
The interaction patterns of 47 intact couples at play with infant sons and daughters were examined. Play in the triad was characterized along dimensions of hostility-competitiveness, family harmony, and parenting discrepancy, and correlates of these 3 patterns were investigated. Though family patterns were generally not related to self-reported distress, they were associated with observed marital distress, with marital-family links differing as a function of child gender. Maritally distressed parents of boys more commonly displayed hostile-competitive coparenting behavior in the triad, whereas distressed parents of girls were more likely to show discrepant levels of parenting involvement. Two systemic hypotheses suggested by family theory (linking marital conflict to hostile-competitive coparenting and marital power to parenting discrepancies) were also supported. These findings indicate the importance of conceptualizing coparenting as a construct separable from marital distress.