that parents' well-being and paternal involvement may have been increasingly crucial for the effectiveness of parenting in Chinese cultures. In the literature, Chinese parenting has been known for being highly controlling, restrictive, with differentiated paternal and maternal roles (Chao, 1994; Fung et al., 2017; Shek, 2007; Shek & Sun, 2014). Whereas such parenting could benefit the general development and academic achievement of the child (Chao, 1994; Luo et al., 2013; c.f., Chen et al., 1997), it risks the quality of parent-child relationship (Lau et al., 1990) and, as a result, parents' own well-being (Shek, 1997). In contrast, the benefit of satisfying parent relationships on parenting efficacy found in current research suggests that Chinese parents can, and perhaps should, consider their own happiness while doing the parenting job, echoing previous research on the direct associations between marital quality and parent-child relationships (e.g., Shek, 1998). Furthermore, the unique moderation we report of marital satisfaction on the effect of paternal involvement points out the advantage of the Chinese father taking the (traditionally the mother's) parenting job.

That said, we would be cautious in directly generalizing the current results to contexts of non-Taiwanese Chinese cultures. Although early research found that differences in the social, political, and economic conditions across Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China had not yielded systematic differences in parenting (Berndt et al., 1993), recent research highlighted the necessity to consider the influence of sociohistorical contexts and social transformations on contemporary parenting across different Chinese societies (Chuang et al., 2018). It is possible that societal changes unique to Taiwan in the 2000s have shifted beliefs about parenting (e.g., diverse family structure has been extensively discussed during the social movement of legalizing same-sex marriage), but it is also possible that the current results reflect the ongoing western influence on parenting in (not only Taiwanese) Chinese societies. Future studies need to pay close attention to cultural contexts when generalizing the current results.

Marriage in Chinese Families Our findings also resonate with recent research on cultural similarities and differences in perspectives of marriage. Lam et al. (2016) found that despite emphasizing resources and extended families (also see Kline & Zhang, 2009; Toro-morn & Sprecher, 2003), the Taiwanese Chinese prefer warm/intimate and attractive/passionate spouses as much as European Americans. In both cultures, marriage is more satisfactory when one's perceptions align with one's ideals of the spouse (Lam et al., 2016). Similarly, our study demonstrated the importance of satisfying marriage for Taiwanese Chinese couples, with further benefits for their parenting job. It seems that marital relationships are worth attention in research on family processes in Chinese cultures, at least to a similar extent as in Western cultures.

Inheriting Well-being Together, the current work may have revealed a potential mechanism through which happiness can be passed down from one generation to the next. It is because the literature has shown that the relationship well-being of the parents translates into their young children's growth (Markiewicz et al., 2001), and it is not surprising that development in the early ages serves as the foundation for one to navigate through one's social and physical world later (Burt et al., 2008), to find happiness. Here, we add to this knowledge and suggest that parents' marital satisfaction may become children's recourses of well-being by repositioning both parents in the family, so they may bring the most out of themselves for their children. As a result, the parents' well-being would be inherited by the children and, theoretically, the children's children to create an upward spiral through generations. Given this hypothesis is a testable one, we then look forward to future investigations that secularize it empirically.

Limitations

With its strengths, the current research is with a few limitations, too. First, our source study was a cross-sectional survey, even if it had followed a carefully designed sampling procedure and, indeed, sampled a large fraction of the population. We thus suggest validating the findings of the present research in the laboratory and—given the applied nature of our study—field experiments in the future. In addition, this source survey relied heavily on self-report questionnaires. For one, that meant we had no control over the design of the questionnaires. Even though we did see reliability and validity in the measures used in the present research and, consequently, its findings—otherwise we would not have used them—some measures could have been set up better—say, more than one item for relationship satisfaction. For another, the self-report design opens the possibility of reporting biases caused by, say, memory distortion and perspective differences between the one answering the survey and those being assessed (e.g., the mother, the father, and the children). As such, future investigations might want to consider using more objective measures (e.g., behavior coding) in examining and extending our work. Finally, even though our research is nationally representative, it is so only for the country it represents—that is, Taiwan—as well as the marital composition it assumes—that is, opposite-sex partnership, which was the only legal form of marriage when the survey was conducted (yet not anymore). It is hence critical to test whether our results hold for other countries with, for instance, different cultures, economic structures, or social institutions. We look forward to support from future studies, as well as challenges that would broaden the field's understanding of parenting and, hopefully, help the next generation thrive.

Supplementary Information The online version contains supplementary material available at <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11482-022-10043-1>.

Declaration

Conflict of Interest and Ethical Statement Given the current research used online publicly available, dei-

identified secondary data as indicated in the manuscript, it complies with the Taiwanese ethical standards and requirements as well as those of the APA even though we did not request for an ethics review of the research. We report no conflicts of interest.

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