

In Search of an Evidence-Based Approach to Understand and Promote Effective Parenting Practices

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Demographic trends indicate there is no longer 1 “dominant family” in the 21st century (Pew Research Center, 2015). Rather, the contemporary family constellation is hugely diverse and dynamic. Ongoing shifts in family life make it imperative that couple and family psychologists stay current through awareness of evidence-based parenting interventions that are applicable to clinical work. Similarly, rapid shifts in family life implore researchers to empirically examine family experiences. This article seeks to provide a cohesive approach to understanding the status of research with regard to evidence-based parenting interventions. The terms *effective parenting*, *parenting interventions/programs*, and *evidence-based interventions* are reviewed. The work of Sexton et al. (2011) is presented as a scaffolding tool to evaluate empirical research by looking at strength of outcome, cross-cultural application, and indication of change processes. A framework that incorporates effective parenting, parenting interventions/programs, and evidence-based practice is applied to an understanding of parenting research with a focus on the following questions: (a) What do meta-analyses suggest about effective parenting practices? (b) What do meta-analyses suggest about effective parenting interventions/programs? Implications of responses to these 2 questions is then considered in the context of a third question: (c) What implications does this knowledge have for the implementation of parenting programs in diverse community contexts? The author presents the parenting research partnership as a culturally centered, community-based participatory research model for evidence-based parenting intervention studies.

Keywords: effective parenting, parenting interventions/programs, evidence-based parenting practice, guidelines for evidence-based treatments in family therapy, parenting research partnership

As we approach the third decade of the 21st century, parents continue to face unique challenges associated with raising their families. Parents may have difficulty coping with a child’s personality traits; they may struggle with having to shift parenting strategies as their child reaches a new developmental milestone; they may be a dual-career family and feel they do not have enough time for children or their significant other; they may have to manage co-

parenting, whether living together or apart; and couples may have to adjust expectations in accordance with life changes such as having a baby and becoming parents (Jenkins, 2012).

As parents in the United States approach this third decade of the 21st century, they face numerous social and economic changes. Parents are stressed financially. For instance, although 32% of parents feel they can pay for expenses and still have a little left over, one in four say that they are just able to make financial ends meet. Further, 9% of parents say they are unable to fulfill their financial commitments (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Demographic trends suggest that there is no longer “one dominant family form” in the United States today (Pew Research Center, 2015). Rather, there are many types of families, with the experience of parenting continually evolving. In 1960, for instance, 73% of children

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lived in a family where both parents were married and in their first marriage. In 1980, this percentage had dropped to 61%. By 2015, 46% of children lived in this type of family constellation. Fifteen percent of children lived with two parents with at least one having been previously married, and 7% of children were living in a cohabiting parent arrangement (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Whereas two-parent families have been decreasing, single-parent families have increased. According to the Pew report (Pew Research Center, 2015), 26% of youth under the age of 18 live with one parent, as compared to 9% in 1960 and 22% in 2000. Sixteen percent of children in 2015 lived in blended families, which are defined as living with a stepparent, stepsibling, or half sibling (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Five percent of children lived without either parent, many of whom were being raised by a grandparent (Pew Research Center, 2015).

At the same time, mothers today are more educated than they were in the past. In 1960, 18% of mothers with infants had a college education in comparison with 67% of contemporary moms (Pew Research Center, 2015). The first set of data was collected on working mothers in 1975. It indicated that 47% of mothers with children under the age of 18 were employed. Today's moms are more likely to be in the workforce, another shift that has an impact on family life. Currently, for instance, 70% of mothers with children under age 18 are working, and 64% of moms with preschool-aged children are employed.

The rapidly evolving family system suggests that parents in this third decade of the 21st century may face a very different parenting experience than did their parents (Arkan, Üstün, & Güvenir, 2013). As a result, today's parents may be less able to benefit from advice given by their parents who raised them in a different parenting context. If this is the case, the question then becomes this: Whom can parents turn to as they take on this enormous life responsibility? An evidence-based approach that informs clinical interventions may provide important supports amid this backdrop of dynamic family changes.

The ever-evolving U.S. family, without its "one dominant form," presents interesting challenges for couple and family psychologists. They may face the ongoing challenge of how to

stay knowledgeable of current family trends and relevant implications for treatment. Further, the diversification of the U.S. family constellation, coupled with shifting demographic trends nationwide, may present challenges for couple and family psychologists as they aspire to understand the families they work with from a multicultural context. Couple and family psychologists may struggle as they explore those techniques and strategies that have evidence-based support that can transfer into clinical work with specific families.

It is important that the literature provides a foundation that addresses potential challenges faced by couple and family psychologists. Empirical linkages between positive parenting and positive child development, as well as those between parental issues and negative outcomes, underscore the importance of parenting research on national and international levels (Day, Michelson, Thomson, Penney, & Draper, 2012a). For instance, maternal verbal and physical responsiveness to infants correlates with the child's development of trust, sense of self, and making good relationship choices later in life (Barnard et al., 1989). In an example of parents with adolescents, Sutton, Lasswell, Lanier, and Miller's (2014) review of the literature indicated that parent-child communication interventions decrease sexual risk factors (e.g., HIV, sexually transmitted infections) among African American and Latino youth.

Other research has tested the perception of Asian American parents as having an authoritarian style, described as "tiger parenting" (Chua, 2011). A longitudinal design explored parenting profiles and subsequent outcomes among a group of Chinese American parents of adolescents (Kim, Wang, Orozco-Lapray, Shen, & Murtuza, 2013). Contrary to the notion that tiger parenting is the predominant type of parenting among Chinese American families, the Kim et al. (2013) study identified four parenting profiles that included "supportive, tiger, easy-going, and harsh parenting" (p. 7). This longitudinal analysis revealed that, over time, the percentage of mothers with a "tiger parent" profile decreased, although there was an increase among fathers. Kim et al. (2013) identified supportive parenting as the most prevalent parenting style among Chinese American parents. In comparison with a supportive parenting style, the tiger parenting profile was related to

less educational attainment, less family commitment, a lower grade point average, more depressive symptoms, increased academic pressure, and greater alienation.

A study of adolescent mothers of Puerto Rican origin found that children whose moms were more likely to support Latino cultural values demonstrated greater compliance with a task in comparison with less enculturated moms (Wood, Grau, Smith, Duran, & Castellanos, 2017). These researchers discuss contextual variables that may influence this outcome.

The observed relation between enculturation and compliance could be accounted for by contextual factors or parenting behaviors not measured within this study. For instance, more traditional adolescent Latina mothers, who likely value family involvement, could be receiving more support, thus parenting in an overall more positive context than less enculturated mothers. They also might be utilizing additional parenting strategies that contribute to their children's increased compliance. (Wood et al., 2017, p. 305)

In another example, Streit, Carlo, Ispa, and Palermo (2017) explored the impact of parenting during early childhood and children's temperament on behavioral outcomes among African American and European American children. Participants were European American and African American mothers and their children who participated in the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. Streit et al. (2017) found varying patterns between African American and European American families among study variables such as severity of parental discipline, child temperament, and prosocial and antisocial behaviors. They stated,

Our findings yield evidence for the direct and indirect effects (via self-regulation) of negative emotionality on children's later social behaviors mostly for European American youth. In contrast, for African American families only, parental discipline severity in infancy had several direct long-term implications for children's behaviors in 5th grade. . . . The effects of negative emotionality on children's aggression, delinquency, compliance, and prosocial behaviors emerged predominantly for European American youth. (p. 1021)

The authors subsequently connect this finding to the cultural context. They stated,

However, the fact that this pattern of relations held mostly for European American children, and not for African American children, suggests that European American children who exhibit high levels of negative emotionality may be particularly prone to negative long term developmental outcomes. Perhaps European

American children who display such high levels of negative emotionality exceed culturally expected levels of display of such emotion, which then elicits negative reactions from socializing agents and places these children on a negative developmental trajectory. (pp. 1021–1022)

The ever-evolving nondominant family constellation, alongside decades of research that demonstrates important linkages between parenting practices and developmental outcomes for children, introduces the following question: How can clinicians and researchers apply what we know from evidence-based parenting research in ways that are responsive to the specific dynamic context that influences a contemporary family's lived experience? One strategy may be to have an understanding of the evidence base as it relates to desired outcomes (i.e., effective parenting). Here, the clinician or researcher might look to see what the research says about specific outcomes associated with certain interventions.

This solution may present some limitations, however, particularly with regard to generalizability. This may be especially relevant if research findings are based on international rather than domestic samples (Bohr, Halpert, Chan, Lishak, & Brightling, 2010; Byrne, Salmela-Aro, Read, & Rodrigo, 2013; Day et al., 2012a; Day, Michelson, Thomson, Penney, & Draper, 2012b; Delawarde, Briffault, Usubelli, & Saías, 2014; Otani, Suzuki, Shibuya, Matsumoto, & Kamata, 2009; Ruiz-Casares, Kolyn, Sullivan, & Rousseau, 2015; Stern, Alaggia, Watson, & Morton, 2008; Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Van Petegem, & Duriez, 2014) or do not reflect the family's reference group identities. A challenge for the clinician and/or researcher may be to consider how various types of interventions may be adapted to a diverse U.S. couple and family context.

Another dilemma for the researcher and clinician may involve identifying studies that reflect specific parental needs. For instance, a plethora of domestic research explores parenting interventions as tools for parents where reports were made to child protective services (Knox, Burkhart, & Cromly, 2013). Although this is important work, it raises the following questions: What about evidence-based parenting practices for parents not necessarily in crisis, but in need of support as they negotiate this ever-changing role? Similarly, what can re-

search tell us about early intervention and prevention efforts that aim to curtail crisis situations?

To get a sense of the status of research, a review in the PsycINFO database of empirical studies on parenting (not including parenting intervention studies and meta-analyses) published in peer-reviewed journals within the past 10 years (i.e., 2007–2017) identified various parenting themes that emerged in international and domestic scholarship. The rationale for identifying articles within the past 10 years was to maintain our understanding of how contemporary family experiences are reflected in current scholarship. In the international domain, empirical parenting research includes an exploration of the following topics (note that studies were identified as international if the sample was international; thus, findings reflected the experience of that international sample): daily parental discipline with a French-speaking sample in Switzerland (Passini, Pihet, Favez, & Schoebi, 2013); connections between terrorism salience and authoritarian parenting style with a sample from Germany (Fischer et al., 2010); relationship between dysfunctional parenting style and interpersonal sensitivity with a sample of Japanese medical students and hospital staff (Otani et al., 2009); perceptions and degree of parent prohibition and adolescent internationalization and defiance with a sample of adolescents from Belgium (Vansteenkiste et al., 2014); parental psychological control and maladaptive perfectionism with a sample of Belgian parents and 10th- through 12th-grade students (Soenens et al., 2008); and relationships between maternal scaffolding, parenting style, and parent education with a sample of mother-child dyads from England with working- and middle-class backgrounds (Carr & Pike, 2012).

In the national domain, empirical research within the past 10 years has addressed a range of topics that include the role of parental support in parent–youth dyads among Latino youth (Crean, 2008), parenting and adolescent outcomes (Abar, Jackson, & Wood, 2014; Wang, Dishion, Stormshak, & Willett, 2011), the relationship between cooperative coparenting and children’s prosocial behavior (Scrimgeour, Blandon, Stifter, & Buss, 2013), the role of cultural context in parenting behaviors and youth outcomes (Gonzalez & Weersing, 2014), the impact of maternal sensitivity on children’s

future academic functioning (Kopystynska, Spinrad, Seay, & Eisenberg, 2016), the impact of paternal and maternal sensitivity on toddler executive functioning among diverse rural communities (Towe-Goodman et al., 2014), relationships between parenting style and child outcomes (Park & Walton-Moss, 2012), the relationship between parenting stress and adolescent self-concept among a sample of European American families (Putnick et al., 2008), positive parenting and intergenerational resilience (Schofield, Conger, & Neppl, 2014), and the association between corporal punishment and externalizing behaviors as moderated by harsh and positive parenting (Mendez, Durtschi, Neppl, & Stith, 2016).

Yet other studies show domestic/international collaborations. One such study focused on parenting and antisocial behavior with a sample of parents and adolescents from Padova, Italy (Vieno, Nation, Pastore, & Santinello, 2009). Another study explored the impact of genetic influences on children’s social motivation on adoptive parent hostility by using a domestic sample while collaborating with colleagues in the United Kingdom (Elam et al., 2014). A third study, with collaborators from the United States and Amsterdam, collected data from a national sample to explore relationships among parenting, media usage, and children’s executive functioning (Linebarger, Barr, Lapierre, & Piotrowski, 2014).

In response to these strengths and challenges, a key goal of this introductory article for the *Couple and Family Psychology* special section on parenting is to consider how to assess the evidence base amid the backdrop of the evolving family system. To achieve this goal, relevant underlying concepts (e.g., effective parenting, parenting interventions/programs, and evidence-based interventions) must first be defined.

Definitions

Effective Parenting

Effective parenting refers to “consistent, supportive, and responsive childrearing practices [that are] critical to achieving positive developmental outcomes for children” (Day et al., 2012a, p. 1). A review of research with regard to what is meant by effective parenting indicates

“that there are parent behaviors and interactions that are important for healthy development from early childhood on [that seem] to hold across socioeconomic and ethnic groups, although it is increasingly clear that they are individualized and responsive to children’s temperament and environmental threats” (Abt Associates Inc., 2012, p. 8).

Effective parenting encompasses parental warmth, as well as a supportive and caring relationship from infancy through adolescence (Abt Associates Inc., 2012). Critical for the parent during these varying developmental stages is the ability to shift parenting roles and strategies in response to children’s needs as they grow. In parenting an infant, for instance, responsiveness involves being aware of ongoing, daily needs such as diapering, feeding, holding, and ensuring safety. For the school-aged child, responsiveness includes responding to the child’s adjustment to school life, peers, and academic responsibilities. For adolescents, having a supportive parent–adolescent relationship can serve as a buffer against the initiation of early sexual activity, teen pregnancy, and the use of alcohol and cigarettes (Blum, Beuhring, & Rinehart, 2002; Miller, Norton, Fan, & Christopherson, 1998). Parents with more than one child whose children are in different development stages (e.g., infancy and adolescence) face the challenge of being simultaneously responsive to the developmental needs presented at differing stages.

Although parents influence their child’s development, children also influence how their parents approach the task of parenting them (Abt Associates Inc., 2012). Here, effective parenting includes having a warm, caring, and supportive relationship while also responding to a child’s temperament and personality (Greenspan, 1997). Parents may be further challenged when they have two or more children with very different temperaments (e.g., active vs. inner-focused). A parent may struggle with having different ways to be responsive, depending upon the characteristics of each child. This is analogous to the shifting the parent is called to engage in when children are in differing developmental stages.

Research has explored what effective parenting means in an environmental context. Much of this work takes an ecological approach that explores how the child and family interact with

the larger social and community environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is also important to note that parents may have low control of their surrounding environment, despite engaging in warm, supportive, and caring parenting practice. In their longitudinal Chicago Youth Development Study, for instance, Gorman-Smith, Tolan, and Henry (2000) found that although effective parenting decreased negative influences among African American and Latino adolescent males, it did not remove them altogether.

In sum, the literature suggests that effective parenting evokes a parent who brings warmth to parent–child interactions; engages in a caring, supportive relationship; and is responsive to the child’s developmental stage, temperament/personality, and the environmental context in which parenting takes place. The publication titled *State of the Science and Practice in Parenting Interventions Across Childhood* summarized related effective parenting elements that include communication between parent and child; consistent, positive discipline that is responsive to the child’s developmental stage; monitoring of activities such as physical safety for infants and social safety during adolescence; and shared involvement in activities (Abt Associates Inc., 2012). Shared involvement can embody effective parenting elements such as communication, positive discipline, and monitoring, as these activities often occur when parents and children are interacting.

Parenting Interventions/Programs

Parenting interventions are designed to support parents through the provision of skills, systemic supports, resources, awareness, and knowledge to raise a family (Arkan et al., 2013). Such interventions help parents develop self-confidence, parental self-efficacy, and related skills as they engage in the parental role (Arkan et al., 2013). Parenting programs/interventions may be aimed at parent and child; the parents only; or the parent, child, and another participant (e.g., a teacher). For instance, the Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers program includes parents, children, and teachers. Teachers rate children’s behavior on the playground and in the classroom to determine if aggressive behaviors have decreased (DeGarmo, Eddy, Reid, & Fetrow, 2009).

Parenting interventions refer to the way in which programs are carried out. Sanders and Kirby (2015) presented a developmental history of parenting programs. They discussed how parenting interventions began as single interventions and then extended into program delivery at a group level. They continued to discuss how more recent parenting programs have evolved to encompass interventions that reach a wide target audience (Sanders & Kirby, 2015). In their review of existing parenting interventions/programs, Abt Associates Inc. (2012) identified the following program components: theoretical framework (i.e., what is the theoretical basis of the parenting intervention?), program goals (i.e., what outcomes does the parenting intervention seek to achieve?), timing (i.e., during what developmental stage[s] is the parenting intervention carried out?), setting (i.e., where is the parenting intervention carried out?), target group (i.e., does the parenting intervention take a universal [all parents], selected [parents facing specific stressors], or indicated [parents and children who face a specific problem] approach to providing the intervention for parents?), service delivery (i.e., who is the parenting intervention for?), evidence base (i.e., what do the outcomes of the parenting intervention tell us about its effectiveness?), and impact (i.e., are there statistically significant changes that result from program implementation?).

Parenting interventions/programs may incorporate varying theoretical orientations. In their review of the literature on evidence-based parenting program journal articles published from 1992 to 2012, Delawarde et al. (2014) identified seven different theoretical approaches taken by parenting interventions/programs: “cognitive, systemic, psychoeducational, psychoanalytical, coaching, community and ecological” (p. 273). Similarly, Arkan et al. (2013) discussed how parenting interventions/programs that take psychodynamic, family systems, and humanistic approaches are relationship based, with content focused on communication, feedback, and managing emotions.

Social learning theory is at the core of many effective interventions (e.g., the Positive Parenting Program [Triple P], Sanders, 2012). Social learning theory focuses on incorporating “behavioral, cognitive, and developmental principles and concepts” (Sanders & Kirby, 2015, p. 422). Learning occurs through observation.

Modeling happens when conclusions are drawn about observations and decisions are made about the behavior (Bandura, 1977). Four mediating processes influence what is learned from modeling (Bandura, 1972): attention (i.e., the learner must pay attention to the model and relevant behavior to learn from it), retention (i.e., to reproduce a behavior the learner must remember aspects of it), reproduction (i.e., the learner is able to reproduce the behavior), and motivation (i.e., the learner decides upon the benefits and costs associated with engaging, or not engaging, in a behavior). Social learning theory is evident in Matthew Sanders’ Triple P, which applies positive parenting skill strategies for parents of 0- to 16-year-olds (Sanders, 2008). This program helps parents develop communication skills as they learn how to respond to behavioral issues.

Recent work has incorporated a public health approach to parenting interventions/programs (Sanders, 2008). Implementing population-wide parenting interventions is uncommon in the public health arena (Shapiro, Prinz, & Sanders, 2010). The lack of a public health approach seems counterintuitive given the overall societal goal of well-being for its members. For instance, we see this metagoal exercised in public health efforts to vaccinate children against certain diseases, with the expectation that they will grow up to be healthy adults. Given what we know about the importance of effective parenting and childhood outcomes, it makes sense to implement parenting interventions/programs on a population-based scale to address a critical public health issue—supporting the well-being of our children.

The U.S. Triple P System Population Trial is an example of a population-based large-scale parenting intervention that has been found to have positive outcome data related to child maltreatment (Prinz & Sanders, 2007; Prinz, Sanders, Shapiro, Whitaker, & Lutzker, 2009). Shapiro et al. (2010) discussed several lessons learned from implementing a population trial parenting intervention. They cautioned not to underestimate the amount of time needed to implement a population-based trial, underscored the need for coordination and resource support among organizations involved in the intervention, discussed the limits of feasibility when conducting a large-scale population trial with providers from a range of service organi-

zations, and talked about the importance of developing “fidelity monitoring systems” (p. 232) to address this issue. Finally, they discussed the role of geographic location, particularly as it relates to agencies that may have locations in both control-group and intervention locations (Shapiro et al., 2010).

Evidence-Based Interventions

Evidence-based practice refers to those clinical interventions that are supported by scientific evidence that demonstrates efficacy in a specific area. The American Psychological Association Task Force on Evidence-Based Practices (Sexton et al., 2011) “suggested a more inclusive perspective in which research evidence was viewed as a part of clinical decision-making processes in which clinicians integrate findings from research with other factors, such as client preferences and clinical judgment, to determine treatment decisions” (p. 378). Although the field has generally agreed that evidence-based treatments are important, disagreement between practitioners and researchers has largely focused on concerns about the possibility that taking an evidence-based approach might oversimplify the complexity associated with clinical work (Sexton et al., 2011).

Taking an evidence-based approach to couple and family therapy is further complicated when one considers the application of a systems approach. Applying the evidence base to research in couple and family psychology goes beyond looking at the individual. Rather, the focus is the impact of the intervention on the overall system. As such, there are complicated issues that need to be addressed when considering evidence-based practice for couple and family psychological research.

According to Sexton et al. (2011), “the *best* couple and family treatments are both scientifically sound and clinically relevant” (p. 389). Within this overall context, Sexton et al. presented three levels from which to weigh the evidence base associated with various treatments: Level I: “evidence-informed treatments clearly based upon psychological research” (p. 384; i.e., some existing research supports the treatment but not enough to classify the treatment for a Level II or III), Level II: “treatments which show promising preliminary research results” (p. 385; i.e., treatments with studies that

are specified, can be replicated, and have a theoretical base), and Level III: “evidence-based treatments” (p. 385; i.e., treatments that are specific and with outcomes that address the issues for which they were implemented). In addition to the three levels, Sexton et al. presented three categories relevant to couple and family therapy research: Category 1: “strength of the evidence” (p. 386; i.e., does the treatment result in reliable, clinical outcomes?), Category 2: “efficacious models with verified mechanisms” (p. 386; i.e., how do change mechanisms promote desired outcomes that are in alignment with the theoretical base?); and Category 3: “effective models with contextual efficacy” (p. 387; i.e., is the model effective with clients from diverse backgrounds who present a range of clinical issues?).

Assessing the Evidence Base Amid an Ever-Changing Family System

Taken together, the concepts of effective parenting, parenting interventions/programs, and evidence-based practice provide a framework from which to assess the evidence-base. First, the focus is on the evidence base as it relates to the topic of effective parenting. Hence, we want to know what studies examine the role of warm, supportive, and caring parenting on outcomes. The next concept, parenting interventions/programs, explores programs that are vehicles to promoting effective parenting. Whether through a specific theoretical approach or in response to a specific parenting issue, the parenting intervention/program facilitates effective parenting as an outcome. Finally, the third concept, evidence-based practice, asks the question of whether the parenting intervention/program that aimed to promote effective parenting was empirically supported. In other words, the intervention provides a vehicle to move toward effective parenting, but how reliable is that vehicle?

A review of meta-analyses on parenting, parenting interventions/programs, and evidence-based practice will address three questions: (a) What do meta-analyses suggest about effective parenting practices? (b) What do meta-analyses suggest about effective parenting interventions/programs? Implications of responses to these two questions will then be considered in the context of a third question: (c) What implica-

tions does this knowledge have for the implementation of parenting programs in diverse community contexts? Following this discussion, a new model of parent intervention and engagement will be introduced.

What Do Meta-Analyses Suggest About Effective Parenting Practices?

A review of meta-analyses provides one strategy to understand the status of research with regard to effective parenting practices. Because it is difficult to base the efficacy of a parenting practice on one single study, meta-analysis allows the researcher to combine results across studies to see if one common outcome exists. If there is a common effect, it can be argued more strongly that the finding carries across multiples studies. If there is variability and not a consistent trend across data, meta-analyses can also try to determine what has prompted differential outcomes.

Several recent meta-analyses have focused on the effect of effective parenting practices in various domains. Meta-analyses have examined the relationship between the Big Five personality factors (i.e., Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness, Neuroticism) and three types of parenting (i.e., warmth, behavioral control, and autonomy support; [Prinzie, Stams, Deković, Reijntjes, & Belsky, 2009](#)); the association between spanking and child outcomes ([Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016](#)); the relationship between parental psychological control and relational aggression in children and adolescents ([Kuppens, Laurent, Heyvaert, & Onghena, 2013](#)); the impact of nonresident father involvement on child well-being ([Adams & Johnson, 2013](#)); the influence of children's temperament on sensitivity to parenting ([Slagt, Dubas, Deković, & van Aken, 2016](#)); the impact of maternal work on children's achievement and behavior problems ([Lucas-Thompson, Goldberg, & Prause, 2010](#)); and parenting strategies, including father's involvement, that promote academic achievement ([Kim & Hill, 2015](#); [Hill & Tyson, 2009](#)). An overall broad theme across these meta-analyses is the identification of common effects that promoted (or interfered) with effective parenting practices. Although a detailed discussion of all the meta-analyses is beyond the parameters of this article, some examples are presented below.

Meta-analyses focused on the impact of parenting style on child outcomes present several interesting findings. In general, the [Prinzie et al. \(2009\)](#) study found that personality does have a modest relationship with parenting practices that suggests "parental personality influences children's developmental context" (p. 360). This meta-analysis found that those parents with higher levels of "Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness and lower levels of Neuroticism engage in more warm and structured parenting" (p. 358). These researchers found that parents with higher levels of Agreeableness and lower levels of Neuroticism were more supportive of their children's independence/autonomy in comparison to other parents. They concluded that these parents are likely to view their children's autonomy as a positive rather than "an attack on parental authority" (p. 358).

Another meta-analytic study explored the relationship between parents who spank their children and child outcomes ([Gershoff & Grogan-Kaylor, 2016](#)). Overall, this meta-analysis suggests that parental spanking is associated with negative child outcomes. Results indicated, for instance, that 13 of 17 child outcomes were associated with parental spanking. Negative outcomes included

more aggression, more antisocial behavior, more externalizing problems, more internalizing problems, more mental health problems, and more negative relationships with parents. Spanking was also significantly associated with lower moral internalization, lower cognitive ability, and lower self-esteem. The largest effect size was for physical abuse; the more children are spanked, the greater the risk that they will be physically abused by their parents. (p. 463)

Although the authors share that most of the studies in this meta-analysis were correlational, they highlight the fact that correlations are needed to make causal associations.

Yet another meta-analysis focused on parenting style to explore whether there is variation among children regarding their sensitivity toward parenting as influenced by their temperaments (i.e., easy or difficult; [Slagt et al., 2016](#)). Slagt et al. referred to research that indicated that children with difficult temperaments, in comparison to children with easy temperaments, demonstrate "more internalizing and externalizing behavior problems and lower social and academic adjustment when parenting qual-

ity was low, and less behavior problems and better adjustment when parenting quality was high” (p. 1071). Results of this meta-analysis indicated that children with more difficult temperaments were more susceptible to negative parenting in comparison with children with easy temperaments. At the same time, however, children with difficult temperaments were also more likely to benefit from positive parenting. Slagt et al. stated these findings support the differential susceptibility model that refers to the ways in which “children vary in their general susceptibility to parenting and other environmental influences” (p. 1069).

What Do Meta-Analyses Suggest About Effective Parenting Interventions/Programs?

The aforementioned meta-analyses lend support to the idea that couple and family psychology has a knowledge base that reflects effective parenting practices. A related next question is how parenting programs/interventions can help change less effective parenting behaviors while also preventing and/or reducing negative child outcomes. This second meta-analytic review provides support for the notion that parent training programs effectively promote positive outcomes among parents and children (Kaminski, Valle, Filene, & Boyle, 2008). Kaminski et al. conducted a meta-analysis of 77 parent programs serving children from 0 to 7 years of age. They found that parenting programs with the largest positive effects supported parents in “increasing positive parent–child interactions and emotional communication skills, teaching parents to use time out and the importance of parenting consistency and requiring parents to practice new skills with their children during parent training sessions” (p. 567). Program components with smaller effects involved factors such as having parents learn how to problem solve, having parents learn how to promote their child’s development, and providing other services.

Pinquart and Teubert (2010) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the effect of parent education on parental outcomes among new and expecting parents. Overall, the Pinquart and Teubert meta-analysis indicated that early parent education programs result in significant effects for first-time and expecting parents in the areas of “parenting, child abuse/neglect, parental stress, health promoting parental behavior,

child development, parental psychological health, and couple adjustment” (pp. 323–324). Their analyses also suggest a program implementation time frame of 3 to 6 months to support positive parenting and child outcomes. An analysis of follow-up data indicated that, with the exception of three, all of the effects were maintained approximately 2 years and 5 months later. Pinquart and Teubert (2010) concluded that parent education programs should be made accessible to more parents.

Letourneau et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis to examine the effectiveness of parenting programs aimed to promote maternal–child attachments. This review examined maternal sensitivity and maternal reflective function in relationship to secure maternal–infant attachment. Researchers found that mothers who received an intervention focused on either maternal sensitivity on its own or maternal sensitivity and reflective function together showed an increased sense of secure attachment in comparison to participants in control groups (Letourneau et al., 2015). Further, infants in the treatment group who received the intervention were almost three times as likely to have a secure maternal attachment in comparison with infants in the control groups.

What Implications Does This Knowledge Have for the Implementation of Parenting Programs in Diverse Community Contexts?

The knowledge base regarding effective parenting practice, coupled with research that demonstrates parent program/intervention efficacy in promoting positive parent–child outcomes, suggests that ongoing parenting program/intervention development is likely to help parents in the third decade of the 21st century address a range of parenting challenges. Given the nondominant family form, how can parenting programs/interventions be responsive to culturally diverse community contexts?

A conclusion made by Pinquart and Teubert (2010) in their meta-analysis of parenting education interventions was that researchers and practitioners should aim to match intervention goals with desired outcomes. They shared, for instance, how early interventions geared to promote secure attachment as an outcome can incorporate understanding of parental sensitivity and responsiveness as intervention goals. When

considering evidence-based parenting programs/interventions in a diverse community context, researchers and clinicians are encouraged to adapt interventions so that they are aligned with the community's cultural values.

Researchers and practitioners are also encouraged to consider contextual factors that influence successful program implementation. Furlong and McGilloway (2015) conducted a qualitative study to identify barriers and facilitating factors associated with implementing the Incredible Years Program in economically challenged areas in Ireland. Thus, in adapting evidence-based parenting programs for diverse community contexts, it is important to consider organizational processes. Furlong and McGilloway (2015) stated,

... findings indicate that the key drivers of successful implementation extend beyond the provision of quality training and supervision of therapists to include: compatibility between agency and intervention goals; appropriate ... intra-agency supports to enhance fidelity, retention of parents, and leverage of funding; and careful attention paid to screening of parents and group composition. (p. 1815)

Furlong and McGilloway (2015) also discussed specific variables that can support parent participation within diverse communities. For instance, evidence-based parenting programs can reduce attrition by being aware of access problems such as transportation and childcare needs. Program staff can develop relationships with parents and families prior to program intervention. This creates a bond with the family and may decrease potential fears parents have about being labeled not good parents. Including a space for fathers in the parenting intervention is also important. Involvement of both parents has been found to result in preserving the positive effects of evidence-based parenting programs (McGilloway et al., 2012). The following paragraphs present a new culturally centered model for evidence-based parenting intervention studies.

A New Model: Culturally Centered Community-Based Participatory Research for Evidence-Based Parenting Intervention Studies

Pulling from the literature on community-based participatory research (CBPR; Belone et al., 2016), the author of the current article proposes a *culturally centered CBPR model for evidence-based parenting intervention studies*

(i.e., parenting research partnership). This model presents a conceptual framework to guide the development and adaptation of parenting intervention research within a culturally focused, community context. There are four central components to the parenting research partnership—each is applicable to intervention development and adaptation (see Table 1).

Component 1. The Parenting Intervention Reflects the Stated Needs of Community Members Who Live Where the Intervention Will Be Carried Out

The role of community members is reflected in the “elements of CBPR [that] include (a) community ownership, (b) coalition building with internal and external partners, (c) capacity building, (d) promotion of interdependence that facilitates colearning, (e) application of research findings to action, and (f) long-term commitment to communities” (Belone et al., 2016, p. 200). Component 1 of the parenting research partnership is conducted prior to intervention implementation. For those researchers who are *developing* an intervention, conducting a community assessment of participant needs prior to intervention development is critical. This allows the researcher to integrate community values and cultural diversity into intervention design. For those researchers *adapting* a currently existing intervention, conjoint analysis is a tool that can help incorporate community member perspectives about program features. Conducting focus groups, implementing surveys, and gathering information from parents about their reactions to the intervention can facilitate the adaptation of an existing parenting intervention for a specific community (Sanders & Kirby, 2015).

Component 2. The Parenting Intervention Incorporates Community Voices and Experiences During the Intervention Process

Component 2 of the parenting research partnership is applied throughout intervention implementation. Whereas Component 1 intends to prepare the researcher to consider how the intervention is relevant to the culture and community of participants, Component 2 acts as a safeguard against intervention aspects that do not reflect community and cultural values. Component 2 encourages re-

Table 1
Parenting Research Partnership

Component	Timing of delivery	Relevance when developing the intervention	Relevance when adapting the intervention
1. The parenting intervention reflects the stated needs of community members who live where the intervention will be carried out	Before intervention implementation	Conduct a community assessment before developing the intervention Community values and cultural diversity are integrated into intervention design	Conjoint analyses, focus groups, surveys, and getting information from parents are all ways to measure the extent to which intervention features are helpful for the community
2. The parenting intervention incorporates community voices and experiences during the intervention process	During intervention implementation	Be flexible during intervention implementation to maximize responsiveness to community and cultural values	Actively incorporate community voices and experiences to facilitate an adaptation process that fits the community's sociocultural context
3. The parenting intervention is inclusive of diverse parenting experiences	Before and during intervention implementation	Consider how to incorporate varying levels of diversity from the outset of parenting intervention development	Consider how to connect back to Components 1 and 2 to increase responsiveness to a diverse group of parents with a range of parenting experiences
4. The parenting intervention considers the implications of the Parenting Research Partnership to address disparities	Before, during, and after intervention implementation	Share results with the community after intervention implementation; write policy briefs to share with policy makers	Conjoint analysis can help investigators ask parents about the inequities they face and explore how the intervention can be adapted to address them; policy briefs can address the need for additional parent resources

searchers to be flexible in their approach to the parenting intervention. For researchers *developing* the intervention, Component 2 can be applied and intervention shifts made throughout program implementation. For researchers *adapting* a parenting intervention, Component 2 can be actively applied throughout intervention implementation, thus facilitating an adaptation process that fits the community's sociocultural context.

Because the intervention may have unanticipated responses from the parents it is designed to serve, being flexible allows the researcher to adjust parenting intervention components (e.g., meeting at another time might prove to be more convenient for parents; parents might want more time to talk with one another as opposed to didactic learning; see [Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2017](#)). For the researcher, this means making

sure that those who are implementing the intervention are actively engaged and listening to participant needs. Complications that may arise from Component 2 include having to amend Institutional Review Board approval if a change in procedure or research design occurs. This may also introduce challenges to feasibility if the parenting intervention is carried out in various communities.

Component 3. The Parenting Intervention Is Inclusive of Diverse Parenting Experiences

In this aspect of the parenting research partnership, parenting intervention researchers are encouraged to be incorporative of diverse parenting experiences. Diversity in this context encompasses demographic variables (e.g., race,

ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation), family constellation/type of family (e.g., nuclear, military, single parent, and same-sex parents), and number of children (e.g., primiparas and multiparas), among other variables. Researchers are encouraged to explore how varying levels of diversity can be incorporated even if the parenting intervention focuses on a specific problem (e.g., children's oral health behaviors), the experience of a certain type of family (e.g., military family; Larsen, Clauss-Ehlers, & Cosden, 2015), or the experience of parents with a certain number of children (Stolk et al., 2008). Researchers *developing* an intervention are encouraged to consider how they can incorporate varying levels of diversity from the outset of parenting intervention development. Researchers *adapting* an existing intervention are encouraged to connect back to Components 1 and 2 in efforts to have the adapted intervention be responsive to a diverse group of parents who express a range of parenting experiences.

Component 4. The Parenting Intervention Considers Implications of the Parenting Research Partnership to Address Disparities

Component 4 of the parenting research partnership involves giving back to the community. It encourages the researcher to consider ways in which study outcomes reflect the needs of parents in the community, particularly in terms of the disparities they may face. The researcher also shares study outcomes with the community so they are aware of the knowledge created by the study's design. The researcher can leverage results by increasing policymaker awareness and advocating for social policy changes that address parental experience.

For researchers *developing* an intervention, Component 4 can be incorporated at the outset of study design. Researchers can share results with the community after intervention implementation. Researchers can write policy briefs to be shared with policymakers. For those researchers *adapting* an intervention, conjoint analysis can help investigators ask parents about the inequities they face and explore how the intervention can be adapted to address their experiences. Policy briefs can specifically discuss how the intervention was adapted for the

community and address the need for additional parent resources.

Directions for Future Research

Directions for future research pose the following questions: What are the gaps in evidence-based parenting research? What do these gaps suggest about the direction of future research and intervention? One way to identify current gaps is to review parenting topics that are currently being addressed and work backward to determine those that are not. Through an Ovid system search conducted on February 4, 2017, the author mapped the term *effective parenting* to specific subject headings. The number of peer-reviewed journal articles within psycARTICLES from 2012 to 2017 were associated with specific subject headings when the focus box was indicated (the focus box seeks out only those articles that consider the subject heading as central to the article's theme; this is in contrast to using the autoexplore box that includes results for the selected term and more specific terms): *parent training* (5,552), *parenting* (4,565), *child-rearing practices* (7,788), *parents* (18,199), *parenting skills* (1,911), *parenting style* (4,008), *parent-child relations* (20,371), *parental attitudes* (12,757), *behavior problems* (21,252), *family intervention* (2,080), *mothers* (19,626), *self-concept* (32,761), *pregnancy* (15,089), *intervention* (33,093), and *child attitudes* (5,180; note that some of the numbers presented may include dissertations and book chapters).

Exploration of these different categories indicates some important gaps in the evidence-based parenting research. Specific gaps identified reflect the article's focus on the incredible variability of what it means to be a family in the 21st century, the important supports that parenting interventions can provide families, and the applicability of the parenting research partnership to work with parents in a community context. Within these parameters, and the mapping categories presented by Ovid after putting in the term *effective parenting*, five gaps in the literature were identified: CBPR studies that focus on parents, studies that explore the experience of parenting among diverse communities, studies on the role of fathers, studies that consider parenting when assisted reproductive technolo-

gies are used, and studies that explore parenting interventions with incarcerated parents.

CBPR and Studies That Explore the Experience of Parenting Among Diverse Communities

No studies emerged when *community-based participatory research* was input as a term. Instead, 1,280 studies were identified when the term *action research* was the search term, and 2,802 studies were identified for *community involvement*. When the subsequent search included the terms *parenting* and *multicultural*, no studies emerged. Instead, the author was mapped to *multicultural counseling* as a related term.

This led to a literature review of journal articles on multicultural counseling from 2012 to 2017 that had the words *parenting*, *couples*, or *family* or *families* in their titles. The review identified a mere five articles. Of these, one had the word *parenting* in the title (Chiou, Chen, & Lih, 2013), one had *couple* or *couples* in the title (Blount & Young, 2015), and three had *family* or *families* in the title (Dwyer & Gidluck, 2012; Malott & Schmidt, 2012; Mirecki & Chou, 2013). This surprising finding underscores the need for future research to explore the experience of parenting within a multicultural counseling framework. Relatedly, that CBPR was not mapped as a category speaks to the need for future couple and family psychology researchers to consider community-focused and participatory parenting intervention research.

Studies on the Role of Fathers

Whereas the subject headings *mothers*, *pregnancy*, and *child attitudes* came up when effective parenting was mapped to specific headings, no separate category for fathers emerged. When the term *fathers* was input under the parenting subject heading, four categories ensued. Using the focus rather than autoexplore box, the category *adolescent fathers* revealed 314 articles, *expectant fathers* 144 articles (compared to 15,089 pregnancy-related articles), *fathers* 1,629 articles, and *single fathers* 77 articles. These findings are startling given U.S. Census data that estimates there are approximately 70.1 million fathers in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008, *Survey of Income and Pro-*

gram Participation on Children). The dearth of research in this area is also surprising given the important role fathers play in their children's lives (Jones & Mosher, 2013). More research is needed to explore the impact of parenting interventions on fathers' sense of self-efficacy and parenting competence.

Assisted Reproductive Technologies

Given the Pew Research Center (2015) finding that women are having children later in life and infertility is on the rise, one would expect to find emerging research on *assisted reproductive technologies*. This term, however, did not emerge in the mapping process. Rather, an advanced search under *pregnancy* and *mothers* indicated a total of 1,404 articles in these domains.

Assisted reproductive technologies, such as the use of a gestational carrier, present different parenting challenges in comparison with pregnant women who give birth to their babies. Currently, there are very limited data on gestational carriers and intended parents, despite existing statistics that indicate a dramatic increase in the use of assisted reproductive technologies. Gugucheva (2010), for the Council for Responsible Genetics, found that the market for gestational surrogacy nearly doubled from 2004 to 2008, resulting in the birth of 5,238 babies during this time.

The significant increase in the use of gestational carriers may be directly related to same-sex marriages, infertility, and health issues. Parenting intervention studies are needed in this area. Future research might explore how parenting interventions can promote communication between intended parents, intended parent prenatal bonding, and intended parent self-efficacy and preparedness.

Studies That Explore Parenting Interventions With Incarcerated Parents

The rate at which the United States has increasingly incarcerated people has been referred to as "mass imprisonment" (King, Mauer, & Young, 2005). According to Arditti (2016), although incarceration was historically used in response to violent crimes, as we approach the third decade of the 21st century, an individual who is incarcerated is likely to have committed

a nonviolent crime, be a person of color, and be a parent. Approximately 1.6 million people are incarcerated in the United States. Further,

52% of state inmates and 63% of federal inmates are parents to an estimated 1.7 million minor children, accounting for 2.3% of the U.S. population under the age of 18 at any one point in time (Glaze & Maruschak, 2008). (p. 65)

Other data indicate that 2.7 million children in the United States, or one child in 28, have a parent who is incarcerated (Pew Center on the States, 2010).

Despite the prevalence of this problem, the literature shows a dearth of research and writing in this area. A literature review of PsycINFO conducted on February 12, 2017, examined journal articles in psycARTICLES from 1806 to the first week of February 2017. The review sought to identify the number of articles written with *incarceration* and *parents* as key terms, using the focus option. Results indicated a total of 75 articles when the two terms were input together.

This low number is quite amazing when we consider this review covered a time span of 210 years and 5 weeks. Further, of the 75 identified articles, 10 were intervention studies and of these, only three directly incorporated parents into the intervention (McLaughlin, 2007, a dissertation; Eddy et al., 2008; Blumberg & Griffin, 2013). For instance, McLaughlin (2007) created a book-writing intervention in which parents could communicate with their children through the books they wrote, Eddy et al. (2008) created the Parenting Inside Out parent training program and a therapeutic visitation program, and Blumberg and Griffin (2013) developed the Family Connections reading program for parents who are incarcerated and their children. Future research can develop and empirically test parenting intervention programs that promote connections between parents who are incarcerated and their children. Future research can explore how to develop evidence-based parenting programs that can be implemented with parents who are incarcerated and incorporate children's developmental needs from infancy to adolescence.

The Couple and Family Psychology Special Section on Parenting

This introductory article for the *Couple and Family Psychology* special section on parenting

has explored the evidence base associated with parenting intervention research. A review of the status of research reveals current areas of focus as well as gaps in research. The author's proposed parenting research partnership seeks to fill these gaps and support parenting intervention research that furthers our understanding of parenting within diverse communities. The next two articles in this *Couple and Family Psychology* special section on parenting reflect key introductory themes.

The second article in the series, "Mediators of Parenting Change Within a Web-Based Parenting Program: Evidence From a Randomized Controlled Trial of Triple P Online" (Day & Sanders, 2017), presents an empirical study that extends our knowledge of evidence-based parenting through examination of the efficacy of the Triple P online parenting program. Mediation models and a path model are presented that seek to explain relationships between program participation and parenting outcomes. Clinical implications of online parenting interventions are presented.

The third article, "Application of the Parenting Research Partnership Model to an Evidence-Based Case Study Approach" (Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2017), presents a parenting intervention case study. Sexton et al.'s (2011) guidelines for evidence-based treatments in couple and family therapy are applied to case conceptualization. The article illustrates how the parenting intervention reflects the parenting research partnership model. Clinical implications are presented.

Conclusion: A Call to Action for Couple and Family Psychologists

This introductory article for the *Couple and Family Psychology* special section on parenting has focused on the search for an evidence base in parenting practice. A review of the status of research highlights how there is no longer one "dominant family form" in the United States. The incredibly varied experiences of contemporary families have implications for couple and family psychologists in both clinical and research domains.

Perhaps now more than ever, couple and family psychologists will be conducting clinical work with diverse families who present a range of concerns. The intersection of such experi-

ences suggests that the couple and family psychologist's clinical work will be highly varied (Crenshaw, 1989). Being able to consult the evidence base as a resource to understand those interventions that are most effective in a given context provides an empirical framework for clinical work.

At the same time, research must be generated if we are to have an evidence base to consult. A review of the status of research indicates the existence of a solid foundation of work from which to build and produce parenting intervention research that reflects contemporary trends and mirrors the output of our international counterparts. A related funding question concerns the extent to which domestic couple and family psychology research is viewed as a funding priority among public and private agencies.

On the domestic front, couple and family psychology researchers are encouraged to continue to engage in parenting intervention research that incorporates the lived experiences of parents within diverse community settings (Furlong & McGilloway, 2015; Kelch-Oliver & Smith, 2015). A review of the status of research suggests a base of existing research on which we can continue to conduct parenting intervention research that reflects the rapidly diversifying U.S. family form (Reese, Slone, Soares, & Sprang, 2012). Researchers are encouraged to conduct parenting intervention studies that consider the experience of parenting among diverse communities and incorporate a CBPR approach (Belone et al., 2016; Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2017), the role of fathers, the experience of intended parents who have employed assisted reproductive technologies, and the experience of parents who are incarcerated, to name a few areas. It is hoped that the generation of parenting intervention research that reflects our diverse society and the range of parenting experiences represented will bring together science and practice communities.

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