Previous research has documented that investigators of parent-child (p-c) relations research who publish either in Child Development (CD) or Journal of Marriage and the Family (JMF) are from essentially two different research communities that function in virtual isolation from each other. The present study attempted to test the hypothesis that the differences in methods used and age groups of subjects studied can be accounted for by meta-theoretical differences that derive from child specialists' closer links to the discipline of psychology and family specialists' closer links to the discipline of sociology. However, the results indicated that the two groups' conceptions of variable meaning and the sources of external causation were more notable for their similarities than their differences. Further, the groups differed on the frequency with which reciprocal interaction measures were employed, even though both have long held similar views about the importance of such assessments. Therefore, it was concluded that methodological differences between the two research groups are only loosely driven by meta-theoretical considerations. Instead, they inhere in the methodological and/or substantive traditions of their respective root disciplines.

Our previous research (Endsley & Brody, 1981; Endsley, Bradbard, & Lang, 1988) documents that child and family research specialists have functioned in virtual isolation from each other, though some signs of rapprochement are evident. Specifically, we demonstrated that researchers who publish parent-child (p-c) relations research in Child Development (CD) versus those who publish p-c relations research in the Journal of Marriage and the Family (JMF) (a) generally reside in different departments; (b) rarely belong to each other's professional organizations; (c) rarely publish in both journals; and, (d) employ substantially different methods and subjects.

With regard to the latter finding, in recent years p-c researchers who publish in CD are highly likely to use observational strategies, as well as questionnaire/interview strategies. These latter (self-report) methods are typically used in combination with
other methods such as experimental, observational, and/or tests-&-measures procedures. In contrast, p-c researchers publishing in *JMF* continue to focus almost exclusively on questionnaire/interview strategies, and rarely combine these procedures with any others. Further, *CD* researchers are much more likely to study infants than any other age group in their p-c research, while *JMF* researchers are much more likely to study adolescents and adults than any other age group. Among the possible reasons given for the distinctively different methods and subjects employed by these two professionally isolated groups was the suggestion that they have fundamentally different meta-theoretical orientations toward their subject matter (e.g., Endsley & Brody, 1981). These purported differences in meta-theoretical perspectives were examined in the present research.

**Meta-theoretical Implications of Psychological and Sociological Perspectives**

It is clear that child studies historically have been more closely identified with the discipline of psychology, while family studies has its intellectual roots more extensively grounded in sociology (Lerner & Spanier, 1978). Among the differences conventionally highlighted to distinguish the world views of the two disciplines is that psychologists are more molecular (less molar) level than sociologists (Larzelere & Klein, 1987). Moreover, environmental causation of behavior from a psychological perspective favors the examination of the individual differences and interactional patterns of social agents, particularly those in close temporal and physical proximity with the targets of their influence. In contrast, a sociological perspective favors the examination of temporally and physically more removed social structures and contexts on the targets of influence. Thus, from a psychological perspective, when parents are the focus of influence on children, the parents' individual qualities and interactional patterns with their children would be regarded as particularly salient variables to examine (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Conversely, a sociological perspective would emphasize the "background" of parents (e.g., demographic factors such as culture, race, social class, family structure, employment status) as particularly salient variables (Peterson & Rollins, 1987).

These different disciplinary perspectives may be manifested in the different methodological styles favored by child and family specialists. For example, it is reasonable to expect that a psychological view that stresses a more molecular perspective and the analyses of temporally and physically close causes would demand the more fine-grained, up-close procedures of experimentation, observation, and tests-&-measures of individual differences. Conversely, the more global and temporally and physically more distant causal influences of a sociological perspective might permit, or even favor, the use of self report techniques such as questionnaires and interviews.

If the different meta-theoretical perspectives found in psychology and sociology have the distinctive methodological influences on child and family specialists as they study p-c relations, it follows that: (a) the independent and dependent variables found in p-c studies published in *JMF* would be relatively more molar than those found in p-c studies published in *CD*; and (b) environmental factors presumed to influence p-c relations would be more demographic and less psychological in nature (i.e., less likely to be individual difference and interactional measures) in the case of p-c studies published in *JMF* than in *CD*.
In addition to the meta-theoretical implications of being grounded either in psychology or sociology on research strategy, there are perhaps even more obvious methodological implications of adopting a "developmental" perspective. Students of development, whether of individuals or families, may disagree on what develops, or even on whether our understanding of development can be advanced by using the term in a theoretical sense (that is, by referring to hypothetical processes that emerge, differentiate, and are reorganized over time in systematic ways—Klein, Jorgenson, & Miller, 1978). However, all accept the notion that systematic changes in individuals and families can be detected over time, and that these observed changes can provide valuable information for testing our theories of parent-child relationships (Lerner & Spanier, 1978). The most widely accepted forms of developmental methodology, therefore, are those that compare different age groups of subjects (in our case, different ages of parents and/or children) either cross-sectionally or longitudinally (Baltes, Reese, & Nesselroade, 1977).

Based simply on the names of the journals, it is reasonable to expect that studies of p-c relations published in CD would more often involve comparisons across two or more age groups of parents and/or children than would studies published in JMF. That this is not necessarily a foregone conclusion, however, is suggested by criticisms within the child development research community that p-c studies traditionally have been approached more from a socialization perspective than a developmental perspective (e.g., Maccoby, 1984). These critics have, correspondingly, called for more studies of how p-c relations change over time and over important age periods in the life span.

As another means of assessing the extent to which our meta-theoretical positions influence research methods among p-c researchers publishing in CD and JMF, the use of multicausal data analytic techniques and measures of reciprocal interactions in p-c studies were examined. In this instance, both theorists within child development and in family studies have long acknowledged the multicausal and reciprocal (bi-directional) nature of family relationships, including p-c relations (Parsons & Bales, 1955; Sears, 1951). Concomitantly, there has been concern that our data analytic techniques and relationship measures often fail to reflect our commitment to these meta-theoretical assumptions (Larzelere & Klein, 1987; Lerner & Spanier, 1978). To the extent that these theoretical exhortions are being taken seriously by p-c researchers, there should be an increased use of multicausal data analytic techniques and measures of reciprocal interaction in the p-c studies over time in both journals. However, to the extent that one or both journals fail to reflect such trends, then one could conclude that the methodological trends are governed by factors other than the above mentioned meta-theoretical considerations.

**METHOD**

From a total of 742 p-c studies published in CD and JMF from their inception through 1986, 308 (41.5%) were selected for analysis. A p-c study was defined as "any empirical article containing at least one measure that explicitly assessed some aspect of a relationship between at least one child and one parent within the families studied" (Endsley & Brody, p. 6). At least 20 articles, but no more than one-third of the total articles, were selected randomly from each time period (all 5 year periods except the last one—see Figures 1-8). The only exception was when less than 20 articles were available in a time period; in this case all were examined.
Assessing the Molarity of Independent and Dependent Variables

The analyses required examining the molarity of the independent and dependent variables rated on a 3-point scale, in which 1 = molecular, 2 = intermediate, and 3 = molar. In p-c research, virtually all dependent variables represent behavioral actions at some level of molarity. Independent variables can also be behavioral, but also might represent other external (e.g., economic) or internal (e.g., health) conditions. Nevertheless, whether one is considering behavioral actions or other conditions, molecular variables are characterized by being highly discrete events lasting only a few moments (e.g., seconds, minutes) and by virtue of their simplicity, are usually relatively easy to summarize operationally. Behavioral examples might include the brief smiles exhibited by infants while being held by their mothers, or physiological reactions such as momentary heart rate. Nonbehavioral (independent variable) examples might include a pin prick of a child's finger to draw blood for a hemoelcrit screen or the visual presence of a non-interactive stranger during the few moments a child's attachment to his mother is being indexed in a laboratory context.

On the other end of the dimension are the truly molar behavioral events and conditions which are characterized by being topographically diverse, existing over large time spans (e.g., months and years), and by virtue of their conceptual complexity, are often difficult to summarize operationally. Behavioral examples might include all the actions that could be summarized in the roles of being married, working, parenting, acquiring a given level of education, or reflecting one's ethnic or cultural background. They also include "styles" of functioning such as authoritative parenting or hyperactivity. Other nonbehavioral molar conditions include factors such as age, gender, health status, geographic location, and alternative child care arrangements.

Finally, by default, intermediate variables are those that fall somewhere between being highly discrete, temporally fleeting and descriptively obvious and those that are topographically complex, of longstanding duration, and descriptively vague. Behavior examples of intermediate level variables include a wide range of actions which, while taking various behavioral forms, are intended to serve the same goals within a relatively circumscribed time frame (e.g., "soothing" behavior of mothers toward their infants' crying, aggressive exchanges between adolescents and their parents, etc.)

Assessing Three Categories of External Causation

The analyses also included three categories of external causation; those that were demographic, psychological, or physical in nature. A determination was first made that the causal (i.e., independent) variables were regarded by the investigator(s) as being external (i.e., contextual) in nature rather than originating within the subjects themselves. Thus, studies that included no external causative variable, but instead, confined their analysis of causation to internal factors (i.e., biological and/or psychological attributes such as I.Q. or hyperactivity that are regarded as stable individual differences) were excluded from the analysis. Researchers making demographic contextual comparisons analyzed molar conditions such as parent education, place of residence, or family composition. Studies examining psychological contextual variables focused on behaviors and/or attitudes exhibited by one or both members of the p-c dyad (or, in some cases, on whole family measures) that directly indexed the interaction and/or relationship(s) existing between the parents and children. Finally, studies examining physical contextual variables were dealing with explicit and readily definable elements of the immediate physical environment such as room size, or number of climbing toys available. Each "external causation" study was evaluated for the presence or absence of each of the three classes of contextual variables.

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Assessing the Developmental Methodological Perspective of Each Study

A study was judged to have a developmental methodological perspective if data were collected on two or more age groups of children and/or parents, by using one or a combination of longitudinal, cross-sectional and retrospective research strategies. The only other proviso was that the multiple time point assessments were attempted for purposes of indexing developmental change and/or life transitions rather than simply to index measurement stability.

Assessing Multicausal and Reciprocal Causal Analytic Techniques

Finally, studies were examined to determine whether they used data analytic techniques that evaluated the effects of two or more independent variables operating on one or more dependent variables, as well as whether variables were assumed to have reciprocal (bi-directional) influences. Multicausal models are assumed to underlie most contemporary data analytic techniques (e.g., MANOVA, multiple regression), and judgements of multicausal analyses were readily determined when such procedures were employed. The measurement of reciprocal influences in a given study was defined in terms of whether any statistical procedure was applied to a given p-c interactional measure (whether behavioral or attitudinal) in order to use and evaluate this measure as both a cause and an effect on other interactional measures.

Measurement Reliability

Reliability was assessed by asking two judges to independently rate a set of 30 articles, 15 from CD and 15 from JMF published during the 80s, on each of the measures just described. Percent of agreement over the eight previously described measures plus the assessment of whether the study contained any analysis of external cause averaged 91%, and ranged from 83-100%.

RESULTS

Molarity of Independent and Dependent Variables

Preliminary inspection of the data revealed that a high percentage of both the independent and dependent variables (i.e., 81% & 92%, respectively) examined were judged to fall at level 2 (recall that 1 = molecular, 3 = molar). Figures 1 and 2 document this fact, and at the same time, indicate that there has been a modest decrease in the percentage of level 2-molarity variables over time in both journals, especially for independent variables. This decrease in percentage of level 2 measures, thereby, indicates that the variability in molarity has increased slightly over time.

More pertinent to the present study, Figures 1 and 2 suggest that the molarity level of the independent and dependent variables employed in the p-c studies published in the two journals has remained quite similar over time. In other words, the data in these figures do not support the hypothesis that JMF variables are operationalized at a consistently more molar level than CD variables. This conclusion was supported by
Figure 1. Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in Child Development and Journal of Marriage and the Family over time that employed independent variables of an intermediate level of molarity.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure1.png}
\caption{Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in Child Development and Journal of Marriage and the Family over time that employed independent variables of an intermediate level of molarity.}
\end{figure}

Figure 2. Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in Child Development and Journal of Marriage and the Family over time that employed dependent variables of an intermediate level of molarity.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in Child Development and Journal of Marriage and the Family over time that employed dependent variables of an intermediate level of molarity.}
\end{figure}
Figure 2. Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in *Child Development* and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* over time that employed dependent variables of an intermediate level of molarity.
inspection of the mean molarity level of the independent and dependent variables in the two journals from 1950-86 and t-test results that were nonsignificant (p's > .05). The mean molarity of the independent variables were 1.93 and 2.01 for CD and JMF, respectively; the mean molarity of the dependent variables was 2.02 and 2.11, respectively.

Type of External Causal Variables Used

Figures 3 to 5 summarize the percentage of p-c studies over time in each journal that employed demographic, psychological, and physical variables, respectively, as external causes of p-c relations. While Figure 3 appears to support the hypothesis that demographic variables are more frequently employed in JMF p-c studies than in CD p-c studies, the differences evaluated via chi square test are small and nonsignificant for both the 1950-74 period (54% vs. 69%) and the 1975-86 period (57% vs. 70%). In general, while there appear to be modest, synchronized fluctuations from one decade to the next in both journals, there is no clearcut long-term trend other than demographic factors have been and continue to be examined as external influences on p-c relations by a majority of the investigators publishing in both journals.

In contrast, the most notable feature in Figure 4 is the dramatic increase over time in both journals in the use of psychological variables as sources of external influence on p-c relations. For example, during the 1950-74 period, only 14% and 16% of CD and JMF p-c studies, respectively, examined psychological variables as external causes. However, by the 1975-86 period, 70% and 49% of CD and JMF p-c studies, respectively, did so. While for the latter time period the chi square tests revealed the difference to be significant in the predicted direction (p < .02), the trends for the two journals in Figure 4 are more notable for their similarities than for their differences.

Finally, Figure 5 clearly documents the fact that physical variables are rarely used as external causes of p-c relations in either journal. However, when used, they have so far only appeared in CD studies.

Percentage of Developmental Parent-Child Studies

Unlike the measures of variable molarity and type of external causes which yielded few differences between the two journals, Figure 6 clearly supports what was confirmed by chi square test (p < .001); namely, that CD publishes a higher percentage of developmental methodology p-c studies (i.e., p-c studies comparing two or more age groups) than JMF. However, it is also evident from Figure 6 that the percentage of developmental methodology p-c studies in both journals has increased over time, so that in the 80s JMF can now be regarded as a developmental journal in its own right. Correspondingly, the 80s is the first decade in which the majority of p-c studies published in CD can be said to incorporate a developmental design.

Use of Multicausal and Reciprocal Analytic Strategies

Figure 7 summarizes the percentage of p-c studies over time in both journals that employed multicausal data analytic procedures, while Figure 8 summarizes the percentage of p-c studies that used measures of reciprocal influences to evaluate the p-c relationship. As indicated in Figure 7 and confirmed by chi square analysis, during the first 20 years of JMF as a research journal (1950-69), p-c researchers were significantly less likely to employ multicausal data analytic techniques than were those
Figure 3. Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in *Child Development* and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* over time that incorporated demographic-contextual variables in their casual analysis.
Figure 4. Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in *Child Development* and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* over time that incorporated psychological-contextual variables in their casual analysis.
Figure 5. Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in *Child Development* and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* over time that incorporated physical-contextual variables in their casual analysis.
Figure 6. Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in *Child Development* and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* over time that examined age differences in the relationships.

![Graph showing percentages of parent-child relations studies published in *Child Development* and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* over time.](image)

Figure 7. Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in *Child Development* and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* over time that employed a multi-causal data analytic strategy.

![Graph showing percentages of parent-child relations studies published in *Child Development* and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* over time.](image)
Figure 7. Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in Child Development and Journal of Marriage and the Family over time that employed a multi-causal data analytic strategy.
publishing in CD (p < .05). However, since the early 70s virtually all p-c researchers in both journals have employed multicausal techniques in analyzing their data.

In contrast to the almost universal use of multicausal data analytic techniques, the use of reciprocal measures has become common only in recent years, and only in p-c studies published in CD. Specifically, from 1950-69, only one study appeared in each journal that employed reciprocal measures. However, since that time the number has risen sharply in CD, while remaining virtually absent in JMF. While Figure 8 clearly documents, and chi square analysis confirms, the rise in CD since 1970, it also reveals a sharp and significant decline in the use of these measures among CD studies published in the last two years assessed (both p's < .001).

DISCUSSION

*Meta-theoretical Perspective versus Substantive/Methodological Traditions in Psychology and Sociology*

While some of the trends support the hypotheses under investigation, the general impression of the results more clearly supports the view that the two groups of p-c researchers do not have fundamentally different conceptions about the nature of their subject matter. Specifically, both (a) conceptualize their variables at a similar level of molarity (i.e., almost always at level 2); (b) continue to examine demographic factors in a majority of their studies; (c) have become increasingly preoccupied with psychological factors as causal agents; and (d) ignore the role of immediate physical circumstances as causal agents in p-c relations. Further, in matters where there is meta-theoretical consensus, i.e., the virtues of multicausal analytic strategies and analysis of reciprocal influences, there are differences between the two sets of studies in the readiness to implement these viewpoints into research practice.

If we can conclude that the two research communities actually assume similar meta-theoretical positions regarding their subject matter, what are some of the alternative possibilities available for explaining the method and the research subject differences of the two groups? One possibility, already raised in a previous study (Endsley, et al., 1988), is that the two groups don't really study the same phenomena, even though they are all studying p-c relations. Specifically, p-c researchers publishing in CD have become enamored with infant-parent relationships, and a substantial percentage of these studies are concerned with parenting behavior that promotes cognitive and linguistic development.1 Conversely, one simply doesn't find studies of cognitive or linguistic development in JMF, regardless of the age of the child subjects. A similar contrast can be found in the more frequent studies in JMF than in CD of adolescent-parent interaction quality (e.g., supportiveness, control, power). Thus, it may be that these and other substantive differences account for the different research methods. Obviously one cannot interview infants as one can adolescents. Further, cognitive and linguistic assessments may require the more standardized and controlled methodologies of experimentation, observation, and tests & measures than do assessments of the degree of supportiveness, control, or power exerted by parents over their teenage children.

However, to some extent, the existence of different substantive topics in the study of p-c relations still begs the question, because to some unknown degree, an investigator's choice of a research topic is prompted by his/her ready familiarity with particular research methods. Thus, as we have argued elsewhere (Endsley et al., 1988), methodological "spillover" occurs from one generation of investigators to the next, re-
Figure 8. Percentages of parent-child relations studies published in *Child Development* and *Journal of Marriage and the Family* over time that assessed reciprocal influences in relationships.
Reflecting to some degree the disciplinary roots of the earlier generations, even as new substantive domains emerge. As has been previously documented (Endsley & Brody, 1981; Endsley et al., in press), the disciplinary roots of psychology and sociology are strongly represented in p-c researchers who publish in CD and IMF, respectively. The "field" of social psychology probably better represents the distinctive methodological impact of psychology and sociology than any other. Indeed, there is not one field of social psychology but two (Stryker, 1977), and the distinction between the two social psychologies is heavily methodological. That is, one field is inhabited by "psychological social psychologists" who essentially do experimental laboratory research, while the other field is inhabited by "sociological social psychologists" who essentially do field questionnaire research. That there is such a distinction between two groups of investigators supposedly interested in the same phenomenon is a testimony to how methods, originally characteristic of distinctively different and earlier established fields of inquiry (e.g., experimental psychology versus demography) spill over and continue to define and distinguish the disciplines of psychology and sociology even at the juncture where the two now overlap substantively.

Integrating Child and Family Studies Through Developmental/Interaction Research Design

That there has been an increase over time in the study of developmental p-c relations in both CD and IMF indicates a growing responsiveness in this area of research to an intellectual tradition that emerged primarily outside of mainstream psychology and sociology in the 20s and 30s (Cairns, 1983; Sears, 1975). The developmental perspective with its attendant research methodologies (e.g., cross-sectional, longitudinal, & retrospective self-report methods) was, therefore, well established before either child study or family study specialists took up the investigation of p-c relations in the late 40s and 50s (Endsley & Brody, 1981). We believe this new developmental thrust is a further sign (in addition to those mentioned in an earlier study -- Endsley, et al., 1988) that a rapprochement is emerging between child and family specialists in their respective research enterprises (Kelly, 1986; Lerner & Spanier, 1978).

Finally, the present findings regarding the trends in the use of measures indexing reciprocal interactions deserve comment. The emergence of such measures in CD but not in IMF, despite a comparably long history of concern about the importance of such processes, suggests that child developmentalsists studying p-c relations have been more responsive to critiques about the mismatch of research to theory than have family specialists. (For other evidence of differential responsiveness to criticisms about mismatches of research to theory, see Endsley et al., 1988). This responsiveness, in turn, appears to be highly correlated with the different methodological preferences of the two research groups. Investigators with predispositions to employ observational techniques would seem to be in a better (more responsive) position to assess reciprocal interactions than those using questionnaire/interview strategies, for observational technologies necessarily bring researchers face-to-face with actual reciprocal encounters. This "up close and personal" experience not only highlights the prevalence of reciprocity in human relationships, but also offers insight into the operational procedures whereby reciprocal influences can be assessed (Cairns, 1979, Klein et al., 1978). To further emphasize the impact of method on the study of reciprocity, inspection of the present data revealed that the dramatic drop in studies of reciprocal interactions in CD during 85-86 was associated with the equally sharp rise in questionnaire/interview strategies in that period. Specifically, none of the studies employing only questionnaire/interview methods in that period examined reciprocal effects, while 40 percent of the studies employing only observational methods did so.

This is a list of reciprocal interactions that require additional information on unimportant spans and their names.

- Bates, P B
- Cairns, R B
- Hillsdale
- Cairns, R E
- Handbook
- Endsley, R
- special analysis
- Endsley, R
- reveal method
- Kelly, H R
- Duck (Eds)
- Klein, D M
- reciprocal and familial
- Lanzelere, R
- library
- Lerner, R M
- A life-course and family development
- Maccoby, E
- Maccoby, E
- interaction personal
- Parsons, T
- II: Fre
- Peterson, G
- K: Stet
- Sears, R R
- Sears, R R
- Psych (Eds)
- Stryker, S (Eds)
- relevant

1. Based on the discussion of the article, research on reciprocal influences as reported in the article had something common with peers. Endsley, et al., 1988 is relevant to each result.
This is not to say that self-report methods are inherently unsuitable in the study of reciprocity. However, it would appear that employing such methodology will either require adopting a synchronous view of reciprocity where causal analyses are deemed unimportant; or, alternatively, conducting causally oriented p-c studies using longer time spans and variants of longitudinal research designs (Klein et al., 1978).

REFERENCES


FOOTNOTE

1. Based on reviewer reactions, it is probably important to clarify that we are not discounting the influence of editorial leadership in shaping the nature of the p-c articles that do get published in the two journals when we refer to the "p-c researchers publishing in CD or JMF. Rather, we view those published researchers as representatives of the two research communities that collectively contribute articles and support the organizations who run the journals in question. These communities, of course, include both the researchers who submit articles and their peers who review them. As stated elsewhere (Endsley & Brody, 1981; Endsley, et al., 1988), it is our view that journal editors and their associates are drawn from each research community precisely because they are judged to be best able to reflect the research interests and standards of their respective groups at the time.
of their selection. But clearly, the editorial process, like so many other social processes, is both a cause and an effect of the type and quality of p-c research that ultimately gets published.

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