PARENT ATTRIBUTIONS FOR SPOUSE BEHAVIOR DURING NEGATIVE PARENT-CHILD INTERACTIONS

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Abstract

This investigation explored the relation between parents' attributions for their spouse's behaviour during negative parent-child interactions and parenting alliance. Specifically, it was hypothesized that lower levels of parenting alliance are associated with more negative causal attributions and greater attributions of responsibility and blame for negative spouse behaviour. The unique contribution of attributions to the prediction of parenting alliance was also examined. Thirty-seven mothers and 32 fathers of elementary-school-aged boys completed a questionnaire package including the Parenting Alliance Inventory (Abidin & Brunner, 1991). Attributions were assessed using written stimuli and ratings scales assessing dimensions along which causal and responsibility-blame attributions are formed. Analyses revealed no associations between causal attributions for spouse behaviour and parenting alliance. For mothers, one of three responsibility-blame attribution dimensions was associated with level of parenting alliance, and for fathers, two of three responsibility-blame attribution dimensions were associated with lower reports of parenting alliance. Attributions of responsibility-blame, but not causal attributions, were found to predict a marginal amount of variance in attributions above and beyond marital adjustment. The study also explored attributions parents made for spouse behaviour relative to attributions made for
self behaviour. Along one causal and one responsibility-blame attribution dimension, a parent by target interaction effect was found, with fathers making more positive attributions for self behaviour than for spouse behaviour, and mothers making equal or more negative attributions for self behaviour than for spouse behaviour. Also, across mothers and fathers, parents made greater attributions of fault-blame for their own behaviour than for spouse behaviour.
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INTRODUCTION

Recently, increasing attention has been paid to the role of cognition in family interactions (e.g., Fincham & Bradbury, 1990; Sigel, 1985). For example, studies of married couples have examined whether the attributions made for spouse behaviour differ across maritally-distressed and nondistressed couples (e.g., Camper, Jacobson, Holtzworth-Monroe & Schmaling, 1988; Fincham, 1985; Fincham, Beach, & Nelson, 1987; Fincham & Grych, 1991). These studies report that maritally-distressed spouses make more negative attributions for their partner's behaviour than nondistressed spouses. Maritally-distressed spouses view their partner's negative behaviour as due to more internal, stable, and global causes, and as more intentional, blameworthy, and reflective of selfish motivations than do nondistressed spouses. Researchers have also begun to examine the attributions spouses make for their partner's behaviour relative to the attributions they make for their own behaviour (e.g., Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987). It appears that maritally-distressed spouses exhibit a negative attribution bias, making less benign attributions for their spouses' negative behaviour than their own behaviour. In contrast, research suggests that nondistressed spouses exhibit a positive attribution bias, making more benign attributions for partner behaviour relative to their own behaviour (Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987). All of these studies, however, have focused on the marital relationship.
and attributions made for marital events. The current research examined whether similar attribution biases are exhibited in the parenting context.

The present study relates the attributions parents make for the behaviour of their spouses in parent-child interactions to parenting alliance. Higher levels of parenting alliance reflect components such as the parent valuing his or her spouse's involvement with the child and respecting the spouse's parenting judgment. My primary question in beginning this program of research is whether the degree to which parents make more benign (less "blaming") attributions for spouse behaviour in negative parent-child interactions is associated with greater levels of reported parenting alliance. That is, do couples who report lower levels of parenting alliance blame their partners more for negative parent-child interactions, whereas couples reporting higher levels of parenting alliance make relatively less blaming attributions? The study also relates attributions for spouse behaviour in parent-child interactions to reports of marital adjustment. In an exploratory manner, the present study compares the attributions parents make for the behaviour of themselves versus their spouses in the context of negative parent-child interactions. These self-spouse comparisons are made across couples reporting higher and lower levels of parenting alliance.
This thesis begins with an overview of attribution theory. Studies from the marital and family therapy literatures describing spouses' attributions for partner behaviour will then be described, emphasizing the demonstrated relationships between spousal attributions and marital adjustment. Next, the relationship between child behaviour and components of the marital relationship, including marital adjustment and child-rearing agreement, will be reviewed. The construct of parenting alliance will then be elaborated, as will its hypothesized relationship to parents' attributions for their spouses' behaviour in parenting situations.

**Attribution Theory**

Attribution theory, an information-processing approach to understanding social behaviour, views behaviour in social interactions as dependent on the individual's ongoing assessment of the persons and events around him or her. Essentially, individuals are conceptualized as naive scientists, striving to understand the events which surround them (Heider, 1958). Heider (1958) proposed that the inferences people make about the people and events in their environment influence their behaviour and that these beliefs, whether accurate or not, must be considered to understand behaviour in social interactions. Some subsequent theorists have focused on the process of attribution formation (e.g., Jones and Davis' (1965) model of correspondent inference, Kelly's (1967) covariation
model). Others have focused on the form and consequences of attributions. For example, Weiner (1979) outlines a number of dimensions along which causal attributions are made (i.e., locus, stability, controllability). According to Weiner's model, inferences made along the various dimensions influence behavioural responses via their impact on the perceiver's affective response to the observed behaviour. Empirical studies have supported this relationship between attributions and subsequent affective and behavioural responses (e.g., Dix & Grusec, 1985; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992; Larrance & Twentymen, 1983; Murphy & Alexander, 1991; Weiner, 1980).

The study reported here follows from attribution research such as that of Weiner (1980) and is concerned with the dimensions along which attributions may be formed. Two types of parents' attributions for spouse behaviour in negative parent-child interactions were examined on dimensions reflecting attributions of causality and responsibility-blame. Causal attributions refer to explanations about the factors that produce an event. As proposed by Weiner (1979), stability, locus, and controllability are three dimensions of causal attributions. Weiner proposes that inferences about a cause's stability influence affective and behavioural responses by determining expectations about the reoccurrence of the behaviour. Inferences about causal locus indicate whether the cause of a behaviour is perceived as reflecting some characteristic
of the actor versus the context or factors external to the actor. Finally, inferences about control reflect the extent to which the cause can be influenced by sources internal or external to the actor. Elaborating on Weiner’s (1979) model, Fincham and Emery (1988) have demonstrated that judgments on the dimension of control serve as a summary index of responsibility-related decisions and attributions. That is, when one can potentially control behaviour that violates a standard, one can be held accountable for that behaviour. Supporting the relationship between the dimension of control and responsibility attributions, the correlation between control and other causal attributions is significantly lower than that between control and attributions of responsibility (Fincham & Emery, 1988). Therefore, in this research, control was not examined as a component of a composite index of causal attributions. A final causal attribution dimension that has received considerable research attention is globality. Decisions regarding causal globality reflect the extent to which the cause of a behaviour influences other events as opposed to influencing only one particular event (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978). In the current investigation, causal attributions were assessed using the dimensions of locus, stability, and globality.

As noted above, the attribution of responsibility involves making a judgment about an individual’s accountability for an event. People are usually not held
accountable for negative behaviour unless they possess certain capacities (e.g., the capacity to appreciate that the behaviour was inappropriate), and limitations in such capacities have been found to have an important mitigating influence on adults' judgments of children's responsibility (e.g., Dix & Grusec, 1985; Fincham & Roberts, 1985). However, adults are typically viewed as possessing the necessary capacities for them to be held responsible for their actions (Fincham & Roberts, 1985). It is argued that the essential criteria for the determination of responsibility are that the behaviour is intentional and freely chosen or performed voluntarily (Hart, 1968). Fincham and Bradbury (1992) used items assessing intentionality, selfish vs. unselfish motivation, and whether the behaviour was justified by mitigating circumstances to arrive at an index of responsibility. The present investigation measured responsibility with rating scales assessing the extent to which spouse behaviour was perceived as intentional and freely chosen in the context of negative parent-child interactions.

Blame attributions are evaluative judgments about fault and liability for censure (Shaver, 1985). Responsibility is conceptually distinguished from blame in that responsibility reflects a judgment which is made before an account of the event has been given, whereas blame is assigned after an account has been provided and subsequently evaluated by the perceiver (Shaver, 1985). However, Fincham and Bradbury
(1990) note that in close relationships, parents and spouses may readily assign blame to their partners or children in the absence of their input or account of the event. To assess blame attributions, previous research has asked subjects directly to rate the extent to which their spouse was blameworthy for his or her behaviour, the extent to which the spouse was at fault for what he or she did, and whether the spouse should not have acted as he or she did (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). The present investigation measured blame via rating scales assessing the extent to which the spouse was at fault for his or her behaviour and the extent to which he or she was to blame for the behaviour.

In summary, distinctions can be made among causal, responsibility, and blame attributions on conceptual grounds. According to the entailment model (Dix & Grusec, 1985), these three types of attributions are likely to unfold in an orderly sequence. That is, assignment of blame is presupposed by a judgment of responsibility which, in turn, is presupposed by attributions regarding the cause of the event. For example, John forgot to turn off the stove, thereby causing dinner to burn (causal attribution). Given that John is an adult and appreciates that leaving the stove on would burn dinner, he is held accountable for burning dinner (responsibility attribution). Furthermore, given that John has no good excuse for forgetting to turn off the stove, he is perceived as blameworthy for burning dinner.
Fincham and Bradbury (1992) hypothesized that, because anger in response to another's negative behaviour is typically instigated by a value judgment, attributions of blame would be the proximal cause of anger and would be most highly correlated with anger. Because blame is presupposed by the attribution of responsibility, which in turn is presupposed by a causal attribution, the investigators proposed that attributions of responsibility would correlate moderately with anger, and that attributions of cause would correlate the least with anger. Fincham and Bradbury found the predicted pattern of correlations between anger and type of attribution in a community sample of 49 couples. However, the correlations involving attributions of responsibility and of blame were not significantly different. The overall pattern of results supported the distinctions between causal and blame attributions and between causal and responsibility attributions, but offered limited support for the distinction between responsibility and blame. Consequently, it was proposed, for the purposes of the present investigation, that a composite index of "responsibility-blame" attributions would be calculated by summing parents' responses across the rating scales assessing intentionality, voluntariness, fault, and blameworthiness.

Recently, investigators have used an attributional framework to examine various aspects of family interactions and functioning. For example, there is empirical evidence
to support a model of discipline in which parent behaviour is adjusted from one child behaviour to the next on the basis of parents' appraisals of why their children behave as they do. Dix and Grusec (1985) found that parents were more upset with child misbehaviour when they perceived the cause of the behaviour as internal to the child, intentional, and controllable. The more parents reported they were upset, the more important they thought it was to respond to the child's behaviour. Similarly, Dix, Ruble, and Zambarano (1989) reported that when mothers attributed responsibility to their children for negative behaviour, mothers were more upset by the behaviour and more likely to endorse power-assertive discipline strategies. MacKinnon, Lamb, Belsky, and Baum (1990) examined the relation between attributions and behaviour for mothers and their 7 to 9 year-old sons. They found that when both mothers and sons perceived the other's behaviour to be negatively intended, their parent-child interaction was more coercive than when only one person in the dyad perceived negative intent. However, even one person perceiving negative intent was associated with increased coerciveness.

Similar relations between attributions and reactions have been demonstrated in the marital literature. For example, Fincham, Beach, and Nelson (1987) found that attributions of responsibility for spouses' behaviour predicted affective impact and intended responses to the behaviour. Fincham and Bradbury (1992) demonstrated that
responsibility attributions were related to wives' reported anger on a questionnaire measure of attributions in relationships and to the amount of anger displayed during a problem-solving interaction with their spouse. In sum, across a number of studies it appears that maritally-distressed spouses make attributions which accentuate the impact of negative marital events (e.g., they locate the cause of the negative event within their partner), whereas nondistressed spouses make attributions which minimize the impact of negative events (e.g., they do not locate the cause in their partner) (e.g., Fincham, Beach & Nelson, 1987; Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). Negatively-biased attributions are presumed to accentuate the impact of negative behaviours by leading spouses to be upset by the behaviour and to respond with punitive behaviour. This display of negative affect and punitive responses is, unfortunately, likely to be perceived by the partner as intentional and to elicit a similar negative response (Fincham, Beach, & Nelson, 1987). This type of interaction among family members, a coercive spiral, has been described at length by Patterson (1982).

Given the literatures describing the importance of attributions in both parent-child and marital relationships, the present study combined these two domains and examined the causal and responsibility-blame attributions made by parents for their spouse's and their own behaviour in the context of negative parent-child interactions. These types
of attributions were chosen for investigation because they have demonstrated an important role in determining the affective impact of events and behavioural responses to events occurring within the family context.

Review of the Literature Describing Marital Attributions

Much of the early literature concerning marital functioning focused on the quality of the relationship (Fincham, Bradbury, & Scott, 1990). Early studies examined the association between marital quality and various demographic, individual difference, and family variables (Barry, 1970). In the 1970s, the focus shifted to the study of marital interactions in distressed and nondistressed couples (e.g., Gottman, 1979). Discrepancies found between spouses' reports of each other's behaviour and between spouses' reports and observational data led researchers to assign importance to the interpretations spouses' were offering for each other's behaviour (Weiss & Heyman, 1990). This line of research has been expanded in the more recent literature where researchers have begun to investigate links among cognitive, emotional, and behavioural factors in an effort to more fully understand marital functioning (e.g., Bradbury & Fincham, 1988; Gottman & Levenson, 1985).

As noted previously, much of the research on cognition in the marital literature has focused on the attributions or explanations that spouses make for marital events. Most of this attributional research has focused on spouse behaviours classified as either positive (e.g. your spouse compliments
you) or negative (your spouse criticizes you). Early studies focused on causal attributions for partner behaviour, seeking to establish that causal attributions were related to marital adjustment. In these studies, researchers asked maritally-distressed and nondistressed spouses to identify the cause of their partners’ negative behaviour and to rate the degree to which the cause was located in the partner (locus), remained constant over time (stability), and affected many areas of the marriage (globality). Across numerous studies, it has been found that maritally-distressed spouses attribute their partner's negative behaviour to internal causes whereas nondistressed spouses tend to make external attributions for negative partner behaviour. For positive partner behaviour, on the other hand, maritally-distressed spouses have been found to make more external attributions whereas the attributions of nondistressed spouses are more internal (e.g., Fincham, 1985; Fincham & Grych, 1991; Fincham & O’Leary, 1983). Regarding the global-specific causal dimension, the same studies have found that distressed spouses, relative to nondistressed spouses, rate the cause of negative partner behaviour as more global and the cause of positive partner behaviour as more specific. However, clear differences have not been found on the stable-unstable causal dimension (Fincham, 1985). One explanation for this lack of effect is samples often contain maritally-distressed couples who are seeking treatment. Such couples may expect treatment-
induced change in marital events and be less likely to rate the causes of negative partner behaviour as stable (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990).

Beyond the basic causal dimensions, attributions of responsibility and blame have also proven central to understanding marital interactions (Fincham, 1985). Fincham, Beach, and Nelson (1987) investigated attributions for spouse behaviour in 40 distressed couples seeking marital therapy and 40 nondistressed community couples. In this study, subjects were asked to assign blame/praise for spouse behaviours, to indicate the extent to which their spouses' behaviour was intended to be positive/negative, and to rate the extent to which the behaviour was motivated by selfish concerns. Results indicated that for negative spouse behaviour, distressed couples inferred more negative intent and selfish motivation, and attributed more blame to the partner relative to nondistressed spouses. Distressed couples also rated their spouses as less praise-worthy for positive behaviour. Regression analyses indicated that attributions of responsibility and blame accounted for almost all the explained variance in self-reported affective impact of the spouse's behaviour and the likelihood of behavioural responses to the spouse's behaviour when controlling for marital adjustment (Fincham, Beach, & Nelson, 1987).

A number of methodological concerns have been raised concerning the studies of attributions and marital
adjustment. For example, it has been suggested that the association between attributions and marital adjustment may be an artifact of common method variance. Gottman and Levenson (1984) noted that couples reporting lower levels of marital adjustment might desire to present themselves in a consistent manner across marital and attribution questionnaires. However, Holtzworth-Monroe and Jacobson (1985) found that, like questionnaire ratings, attributions coded from open-ended responses to partner behaviour were also associated with marital adjustment. A related methodological concern has been the possibility that the association of attributions and marital adjustment is the result of a third variable, namely depression. Investigating this possibility, Fincham, Beach, and Bradbury (1989) found that responsibility attributions for hypothetical partner behaviour continued to account for a significant portion of the variance in marital adjustment, even with levels of depression held statistically constant. Finally, to address concerns regarding the use of hypothetical partner behaviours in attribution questionnaires, Fincham and Beach (1988) demonstrated that the same pattern of responses is found for maritally-distressed versus nondistressed spouses when attribution ratings are elicited in response to both hypothetical and real partner behaviours.

Despite the demonstrated relationship between attributions for spouse behaviour and marital adjustment,
the direction of this relationship has yet to be conclusively demonstrated. However, experimental, clinical outcome, and longitudinal study data all suggest that attributions influence marital adjustment rather than the opposite. For example, Fincham and Bradbury (1987) found that causal and responsibility attributions for negative spouse behaviours were related to both concurrent marital adjustment and to marital adjustment assessed 10 to 12 months later, even with the level of earlier adjustment controlled. In contrast, marital adjustment did not predict later attributions for neither husbands nor wives. Also, manipulations of attributions for negative spouse behaviour have been found to influence the subsequent behaviour of distressed spouses (Fincham & Bradbury, 1988).

In summary, the attributions spouses make for marital events are related to their marital adjustment. Compared with happily-married spouses, maritally-distressed spouses make causal and responsibility attributions that are likely to increase the impact of negative spouse behaviours (e.g., by attributing them to internal and global characteristics of their partner, and seeing the partner as responsible and deserving of blame) and to decrease the impact of positive spouse behaviours (e.g., by attributing them to external, specific, situational causes).

Recently, Bradbury and Fincham (1990) have pointed out the need to broaden the current perspective on attributional processes in marriage to include a comparison of the
attributions made for partner behaviour and those made for one's own behaviour. It is proposed that the attributions spouses make for their own behaviour serve as a standard against which to judge and evaluate partner behaviours (Fincham & Bradbury, 1990). The self-other distinction and possible biases in attributions that result from this distinction may be particularly fruitful to investigate in the context of marital relationships given that "attributional bias sows the seeds of interpersonal discord" (Jones, 1976, p. 304). Fincham, Beach, and Baucom (1987) have reported some empirical evidence of self versus other divergences in spouses' attributions for themselves and their partners. Furthermore, these self versus other divergences appear dependent on level of marital adjustment. Fincham, Beach, and Baucom found that nondistressed spouses exhibited a positive attributional bias, making more benign causal and responsibility attributions for partner behaviour than for self behaviour. In contrast, distressed spouses exhibited a negative attributional bias, making less benign attributions for partner behaviour relative to self behaviour. Thus, self-spouse distinctions appear as a promising avenue to explore in understanding how attributions relate to marital functioning.

**The Relation Between Marriage and Child Behaviour.**

Several reviews have concluded that there exists a relationship between marital distress and the severity and frequency of child behaviour problems (e.g., Emery, 1982;
Grych & Fincham, 1990). Despite the pervasiveness of the link, a recent review by Jouriles, Farris, and McDonald (1991) found that 97% of the correlations between indices of marital functioning and child behaviour were below .50, accounting for less than a quarter of the variance in either construct. In addition, despite the numerous studies relating marital adjustment to child outcomes, the mechanisms underlying this association remain elusive (Grych & Fincham, 1990). Jouriles et al. (1991) noted that there are many aspects of the marital relationship (e.g. child-rearing disagreement, sexual intimacy) and it is unlikely that they are all equally related to child behaviour. Jouriles et al. (1991) also proposed that to the degree that marital distress exerts its effect on children via disruptions in parenting, it may not affect all children equally, because it may not disrupt all spouses in their functioning as parents.

In exploring the relationship between marital and child functioning, researchers have found that measures of specific aspects of the marital relationship are better predictors of behaviour problems in children than are general indices of marital adjustment. In particular, it appears that aspects of the marital relationship associated with parenting are more strongly related to child outcomes than more general indices of marital adjustment (e.g., Dadds & Powell, 1991; Johnston, 1993; Jouriles et al., 1991). For example, Dadds and Powell (1991) reported that inter-parent
conflict in child-rearing was a more powerful predictor of aggressive child behaviour than a more general marital measure. Jouriles and colleagues (1991) also found that parental disagreements about child-rearing were related to child behaviour problems, even after controlling for general marital adjustment. Johnston (1993), using a dynamic measure of child-rearing disagreement which involved the observation of couples as they discussed how they would respond to various child behaviour problems, also reported a stronger relationship between child-rearing agreement and child behaviour than between marital adjustment and child behaviour. In that study, scores on the Short Marital Adjustment Test (Kimmel & Vanderveen, 1974) did not distinguish the parents of disruptive versus nonproblem children whereas parents' responses during the child-rearing discussion task did discriminate between these two groups. Consistent with previous research, this study suggests that the ability to co-ordinate child-rearing efforts and marital adjustment function as relatively distinct constructs, with aspects of the couples' child-rearing appearing to be a more important feature of families of disruptive children than marital adjustment.

Weissman and Cohen (1985) differentiate the parenting and the marital relationships. They theorize that the marital relationship pertains to "the libidinal object needs of the spouses for each other" (p. 25), and the parenting alliance consists of "the capacity of a spouse to
acknowledge, respect, and value the parenting roles and tasks of the partner" (p. 26). Higher levels of parenting alliance reflect the greater extent to which each parent desires to communicate with the other, is invested in the child, values the other parent's involvement with the child, and most importantly, respects the judgments of the other parent (Abidin & Brunner, 1991; Weissman & Cohen, 1985). Given its emphasis on perception of the other parent's behaviour and respect for the other parent's parenting decisions, the construct of parenting alliance appears likely to stand as a predictor of the attributions parents form in response to their spouse's parenting behaviour. Parallel to findings in the marital literature where negative attributions about marital events are associated with lower levels of marital adjustment, parents' negative attributions for their spouse's parenting behaviour in interactions with the child may be associated with lower level of parenting alliance. A model is proposed in which both parenting alliance and attributions for spouse behaviour are ultimately related to child outcome. However, the first step in testing this model is to test the association between parenting alliance and attributions.

A few recent studies have examined the construct of parenting alliance. One study (Frank et al., 1991) assessed whether higher levels of this construct were associated with lower levels of individual parent stress in families of physically-ill children. To assess parenting alliance,
Frank et al. employed the 31-item, Parenting Alliance Scale developed by Frank, Jacobson, and Avery (cited in Frank et al., 1991). This scale is comprised of items generated from Cohen and Weissman's theoretical discussion of the parenting alliance. Frank et al. found that fathers with lower levels of parenting alliance reported significantly more stress than fathers reporting higher levels of parenting alliance. Abidin and Brunner (1991), using the Parenting Alliance Inventory which they developed, also report a significant, negative association between parenting alliance and parenting stress. Higher levels of parenting alliance associated with lower levels of parenting stress for both mothers and fathers. These authors speculated that the presence of a strong parenting alliance may serve to reduce parenting stress. Abidin and Brunner also noted that, conversely, lower levels of parenting stress may result in a stronger parenting alliance. Recent studies examining the parenting alliance have also linked parents' scores on the Parenting Alliance Scale to more optimal family functioning in families of developmentally-disabled children (Floyd, cited in Frank et al., 1991) and to reports of paternal involvement in childcare (Pirsch, 1990). Laub (1990) demonstrated that parents' problem-solving behaviours during a discussion about the discipline of a child behaviour problem were associated with parents' perceptions of the parenting alliance. Also, scores on Abidin and Brunner's Parenting Alliance Inventory have been found to correlate
significantly with child outcome measures of positive adjustment, popularity, social competence, and self-esteem (Brunner, 1992). In sum, the construct of parenting alliance appears related to measures of individual parent and child adjustment, as well as more global measures of family functioning. To date, however, parenting alliance has not been linked to parents' attributions for each other's behaviour.

For the current investigation, it was proposed that lower levels of parenting alliance would be associated with parents making more negative attributions for their spouse's parenting behaviour. On the other hand, higher levels of parenting alliance were hypothesized to be associated with attributions which cast the spouse's parenting behaviour in a more positive light.

**Rationale For The Current Investigation**

The primary goal of this study was to determine whether parenting alliance (PA) is associated with the attributions parents make for their spouse's behaviour in negative interactions with their child. Secondly, the relationship between attributions for the spouse's parenting behaviour and marital adjustment was examined. Whether PA makes a contribution to the prediction of parents' attributions for spouse behaviour above and beyond the prediction afforded by marital adjustment was also investigated. Finally, whether parents reporting higher and lower levels of PA think differently about the parent's role in negative parent-child
interactions when the interactions involve their partners versus themselves was explored. The following hypotheses were addressed:

**PRIMARY HYPOTHESES**

1. There is a negative association between parents' negative attributions for spouse behaviour during problematic parent-child interactions and PA. Parents reporting lower levels of PA exhibit more negative causal attributions and greater attributions of responsibility-blame for negative spouse behaviour than parents reporting higher levels of PA.

2. The extent to which parents make negative attributions for their spouses is inversely related to marital adjustment. Subjects reporting higher levels of marital adjustment make more benign causal and responsibility-blame attributions for negative spouse behaviour than subjects reporting lower levels of marital adjustment.

**SECONDARY HYPOTHESIS**

3. PA accounts for variance in the attributions parents make for negative spouse behaviour above and beyond that accounted for by marital adjustment.

**EXPLORATORY QUESTION**

The current investigation also compared the attributions parents make for the behaviour of themselves versus their spouses in parent-child interactions across parenting couples reporting higher and lower levels of
parenting alliance. Given only preliminary evidence of self-other differences in the marital literature, no specific predictions were made regarding self versus spouse attributions across levels of parenting alliance.

Although no predictions were made regarding the effects of parent gender on attributions, this variable was examined in all analyses.
METHOD

Study Design

To test the hypotheses of this study, written stimulus materials were used to elicit parents' attributions for their spouses' and their own behaviour in negative parent-child interactions. Parents were asked to imagine their spouse and their child and themselves and their child in various situations in which a negative parent-child interaction occurred. After reading each scenario, parents were asked to respond to a series of questions regarding their attributions for the cause of the negative parent behaviour within the parent-child interaction and the extent to which the parent was responsible-blameworthy for the behaviour. To test the hypothesized association between attributions and PA, correlations were calculated between attributions for spouse behaviour and reports of parenting alliance. These correlations were calculated separately for mothers and fathers. Similar correlations were calculated between attributions and reports of marital adjustment.

To address the secondary hypothesis, regression analyses were performed to determine whether parenting alliance made a significant, unique contribution to the prediction of attributions for spouse behaviour after controlling for marital adjustment.

Finally, a 2 X 2 X 2 (mother/father, self/spouse, and higher PA/lower PA) multivariate analysis of variance was employed to test the exploratory hypothesis. The mother-
father and self-spouse comparisons were conducted within-subjects, and a between-subjects comparison was made for couples reporting higher and lower levels of parenting alliance. The causal and responsibility-blame attribution dimensions served as dependent variables.

**Procedures**

Participants were recruited through notices placed on public notice boards in community centers, swimming pools, and libraries, as well as advertisements placed in local newspapers and a local parenting magazine. Step-families were excluded from the sample. To allow for a range of functioning, families were not excluded on the basis of parent or child involvement in psychological treatment. Recruiting notices instructed interested parents to telephone the principal investigator. Upon initial telephone contact, parents were provided with a rationale and overview of the present study and details about what participation in the study would entail. Basic descriptive information gathered during this telephone contact determined eligibility for participation. Eligible families had at least one male child in the home between the ages of 5 and 12 years. Elementary-school aged boys were chosen to allow comparability with the age and gender of most target children for whom families seek mental health services (Offord et al., 1987). It was required that both the mother and father were the biological parents of the target child. Because the instructions, stimulus materials, and
questionnaires required a minimum level of competence in English for completion, parents who had completed less than 10 years of schooling were not included in the study. However, no subjects who returned completed questionnaire packages were eliminated from the study for this reason. Parents with more than one male child between the ages of 5 and 12 years were specifically instructed to complete the attribution questionnaires with the oldest child in that age range in mind, and mothers and fathers were reminded to think of the same child when completing the questionnaires. Mothers and fathers were asked to complete all questionnaires independently and to seal the completed materials in return envelopes before discussing them together. A separate return envelop was provided for each parent. Subjects were also informed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, and that the return of completed questionnaires was indicative of consent for participation.

Following the initial telephone contact, families agreeing to participate in the study were mailed an explanatory cover letter (Appendix A), a demographic information sheet (Appendix B), instructions for the attribution ratings (Appendix C), an attribution questionnaire consisting of stimulus situations and attribution questions (see Appendix D), the Parenting Alliance Inventory (Abidin & Brunner, 1991) (Appendix E), the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976) (Appendix F),
Overreactivity subscale from the Parenting Scale (Arnold et al., 1991) (Appendix G), and two stamped, self-addressed return envelopes. Parents were instructed to complete the questionnaires in the above order. The questionnaire packet also contained questionnaires not addressed in this study (e.g., a measure of parenting self-esteem) that were filled out by parents following completion of the other measures.

**Subjects**

To date, 79 parenting couples have been mailed questionnaire packages. A cutoff date for returned questionnaires to be included in analyses for this thesis was established, and by that date, completed questionnaires had been returned by 37 mothers and 32 fathers. For all 32 fathers, the spouses’ questionnaires were also received by the cutoff date.

The 37 mothers ranged in age from 31 to 48 years (M = 36.89) and fathers ranged from 29 to 52 years (M = 39.22). The parents represented a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Looking at mothers, 32% identified themselves as Canadian, 51% as of European descent, and 12% as of other ethnicities (Chinese, East Indian, Egyptian, and Singhalese). Five percent did not respond to the ethnicity item on the demographic information sheet. For fathers, 38% were identified as Canadian or French Canadian, 46% were identified as of European descent, 5% were identified as of East Indian descent, and for 11% of fathers, the ethnicity item on the family demographic sheet was not completed.
Family socioeconomic status ranged from 1 to 5 on the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status (Hollingshead, 1975), with an average status of 2.39, corresponding to middle class. The average number of years married for this sample was 11.74, and the average age of the target child was 8.38 years. The number of children in each family ranged from 1 to 3, with a median of 2. Sixteen percent of the target children were only children, and 90% of the children with siblings were the oldest male child in the family. For each family, the demographic information sheet completed by mothers also asked whether the parents had ever sought psychological help for themselves or their children. Thirty percent of mothers reported they had, at some time, sought psychological help for themselves (e.g., depression, counselling after miscarriage), and 30% reported that they and their husband had received marital counselling. Five percent of mothers reported that their spouse had sought help for their own psychological problems (e.g., drug addiction). Finally, 22% of mothers reported they had sought help for problems with the target child (e.g., assessment of attentional difficulties).

Measures

Demographic Information. Each family was asked to provide each parent's age, occupation, highest level of education, and ethnicity. Each family was also asked to provide the number of years they had been married, the age and gender of their child(ren), and whether both parents
were biological parents of the target child. This demographic information was used to confirm eligibility of subjects and to calculate family socioeconomic status. No families who completed questionnaire packages failed to meet the eligibility criteria. Finally, families were asked to indicate whether they had ever sought help for child or parent psychological problems.

Instructions for attribution ratings. Prior to reading and responding to the stimulus situations, parents read a cover sheet providing detailed instructions for the attribution ratings. Parents were asked to read each scenario imagining that the situation involved either their spouse and their child or themselves and the child. Parents were requested to think of each situation as a separate event, and were reminded that there are no right or wrong answers for the ratings.

Parent-child interaction stimuli. To assess parent attributions for negative parent-child interactions, each parent read eight similar scenarios depicting coercive parent-child interactions (four involving the respondent and child, and four involving the respondent's spouse with the same child). Responses were aggregated across the multiple stimulus situations to enhance stability of scores and to reduce the influence of atypical responses.

Negative parent-child interactions were used as stimuli because the marital literature has shown that unsolicited attributions are more likely to occur for negative rather
than positive partner behaviour (Camper et al., 1988; Holtzworth-Monroe & Jacobson, 1985) and that attributions for negative events appear more strongly and consistently related to marital adjustment relative to those for positive events (e.g., Baucom et al., 1989; Fincham et al., 1987). Also, negative interactions are more relevant in the clinical context. Hypothetical stimuli were used because of their advantage in providing a standard and controllable stimuli event to all subjects. Past research has found that spouses’ patterns of responding to hypothetical events are comparable to their responses to real events (Fincham & Beach, 1988).

Specific child and parent behaviours depicted in the interaction stimuli were chosen from a coding scheme for home observations of aversive behaviour among members of distressed families (Patterson, 1982). Given the desire to select behaviours common enough so that most parents could imagine them occurring in their family, only behaviours with relatively high base rates as demonstrated in previous studies were selected (Reid, 1978). Child behaviours were disapproval, negativism, and destructiveness and parent behaviours were disapproval, negativism, and giving negative commands. Scenarios were written to be equivalent in terms of the consequences of the child’s behaviour for the parent (i.e., the parent is directly affected by the child’s behaviour in all scenarios) and in setting (all behaviours occur in the home). Also, scenarios were written to be
similar in format and to not indicate the cause of the parent’s or child’s behaviours in the interaction. Twenty-one stimuli scenarios were initially pilot tested using a sample of 15 male and female university undergraduates and 7 mothers of 2 to 18 year old children to ensure that scenarios were perceived as realistic, age-appropriate, easy to visualize, and equivalent in terms of parent and child negativity. Subjects in the pilot sample were also asked to rate the extent to which the negative interaction was caused by something about the parent versus the child, and the extent to which the interaction occurred because of something about the situation. Stimuli were revised as indicated by respondents’ ratings to make the children appear elementary-school aged, to equate the interactants’ negativity across situations, to reduce situational causes of the interaction, and to have the cause of the interaction attributed more to the parent than to the child. The revised stimuli were then pilot tested on a larger sample of 27 undergraduate and graduate students and 6 parents. Ratings obtained in this pilot study guided the final selection of stimuli for use in the attribution questionnaire.

Specifically, respondents in the final pilot study were asked to indicate on 10-point Likert scales, "How realistic is this scenario", "How easy is it to imagine this scenario", "How negative is the parent’s behaviour", "How negative is the child’s behaviour", "To what extent was this
negative interaction caused by something about the parent vs. something about the child", and "To what extent was this negative interaction caused by something about the situation". Respondents were also asked to indicate the age group which best described the child in each scenario: preschooler, elementary-school aged, or adolescent. Based on these ratings, the eight scenarios that were rated as reflecting an elementary-school-aged child, and as most equivalent in terms of causal locus and child and parent negativity, were chosen for the study. The mean parent negativity score across the eight chosen scenarios, on a scale from 1 (not at all negative) to 10 (very negative), was 7.12 based on student ratings and 7.15 based on parent ratings. The mean child negativity scores were 6.32 and 6.77 for students and parents, respectively. Ratings of the extent to which the interaction was caused by something about the parent vs. something about the child on a scale ranging from 1 (something about the child) to 10 (something about the parent) averaged 6.29 among students and 6.31 among parents. Ratings of the extent to which the interaction was caused by something about the situation on a scale ranging from 1 (little to do with the situation) to 10 (much to do with the situation) averaged 3.85 among students and 4.30 among parents. Ratings to assess each scenario’s realism, using a scale ranging from 1 (not at all realistic) to 10 (very realistic), averaged 6.98 among students and 6.33 among parents. The children in the scenarios were
rated as elementary-school-aged children by 68% of the student sample and 73% of the parent sample.

As noted above, within each couple, each parent responded to eight scenarios, four worded to describe interactions involving themselves and their child and four scenarios worded to depict interactions between their spouse and the same child. In order to account for the influence of order effects, one-half of the families first read four scenarios in which the parent was to imagine him or herself and the child (self scenarios) and then four scenarios depicting interactions between their spouse and the same child (spouse scenarios). This order was reversed in the remaining families. Self and spouse scenarios were not mixed together in random order because it was felt that shifting back and forth between the two types of scenarios would inhibit the respondents' ability to vividly imagine him or herself and his or her spouse in each situation. However, the specific interactions assigned as either self or spouse scenarios were varied across families. Finally, the scenarios within each section (self-child, spouse-child) were presented in random order.

Attribution Ratings. After reading each scenario, parents completed ratings on seven, 10-point scales reflecting attributional dimensions which comprise causal and responsibility-blame attribution types. The first three ratings assessed respondents' causal attributions for the parent behaviour in the negative interaction. Locus was
assessed by asking parents rate "to what extent was this behaviour caused by something about you/your spouse versus something about the situation?" on a scale of 1 to 10 ranging from "something about you/your spouse" to "something about the situation". Globality was assessed by asking "to what extent was this behaviour caused by something that will influence your/your spouse's behaviour in other interactions with the child?" on a 10-point scale ranging from "influences most interactions" to "influences just this particular interaction". Stability was assessed by asking "to what extent was this behaviour caused by something that is lasting vs. a one-time thing?" on a 10-point scale ranging from "lasting" to "a one-time thing". Parents were also asked to rate the extent to which they felt their own or their spouse's behaviour was intended to be negative on a 10-point scale ranging from "not at all intentional" to "very intentional", the extent to which the behaviour was freely chosen on a 10-point scale ranging from "not at all freely chosen" to "very freely chosen", the extent to which the parent or the spouse is blameworthy for the behaviour on a scale ranging from "not at all to blame" to "very much to blame", and the extent to which the parent is at fault for behaving as he or she did on a scale ranging from "not at all at fault" to "very much at fault".

As part of another investigation, after making the above ratings, parents also completed ratings assessing
their attributions for the cause of the child's behaviour during the negative parent-child interactions.

**Parenting Alliance.** Parenting alliance was assessed for each parent using the Parenting Alliance Inventory (PAI; Abidin & Brunner, 1991), a 30 item, self-report measure which reflects the extent to which parents respect the other parent's judgment, value the other parent's involvement, and believe in the other parent's confidence in them. On this measure, parents respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", with a minimum possible score of 30 and a maximum of 150. Higher scores indicate higher levels of parenting alliance. Scores on the PAI have been found to display a pattern of correlations suggestive of the measure's concurrent and predictive validity. PAI scores are correlated with scores on measures of parenting stress and child behaviour, but not social desirability. Relatively low correlations between the PAI and marital adjustment scores for both mothers and fathers ($r=.20$ and $r=.25$, respectively) suggest that the two constructs are relatively independent and are likely measuring different aspects of the family (Abidin & Brunner, 1991). The measure has excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .97, and no significant differences were found between mothers' and fathers' responses (Abidin & Brunner, 1991; Brunner, 1992).

**Marital Adjustment.** Marital adjustment was assessed using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976), a 32
item, self-report questionnaire completed by each parent. This measure reflects dyadic satisfaction, dyadic cohesion, dyadic consensus, and affectional expression (Spanier, 1976). In this study, the measure's total score, which can theoretically range from 0 to 151, was used as a general measure of marital adjustment. Overall, the measure has excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .96 for the total scale, and concurrent validity with the Locke-Wallace Marital Adjustment Scale (Spanier, 1976). Scores on this overall index of marital adjustment have been shown to be capable of discriminating between maritally-distressed and nondistressed couples (Sharpley & Cross, 1982; Spanier, 1976).

**Parent Behaviour.** Parent behaviour was assessed for each parent using the Overreactivity subscale of the Parenting Scale (Arnold et al., 1991), a self-report measure designed to assess parents' problems in disciplining children. The Overreactivity subscale was selected because of its similarities to the types of parent behaviour portrayed in the stimulus scenarios. This subscale consists of 10 items rated on 7-point bipolar scales, with ineffective and effective parenting strategies serving as poles. Parents are instructed to rate the items to reflect their style of parenting during the past 2 months. The Overreactivity subscale has adequate internal consistency, with a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .81 and a test-retest correlation coefficient of .83. Scores on this subscale
have been found to correlate modestly with rates of child
misbehaviour ($r = .44$, $p < .05$) and total scale scores have
been found to discriminate between parents of clinic and
RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses.

For each parent, scores on each attribution rating were calculated by summing across the four spouse-child scenarios. Correlations among the three causal attribution ratings and among the four responsibility-blame attribution ratings were conducted to assess whether these ratings could be aggregated. Given that the pattern of intercorrelations among these ratings was similar for mothers and fathers, mother and father ratings were considered together. The intercorrelations among the seven attributional dimensions collapsed across mothers and fathers are presented in Table 1. A correlation between ratings of .80 or greater was employed as the criterion for aggregation into a composite score. For the causal attribution dimensions, only moderate correlations were found between Locus and Stability and between Locus and Globality. Therefore, the locus dimension was considered a relatively independent dimension, and was retained individually for subsequent analyses. The correlation between Stability and Globality ratings was .80, and therefore these two ratings were averaged into one score (Stab-Glob) in all further analyses. Among the responsibility-blame attribution ratings, only the correlation between Fault and Blame exceeded .80. These two ratings were averaged into one score (Fault-Blame) in all further analyses.
Descriptive and Psychometric Statistics.

In this sample, mean PAI scores were 130.5 (SD = 14.5) and 128.3 (SD = 11.4) for mothers and fathers, respectively. Mean DAS scores were 115.6 (SD = 15.0) and 109.2 (SD = 15.5) for mothers and fathers, respectively. Mean parent ratings for the spouse’s parenting behaviour on the Overreactivity subscale of the Parenting Scale were 27.9 (SD = 10.2) and 28.5 (SD = 9.1) for mothers and fathers, respectively. Correlations between PAI scores and DAS scores were .76 (p < .001) and .74 (p < .001), for mothers and fathers, respectively. Correlations between parents’ PAI scores and their spouse’s scores on the Overreactivity subscale of the Parenting Scale were −.30 (p < .05) and −.34 (p = .03) for mothers and fathers, respectively. Higher parenting alliance was associated with less spouse overreactivity in discipline. The correlation between DAS and the spouses’ ratings of parent behaviour was not significant for mothers, and marginally significant for fathers (r = −.24, p = .10). Fathers with higher marital satisfaction had spouses reporting less parenting overreactivity. The means and standard deviations for mothers’ and fathers’ attribution ratings for spouse behaviour (summed across the four spouse-child scenarios) are provided in Table 2.

In this study, Cronbach’s alpha internal consistency coefficients were calculated for both mothers and fathers on the measures of parenting alliance, marital adjustment, and parent behaviour. For mothers, the Cronbach’s alpha
coefficients were .95 for the PAI, .90 for the DAS total scale, and .86 for the Parenting Scale's Overreactivity subscale. For fathers, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .91 for the PAI, .87 for the DAS total scale, and .79 for the Parenting Scale's Overreactivity subscale.

Main Analyses.

To determine whether parents' attributions for spouse behaviour during negative parent-child interactions were associated with parenting alliance and marital adjustment, scores on the PAI and on the DAS were each correlated with attribution ratings for mothers and fathers separately. It was hypothesized that an association would be found between parents' negative attributions for spouse behaviour and parents' PAI and DAS scores. Specifically, it was predicted that lower scores on the PAI and the DAS would be associated with lower scores on Locus (reflecting more internal attributions) and Stab-Glob (reflecting more stable and global attributions), and with higher scores for Intent, Freedom and Fault-Blame (reflecting perceptions of more intentional, freely chosen behaviour for which the spouse is at fault and blameworthy). Correlations between attributions and PAI scores, and attributions and DAS scores, are presented in Table 3. Given the small sample size and the lack of previous research investigating the predicted relationships, a liberal alpha level of .05 was used in determining the significance of correlations. However, it is noted, that given the multiple correlations conducted,
the risk of Type 1 error has been elevated. Therefore, these findings warrant cautious interpretation and replication.

For mothers, PAI scores were not associated with Locus, Glob-Stab, Freedom, or Fault-Blame. A significant, negative relationship was found between Intent and PAI ($r = -0.33$, $p = 0.02$), so that mothers who attributed more negative intent to their spouse reported lower parenting alliance than mothers who attributed less negative intent. For fathers, PAI scores were not associated with Locus, Stab-Glob, or Fault-Blame. However, significant, negative relationships were found between both Intent and Freedom and PAI scores ($r = -0.41$, $p = 0.01$ and $r = -0.30$, $p = 0.05$, respectively). Fathers who inferred that their spouse's behaviour was more negatively intended and more freely chosen scored lower on the PAI than fathers who perceived their spouse's negative behaviour as less intentional and less freely chosen. In sum, 3 of the 10 correlations across mothers and fathers provided support for the hypothesis that attributions are related to parenting alliance.

For mothers, none of the correlations between attributions and DAS scores were significant. For fathers, Locus, Glob-Stab, Intent, and Freedom were not significantly correlated with DAS. Contrary to the hypothesis, a positive correlation between Fault-Blame and DAS was revealed ($r = 0.46$, $p < 0.01$), so that fathers who attributed more Fault-Blame to their spouse reported higher marital satisfaction.
In sum, only 1 of 10 correlations suggested an association between marital adjustment and attributions for the spouse's parenting behaviour.

Secondary Analyses.

This study also sought to test whether parenting alliance could account for variance in attributions, above and beyond the proportion of variance in attributions that could be accounted for by marital adjustment. To test this secondary hypothesis, regression analyses were performed to predict causal and responsibility-blame attributions using PAI scores as the independent or predictor variable and controlling for DAS. For these analyses, an alpha of .05 was used to determine the significance of the full regression models, and individual predictors were examined only if the full model was significant. Results with alpha levels of .05 to .10 were considered marginally significant and were interpreted in an exploratory fashion. The significance level for individual predictors was also set at .05.

Full regression models were not significant for predicting mothers' scores for Locus, Glob-Stab, Intent, Freedom or Fault-Blame.

The full regression model for predicting fathers' ratings of stability-globality was not significant. The full regression model for predicting ratings of Locus was marginally significant ($F(2,29) = 3.08, p = .06$). Examining the contribution of PAI after controlling for DAS indicated
that PAI made a unique contribution to the prediction of father Locus ($t(1,29) = 2.01, p = .05$). However, examining the beta weights for PAI and DAS indicated that PAI and DAS operated in different directions. This was consistent with the findings from the bivariate correlations. As predicted, higher PAI scores predicted less internal attributions. However, higher DAS scores were predictive of more internal attributions.

For attributions of responsibility-blame, the full regression models were significant for predicting fathers’ ratings of Intent ($F(2,29) = 4.62, p = .02$) and Fault-Blame ($F(2,29) = 6.15, p < .01$), but not Freedom. Looking first at attributions of intent, it was found that PAI made a significant, unique contribution in predicting father attributions of negative intent after controlling for DAS ($t(1,29) = -2.96, p < .01$). As expected, higher PAI scores were predictive of fathers’ attributions of less intent. For predicting Fault-Blame, examining the unique contribution of PAI after controlling for DAS indicated that PAI made a marginally significant, unique contribution in predicting father attributions of fault-blame ($t(1,29) = -1.84, p = .08$). As expected, higher PAI scores were predictive of lesser ascriptions of fault-blame to the spouse. However, unexpectedly, higher scores on the DAS were predictive of greater ascriptions of fault-blame to the spouse. In sum, at least for fathers, support was found that parenting alliance makes a significant, unique
contribution to the prediction of attributions for spouse behaviour along the dimensions of Locus (marginal), Intent, and Fault-Blame (marginal).

In line with longitudinal studies in the marital attribution literature which suggests that attributions influence marital adjustment, regression analyses were also performed using attributions to predict PAI scores. However, it is acknowledged that regression analyses cannot test causality. To compare the relative contributions of conceptually distinct types of attributions, two blocks of variables were entered into the regression. The causal attribution ratings (Locus, Stability-Globality) were entered in one block and the responsibility-blame attribution ratings (Intent, Freely Chosen, Responsibility-Blame) were entered in a second block. Analyses were conducted examining the unique contribution of each block, after controlling for the other block.

The full regression model was not significant for predicting mothers' PAI scores. For fathers, the full regression model was marginally significant for predicting PAI scores ($F(5,26) = 2.25, p = .08$). Examination of each block's unique contribution revealed that only the attributions of responsibility-blame significantly contributed to the prediction of PAI scores ($F(3,26) = 3.47, p = .03$). Within this block, only Intent ($t(5,26) = -2.89, p = .01$) made a significant and unique contribution to the prediction of PAI. Fathers attributing less intent for
their spouse's negative behaviour reported higher parenting alliance.

Due to the concern that differences in the parenting behaviour of the spouse might account for the relationship between attributions for the spouse's behaviour and PAI, further regression analyses were conducted adding the spouses' report of their own parenting behaviour as a control variable. That is, the prediction of PAI scores was examined using three blocks of variables (spouse's overreactivity score, causal attributions, and responsibility-blame attributions) and examining the unique contributions of each block. The full regression model for predicting mothers' PAI scores again did not reach significance. The full model for predicting fathers' PAI scores achieved reach marginal significance ($F(6,25) = 1.98$, $p = .107$). The block containing the responsibility-blame attributions was marginally significant in predicting fathers' PAI scores ($F(3,26) = 2.37$, $p = .09$). Parenting behaviour and causal attributions did not make significant, unique contributions to the prediction of fathers' PAI scores. Hence, it appears that spouse behaviour did not account for the relationships that were found between attributions and parenting alliance.

**Exploratory Analyses**

In this study, mothers and fathers also made attribution ratings for parent behaviour in scenarios describing interactions between themselves and their
children. The means and standard deviations for mothers' and fathers' attributions for their own behaviour, summed over the four self-child scenarios, are provided in Table 4. The self-child scenarios were included in the study so that a comparison between the attributions parents make for their own behaviour versus their spouse's behaviour could be made across couples reporting higher and lower levels of parenting alliance. Given only preliminary evidence of self-spouse differences in the marital literature, no specific predictions were made for this exploratory analysis.

Three-way repeated-measures univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted with parent (mother, father) and target (self, spouse) as the within-subject variables and PAI (higher, lower) as the between subjects factor. The 32 mother-father pairs were assigned to higher and lower PAI groups using a median split based on couples' mean PAI scores. Couple PAI scores for the lower parenting alliance group ranged from 110.0 to 131.0 and couple scores for the higher parenting alliance group ranged from 131.5 to 147. Due to the small sample of couples, a median split was used to generate groups for this exploratory analysis rather than examining the upper and lower thirds of the distribution of PAI scores. The dependent variables were Locus, Stab-Glob, Intent, Freedom, and Fault-Blame. The cell means for these analyses are presented in Table 5.
Employing Locus as the dependent variable, the ANOVA revealed no significant main effects nor interaction effects. For Stab-Glob, no main effects for target nor PAI were found. A main effect for parent, qualified by a parent X target interaction effect was found ($F(1,29) = 6.01, p = .02$ and $F(1,29) = 6.67, p = .02$, respectively). A follow-up analysis of simple effects was conducted looking at the effect of target (self, spouse) at each level of parent (mother, father) and collapsing across lower and higher PAI groups. It was revealed that mothers did not differ in the attributions they made for their own behaviour versus the attributions they made for their spouse's behaviour ($M = 21.37$ and $M = 22.99$, respectively). Fathers, however, rated the cause of their own behaviour as less stable and global than they rated their spouse's behaviour ($M = 28.48$ and $M = 22.94$, respectively). Given the exploratory nature the self versus spouse investigation, an analysis of simple effects was also conducted looking at the effect of parent across each level of target, and again, collapsing across lower and higher PAI groups. Looking first at attributions made for own behaviour, it was revealed that mothers made more stable and global attributions for their own negative behaviour than fathers made for their own behaviour ($M = 21.37$ and $M = 28.48$, respectively). However, mothers and fathers did not differ in their ratings of stability-globality for spouse behaviour ($M = 22.97$ and $M = 22.94$, respectively). The ANOVA employing Intent as the dependent
variable revealed no significant main or interaction effects. The ANOVA for Freedom revealed a significant parent X target interaction ($F(1,28) = 14.57, p = .001$), and no significant main effects for either parent, target or PAI. A follow-up analysis of simple effects looking at the effect of target across levels of parent, collapsing across couples reporting higher and lower levels of PAI was conducted. It was revealed that mothers rated their own negative behaviour as more freely chosen than they rated their spouse's negative behaviour ($M = 31.5$ and $M = 29.77$, respectively) and fathers rated their own negative behaviour as less freely chosen than they rated their spouse's negative behaviour ($M = 27.47$ and $29.33$, respectively). Looking at mothers' and fathers' ratings across levels of target revealed that mothers rated their own behaviour as more freely chosen than fathers rated their own behaviour ($M = 31.5$ and $27.47$, respectively). However, mothers and fathers did not differ in their ratings for spouse behaviour ($M = 29.77$ and $M = 29.33$, respectively). Finally, employing Fault-Blame as the dependent variable, a significant main effect was detected for target, $F(1,28) = 12.02, p < .01$. Collapsing across mothers and fathers and across levels of parenting alliance, parents made greater attributions of fault-blame for their own behaviour than spouse behaviour ($M = 28.28$ and $M = 25.37$, respectively).
Discussion

This study examined whether parenting alliance is associated with the attributions parents make for their spouse's behaviour in negative interactions with their child. Findings from the bivariate correlations provided modest support for the hypothesis that there exists an association between parents' attributions for their spouse's parenting behaviour and the level of parenting alliance they report. Specifically, it was found that mothers and fathers who attributed more negative intent to their spouses scored lower on the PAI than mothers and fathers who perceived their spouse's behaviour as less negatively intended. Also, fathers who inferred that their spouse's negative behaviour was more freely chosen scored lower on the PAI than fathers who inferred their spouse's negative behaviour to be less freely chosen. Attributions of fault-blame were not associated with parenting alliance for either mothers or fathers. Also, no associations were found between parenting alliance and the causal attribution dimensions.

Bivariate correlations testing the association between attributions and marital adjustment, similar to the correlations assessing the relationship between attributions and parenting alliance, also revealed no significant associations between marital adjustment and causal attributions for either mothers or fathers. Neither were associations found between attributions of intent and freedom and marital adjustment. For fathers, attributions
of responsibility-blame were found to be associated with marital adjustment. However, this was a positive association, with fathers attributing more fault-blame to their spouse scoring higher on the DAS. The correlation between attributions of fault-blame and marital adjustment for mothers was not significant.

In summary, bivariate analyses revealed no associations between causal attributions and either parenting alliance or marital adjustment. The correlations that were found between responsibility-blame attributions and parenting alliance reflected inverse associations, as predicted, with more negative attributions associated with lower levels of parenting alliance. However, the direction of the association found between the one responsibility-blame attribution and marital adjustment was opposite to the prediction, with greater attributions of fault-blame associated with higher levels of marital adjustment.

This study also sought to determine whether parenting alliance contributed to the prediction of attributions for spouse behaviour above and beyond the prediction afforded by marital adjustment. Looking at fathers, and controlling for marital adjustment, it was found that parenting alliance contributed to the prediction of attributions of locus (marginally), intent, and fault-blame, but not globality-stability and freedom. Higher levels of parenting alliance predicted more external attributions for negative spouse behaviour, diminished attributions of negative intent, and
lesser ascriptions of fault-blame. Unexpectedly, however, it was found that higher levels of marital adjustment predicted more internal attributions, greater perceptions of negative intent, and greater ascriptions of fault-blame to the spouse. For mothers, neither parenting alliance nor marital adjustment were predictive of attributions for spouse behaviour.

The pattern of data in this study support further investigation of parenting alliance as an element of family relations distinct from marital adjustment. In both bivariate correlations and regression analyses, parenting alliance was found to be related to attributions in a manner different from marital adjustment. In fact, the regression analyses were most supportive of the distinction between parenting alliance and marital adjustment in that controlling for marital adjustment allowed more relationships between parenting alliance and attributions to emerge than had appeared in correlations. As expected, inverse relationships were found between parenting alliance and attributions of intent and freedom, two elements that have been proposed to be criteria for the determination of responsibility (Hart, 1968). On the other hand, a relationship between attributions and marital adjustment was only found along the dimension of fault-blame, a type of attribution that has been conceptually distinguished from attributions relating to responsibility.
Perhaps the unique relationship found between marital adjustment and Fault-Blame is related to the finding that lower levels of marital adjustment are associated with more frequent and severe behaviour problems in children (Emery, 1982). Whereas attributions of intent and freedom are actor-specific (that is, the actor is the only person in an interaction with the capacity to intend or chose his behaviour), ascriptions of fault and blame can be divided among the participants in the interaction. For a negative parent-child interaction, attributions of fault-blame might be directed mostly toward the parent in happily married families of children who display few behaviour problems. On the other hand, maritally-distressed families with children exhibiting disruptive behaviour problems may ascribe more blame to the child in the interaction, thus attributing less fault-blame to the parent.

In the marital literature, the question of whether there is an association between spouses' attributions for marital events and marital adjustment has often been linked with the question of whether this association is causal in nature (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). In the current research, regressions were conducted to test whether parenting alliance was predictive of attributions and whether attributions were predictive of parenting alliance. The findings from these regression analyses were consistent with a model in which attributions and parenting alliance share a reciprocal relationship. Longitudinal research, like that
of Fincham and Bradbury (1987), and treatment outcome research examining cognitive restructuring, may be useful in the exploration of causality.

Parallel to attributional models presented in the marital literature, the data obtained in the present study also suggested that the attributions fathers make for their spouse's behaviour are predictive of parenting alliance. Fathers who perceived their spouse's behaviour as less negatively intended reporting higher levels of parenting alliance. Even when controlling for spouse behaviour, fathers' attributions of negative intent remained marginally predictive of their reports of parenting alliance. However, fathers' attributions along the remaining dimensions did not predict parenting alliance. None of the attribution composites, nor spouse behaviour, were found to predict mother reports of parenting alliance.

The findings of the present study suggest that there may be merit in distinguishing among broad dimensions or types of attributions (i.e., causal, responsibility). The two causal attribution dimensions examined in this study were not found to significantly correlate with either parenting alliance or marital adjustment, unlike attributions of responsibility-blame. Also, causal attributions did not contribute to the prediction of parenting alliance for either mothers or fathers, whereas responsibility-blame attributions were predictive at least fathers' reports of parenting alliance. These results
suggest that responsibility-blame dimensions are more important than causal dimensions in understanding attributional processes in couples reporting lower versus higher levels of parenting alliance. This pattern of results is consistent with previous research which has found a greater association between responsibility-blame attributions and affective responses than between causal attributions and affective response (Fincham & Bradbury, 1992). The lack of findings along causal dimensions may also reflect that questions assessing responsibility and blame attributions (e.g., to what extent is your spouse to blame for his behaviour?) may be easier to understand and to answer for parents than questions posed to assess causal dimensions (e.g., to what extent was the cause of your spouse's behaviour something about your spouse versus something about the situation?).

The current findings also suggest that it might be advantageous to analyze separately the constituent dimensions of a given attribution type rather than focus on a composite attribution measure that collapses ratings across dimensions. For example, in this study, different correlates were found for the 3 dimensions reflecting attributions of responsibility-blame. Bivariate correlations showed attributions of intent and freedom to be inversely associated with parenting alliance, but not fault-blame. On the other hand, attributions of fault-blame, but not intent or freedom, had a positive association with
marital adjustment. These findings support the argument that "a premature focus on attribution composites may preclude the identification of correlates unique to individual attribution dimensions" (Bradbury & Fincham, 1990). Fincham and Bradbury (1992) also point out that exclusive reliance on composite indices of broad attribution types may inappropriately lead to the conclusion that each of the component dimensions of an attribution type are equally important.

The present study did not find differences in the attributions parents made for their own behaviour versus their spouse's behaviour across couples reporting higher and lower levels of parenting alliance. However, this study reports on a community sample. Also, couples were divided into groups based on the average of mother and father PAI scores. Findings did suggest that mothers and fathers made differential attributions for themselves versus their spouses, at least in terms of stability-globality and freedom dimensions. It is interesting to note that along these two dimensions, the mothers' pattern of attributions for their own versus their spouse's behaviour was similar to the pattern reported in community samples where spouses make equally or more benign (less blaming) attributions for their partner's behaviour relative to their own behaviour. The pattern of attributions made by fathers for their own and their spouse's behaviour appears similar to the pattern of self versus spouses divergences reported in clinic samples,
where spouses make less benign or more blaming attributions for their spouse’s behaviour relative to their own. This may be because the mean marital adjustment score was lower for fathers than for mothers in this sample. It was also found that fathers made less blaming or more benign attributions for their own behaviour (less negatively intended, less freely chosen, less at fault and worthy of blame) than mothers made for their own behaviour. One could speculate that fathers are perceiving themselves as doing better jobs as parents than their fathers did, whereas mothers might feel the reverse.

The findings of this study, upon replication, will have interesting implications in the assessment of families seeking treatment in mental health settings. The family literature attests to the importance of assessing the marital dyad in treating families of problem children (e.g., Emery, 1982; Grych & Fincham, 1990). However, the present study offers preliminary support for conceptualizing the parenting alliance as distinct from marital functioning. This finding, in combination with research recommending that specific aspects of the marital relationship (e.g., child-rearing disagreements) are better predictors of child behaviour problems than overall marital adjustment (Dadds & Powell, 1991, Johnston, 1993), suggests that measures of parenting alliance may be more relevant for assessing families with problem children than standard measures of marital adjustment.
Due to the limited size of this preliminary sample, and the multiple analyses conducted, it is important to recognize that the risk of Type I error in this study has been inflated, such that only tentative conclusions can be drawn pending replication. There are also questions of external validity. Although some marital research has suggested that spouses' respond similarly to hypothetical and real marital events (Fincham & Beach, 1988), studies have not evaluated the responses of parents to hypothetical versus real parenting events. Nor has research been conducted to evaluate parents' responses to hypothetical events involving interactions between two family members. It is uncertain whether the attributions elicited in this study in response to hypothetical parent-child interactions are comparable to the attributions parents might make when observing interactions between their child and spouse in their own home.

There is also potential in this sample for the operation of a selection bias. Of the 37 mothers who completed questionnaires, 32 of their spouses also completed and returned questionnaires. Parents in couples where both spouses are willing to complete questionnaires may differ from parents in families where only one parent is willing to complete a questionnaire. It is also noted that the percentage of families in this sample who have sought psychological services for at least one of their children was higher than that found in the general population (Offord
et al., 1987). Thus, the extent to which this sample of volunteer couples is representative is unknown.

Nonetheless, findings from this study do suggest that, at least for fathers, lower levels of parenting alliance are associated with the formation of attributions which may accentuate the impact of the spouse's negative behaviour and cast it in a more negative light in comparison to the attributions made by fathers reporting higher levels of parenting alliance. Upon replication, the findings of this study will contribute to the growing literature which has acknowledged that a comprehensive account of the family functioning must address cognitive components of family interactions (Johnston, in press). This study adds to the current literature by looking beyond dyadic relationships between husbands and wives (e.g., Fincham, Beach, & Baucom, 1987, Fincham & Bradbury, 1992) and mothers and children (e.g., Dix & Grusec, 1985, MacKinnon et al., 1990), to triadic situations where parents' observed their spouses interacting with their children.

It would be profitable for future research to search for other factors which may be associated with higher and lower levels of parenting alliance (e.g., parenting stress). Research is also needed to determine whether there are factors other than parenting alliance and marital adjustment which may differentially predict attributions made by mothers versus fathers (e.g., parenting self-esteem, parental locus of control). Future directions also include
the addition of measures of affect to examine whether attributions made for the spouse's parenting behaviour are related to parents' affective responses to both the spouse's and the child's behaviour in negative parent-child interactions. This preliminary work could also be extended to investigate whether attributions underlie patterns of behaviour exchange (e.g. co-ordination of parenting efforts) which may differentiate couples differing in level of parenting alliance. In line with much of the marital literature, it would be useful to compare parents' attributions for spouse behaviour in a community sample with those of a clinic sample. Finally, to find further support for the distinction between parenting alliance and marital adjustment in married couples with children, it may be useful to measure and compare both these constructs in clinic samples referred either for marital counselling or for child problems.
Notes

1. One response alternative from item 32 was missing on all DAS questionnaires due to a clerical error. Also, item 15(a) was added to the Dyadic Adjustment Scale by the investigator, and was not included in the calculation of DAS scores.
Table 1

**Intercorrelations Among Causal and Responsibility-Blame Attribution Ratings** (Collapsed Across Mothers and Fathers).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Locus</th>
<th>Stability</th>
<th>Globality</th>
<th>Intent</th>
<th>Freedom</th>
<th>Fault</th>
<th>Blame</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locus</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.56***</td>
<td>-.32*</td>
<td>-.27</td>
<td>-.46**</td>
<td>-.40*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.35*</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-.35*</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-.26</td>
<td>-.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.38*</td>
<td>.34*</td>
<td>.40**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fault</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.91***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blame</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05. ** p < .01. *** p < .001
Table 2

Mean Attribution Ratings For Negative Spouse Behaviour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution Dimension</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locus</td>
<td>19.5 (5.8)</td>
<td>24.0 (6.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stab-Glob</td>
<td>21.8 (7.4)</td>
<td>22.8 (7.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent</td>
<td>20.6 (8.6)</td>
<td>18.2 (7.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>29.8 (6.9)</td>
<td>29.4 (6.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fault-Blame</td>
<td>26.8 (7.4)</td>
<td>23.7 (7.6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

**Correlations Between Attribution Ratings and Parenting Alliance.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution Dimensions</th>
<th>PAI</th>
<th>DAS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mothers</td>
<td>fathers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stab-Glob</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent</td>
<td>-.33*</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fault-Blame</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < .05. ** p < .01
Table 4

Mean Attribution Ratings for Self Behaviour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribution Dimension</th>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Locus</td>
<td>19.33 (8.6)</td>
<td>21.65 (6.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glob-Stab</td>
<td>20.75 (8.6)</td>
<td>23.44 (6.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent</td>
<td>21.86 (8.4)</td>
<td>18.26 (6.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>30.56 (7.3)</td>
<td>27.81 (7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fault-Blame</td>
<td>28.17 (8.6)</td>
<td>27.84 (6.2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 5

**Cell Means for Parent (mother,father) by Target (self,spouse) by PAI (higher,lower) ANOVAs.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locus</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
<th>Self</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mother</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Father</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower</td>
<td>19.69</td>
<td>21.25</td>
<td>22.56</td>
<td>23.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher</td>
<td>19.86</td>
<td>19.93</td>
<td>20.71</td>
<td>24.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stab-Glob</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower</td>
<td>21.66</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>26.31</td>
<td>22.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher</td>
<td>21.07</td>
<td>21.87</td>
<td>30.80</td>
<td>23.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower</td>
<td>22.63</td>
<td>20.56</td>
<td>17.75</td>
<td>19.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher</td>
<td>21.43</td>
<td>18.93</td>
<td>19.64</td>
<td>17.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freedom</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower</td>
<td>29.38</td>
<td>27.69</td>
<td>27.81</td>
<td>29.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher</td>
<td>33.93</td>
<td>32.14</td>
<td>27.07</td>
<td>29.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fault-Blame</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lower</td>
<td>26.31</td>
<td>24.06</td>
<td>26.97</td>
<td>22.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>higher</td>
<td>30.89</td>
<td>29.79</td>
<td>29.39</td>
<td>25.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


APPENDIX A

Study of Attributions for Parent Behaviour in Parent-Child Interactions

Department of Psychology
University of British Columbia
Wendy Freeman 683-2156
Dr. Charlotte Johnston 822-6771

This questionnaire package is part of a research project being conducted by graduate student Wendy Freeman and Dr. Charlotte Johnston in the Psychology Department at the University of British Columbia. We are interested in how parents explain things that happen during parent-child interactions. Findings from this project will better our understanding of how parents think about family interactions and have implications for understanding family functioning.

We recommend that you choose a quiet time to complete the forms in this package (e.g. after your child(ren)'s bedtime). There are several sections to the questionnaire. One parent in each family will complete a form asking for general family information (e.g., mother and father's occupation, number of children). All parents complete a section which asks you to respond to eight descriptions of family interactions, four occurring between yourself and ____________, and four occurring between your spouse and ____________. After reading each description, you are asked to indicate your feelings about the parent's and the child's behaviour on several rating scales. Following, there is a short page asking you to rate the extent to which the behaviours described in the eight scenarios are or are not typical of yourself, your spouse, and your son. The next section asks you questions about being a parent together with your spouse and then your marital relationship. This is followed by a brief section asking you to describe ____________'s behaviour. The final section asks questions about your spouse's parenting behaviour, about disagreements between you and your spouse with regard to child-rearing, and your feelings about being a parent.

Please check the back side of each page of your questionnaire as most sections use both the front and back of the pages.

We would appreciate it if you could complete the questionnaires and return the packet as soon as possible in the envelopes provided. We also ask that you and your spouse complete your questionnaires independently and seal them in the envelopes provided before discussing them together. The questionnaires should take about 45-60 minutes to complete.

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time. If the completed questionnaires are returned to UBC, then it will be assumed that you have consented to participate in the study. Your responses to the questions will be treated as confidential. The external envelope we receive from you will be discarded and your package will be identified by subject number only. Your participation in the study is strictly voluntary.

Thank you for expressing an interest in this study. If you have any comments or questions regarding the project, please call Wendy Freeman at 683-2156.

If you would like to receive a summary of the results, please provide your name and address, and we would be happy to mail you a summary of our findings.
GENERAL INFORMATION SHEET

1. Mother's Age: ___ 2. Mother's Occupation: ________________

3. Highest level of education received for mother: ________________

4. Mother's ethnic background: _____________________________

5. Father's Age: ___ 6. Father's Occupation: ________________

7. Highest level of education received for father: ________________

8. Father's ethnic background: _____________________________

9. Please provide the following information about each of your children:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Are you and your spouse the child's biological parents?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10.(a) Have you or your spouse ever sought psychological help for personal problems? Yes  No

  (b) If yes, please describe briefly:

________________________________________________________________________

11.(a) Have you ever sought psychological help for child behaviour problems? Yes  No

  (b) If yes, please identify which child and describe briefly:

________________________________________________________________________

12. How many years have you been married? ________________

13. ____________________'s date of birth. ________________
APPENDIX C

INSTRUCTIONS FOR RATINGS

We would like you to read a series of scenarios describing problem parent-child interactions and answer questions about each of them. For each situation, please try to imagine that the situation involved __________________. For four of the situations, we ask you to vividly imagine yourself and ____________. For four other situations (evident from how the scenario is described), we ask you to vividly imagine the interaction occurring between your spouse and ____________. Try to imagine each situation as an entirely separate event, and not to let your ratings for one situation influence ratings on subsequent situations.

For each situation, you will first be asked to answer specific questions about what you think caused the parent's behaviour. In seeking such explanations for their own behaviour and the behaviour of others, people often make judgements about the extent to which the behaviour was caused by something about the person doing it versus something about the circumstances or the situation, the extent to which the behaviour was caused by factors which affect your or the other person's behaviour in other situations, and the extent to which the behaviour was caused by factors which are always present in these situations and are long-lasting. You will also be asked whether the behaviour was intentional and freely chosen, and whether the parent (you or your spouse) was at fault and to blame for the behaviour.

In this section, the same scenario will be repeated on the reverse side of each page. However, on the back of the page, the child's behaviour is highlighted in bold print, and you will be asked questions about the child's behaviour in the parent-child interaction.

You may find it difficult to make these ratings. There are no right or wrong answers, just go with your first impression.

Please Remember

Please try to vividly imagine ______________ and yourself, or your spouse as indicated, in the situations that follow. Although some of the situations may not be typical of your experiences with your child(ren), please stretch your imagination and try to put yourself and ______________, or your spouse and ______________ as indicated, in the situation described. Also, please remember to complete the reverse side of each page.
APPENDIX D

For the parent behaviour highlighted in bold print:

1. To what extent was this behaviour caused by something about your spouse versus something about the situation?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
something about my spouse
something about the situation

2. To what extent was this behaviour caused by something that will influence your spouse’s behaviour in other interactions with the child?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
influences most 
influences just this
interactions particular interaction

3. To what is this behaviour caused by something that is lasting vs. a one-time thing?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
lasting a one-time thing

4. To what extent was your spouse’s behaviour intended to be negative?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
not at all very
intentional intentional

5. To what extent was the behaviour something your spouse freely chose to do?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
not at all completely
freely chosen freely chosen

6. To what extent would your spouse be at fault for his or her behaviour?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
not at all very much
at fault at fault

7. To what extent would your spouse be to blame for his or her behaviour?

1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10
not at all very much
to blame to blame
APPENDIX E

PARENTING ALLIANCE INVENTORY

DIRECTIONS: The questions listed below concern what happens between you and your child's other parent. While you may not find an answer which exactly describes what you think, please circle the answer that comes closest to describing what you think. YOUR FIRST REACTION SHOULD BE YOUR ANSWER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Not Agree</th>
<th>Sure</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. During pregnancy, my child's other parent liked to talk about our child.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. During pregnancy, my child's other parent expressed confidence in my ability to be a good parent.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My child's other parent believes I am a good parent.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My child's other parent tells me I am a good parent.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My child's other parent sees our child in the same way I do.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My child's other parent and I would basically describe our child in the same way.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My child's other parent and I have the same goals for our child.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. If our child needs to be punished, my child's other parent and I usually agree on the type of punishment.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My child's other parent and I agree on what our child should and should not be permitted to do.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. When I see my child's other parent interact with our child, I feel good about it.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel close to my child's other parent when I see him/her play with our child.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. When there is a problem with our child, we work out a good solution together.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I believe my child's other parent is a good parent.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I learn how to better manage my child by watching his/her other parent manage him/her.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I believe my child's other parent cares deeply about our child.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>I believe my child's other parent has confidence in what I do with our child.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Even if my child's other parent and I have problems in our relationship, we can work together for our child.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>When my child's other parent helps out with our child, I feel good about it.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>My child's other parent cares about our child.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>I feel good about my child's other parent's judgement about what is right for our child.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>My child's other parent makes my job of being a parent easier.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>I know my child's other parent and I will always be together as parents, even if our relationship ends.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>My child's other parent and I communicate well about our child.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Talking to my child's other parent about our child is something I look forward to.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>My child's other parent and I are a good team.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>My child's other parent is willing to make personal sacrifices to help take care of our child.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>My child's other parent enjoys being alone with our child.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>My child's other parent pays a great deal of attention to our child.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>My child's other parent knows how to manage children well.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>When my child's other parent thinks our child is doing something wrong, I often think the same thing.</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Not Agree</td>
<td>Sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

DYADIC ADJUSTMENT SCALE

Completed by: Mother Father

Most persons have disagreements in their relationships. Please indicate below the approximate extent of agreement or disagreement between you and your partner for each item on the following list. (Place a check mark to indicate your answer).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Almost</th>
<th>Almost</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Frequently</th>
<th>Almost</th>
<th>Always</th>
<th>Always</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aways</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Handling family finances</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Matters of recreation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Religious matters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Demonstration of affection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Friends</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Sex relations</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Conventionality</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Philosophy of life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Ways of dealing with parents or in-laws</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Aims, goals, &amp; things believed important</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Amount of time spent together</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Making major decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Household tasks</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Leisure time interests and activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Career decisions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15a. Child-rearing (e.g., discipline)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All of the Time</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
<th>More Often Than Not</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16. How often do you discuss or have you considered divorce, separation, or terminating your relationship?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17. How often do you or your mate leave the house after a fight?</td>
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<tr>
<td>18. In general, how often do you think that things between you and your partner are going well?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
19. Do you confide in your mate?  
20. Do you ever regret that you married (or lived together)?  
21. How often do you and your partner quarrel?  
22. How often do you and your mate "get on each others" nerves?  
  Every Day  Almost Every Day  Occasionally  Rarely  Never  
23. Do you kiss your mate?  
  All of Them  Most of Them  Some of Them  Very few of Them  None of Them  
24. Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?  
   
How often would you say the following events occur between you and your mate?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Less than Once a Month</th>
<th>Once or Twice a Month</th>
<th>Once or Twice a Week</th>
<th>Once a Day</th>
<th>Often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25. Have a stimulating exchange of ideas?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>26. Laugh together</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Calmly discuss something</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Work together on a project</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are some things about which couples sometimes agree and sometimes disagree. Indicate if either item below caused differences of opinions or were problems in your relationship during the past few weeks. (Check yes or no).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29. Being too tired for sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Not showing love</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. The dots on the following line represent different degrees of happiness in your relationship. The middle point, &quot;happy,&quot; represents the degree of happiness in most relationships. Please circle the dot which best describes the degree of happiness, all things considered, of your relationship.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Happiness</th>
<th>Extremely Unhappy</th>
<th>Fairly Unhappy</th>
<th>A Little Unhappy</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Very Happy</th>
<th>Extremely Happy</th>
<th>Perfect Happy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
32. Which of the following statements best describes how you feel about the future of your relationship? (Check one).

____ I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does.

____ I want very much for my relationship to succeed, and will do all I can to see that it does.

____ I want very much for my relationship to succeed, but I can't do much more than I am doing now to help it succeed.

____ It would be nice if it succeeded, but I refuse to do any more than I am doing now to keep the relationship going.

____ My relationship can never succeed, and there is no more that I can do to keep the relationship going.
APPENDIX G

Parenting Scale

At one time or another, all children misbehave or do things that could be harmful, that are "wrong", or that parents don't like. Examples include:

- hitting someone
- throwing food
- not picking up toys
- having a tantrum
- wanting a cookie before dinner
- arguing back
- whining
- forgetting homework
- lying
- refusing to go to bed
- running into the street
- coming home late

Parents have many different ways or styles of dealing with these types of problems. Below are items that describe some styles of parenting. FOR EACH ITEM, FILL IN THE CIRCLE THAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR STYLE OF PARENTING DURING THE PAST TWO MONTHS with the child indicated above.

*******************************

SAMPLE ITEM:

At meal time ...

| I let my child decide how much to eat. | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 |
| I decide how much my child eats.       | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 |

*******************************

1. WHEN I'M UPSET OR UNDER STRESS ...

| I am picky and on my child's back. | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 |
| I am no more picky than usual.      | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 |

2. WHEN MY CHILD MISBEHAVES ...

| I usually get into a long argument with my child. | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 |
| I don't get into an argument.                   | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 |

3. WHEN MY CHILD MISBEHAVES ...

| I give my child a long lecture                   | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 |
| I keep my talks short and to the point.          | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 |

4. WHEN MY CHILD MISBEHAVES ...

| I raise my voice or yell                        | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 |
| I speak to my child calmly.                     | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 |
5. **AFTER THERE'S BEEN A PROBLEM WITH MY CHILD ...**

   | I often hold a grudge. | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 | Things get back to normal quickly.

6. **WHEN THERE'S A PROBLEM WITH MY CHILD ...**

   | Things build up and I do things I don't mean to do. | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 | Things don't get out of hand.

7. **WHEN MY CHILD MISBEHAVES, I SPANK, SLAP, GRAB, OR HIT MY CHILD ...**

   | Never or rarely. | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 | Most of the time

8. **WHEN MY CHILD MISBEHAVES ...**

   | I handle it without getting upset. | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 | I get so frustrated or angry that my child can see I'm upset.

9. **WHEN MY CHILD MISBEHAVES ...**

   | I rarely use bad language or curse | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 | I almost always use bad language.

10. **WHY MY CHILD DOES SOMETHING I DON'T LIKE, I INSULT MY CHILD, SAY MEAN THINGS, OR CALL MY CHILD NAMES ...**

    | Never or rarely | 0---0---0---0---0---0---0 | Most of the time.