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Revealing the Pathway from Couple Relationship to Children's Social Competence:
The Role of Life Stress, Parenting Self-Efficacy, and Effective Parenting

by

Ayumi Nagase

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

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in

Education

in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Susan D. Holloway
Professor Laura Sterponi
Professor Jennifer Johnson-Hanks

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Abstract

Revealing the Pathway from Couple Relationship to Children's Social Competence: The Role of Life Stress, Parenting self-efficacy and Effective Parenting

by

Ayumi Nagase

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Susan D. Holloway, Chair

Parenting is an intricate matter influenced by multiple processes and elements within the family. Drawing from the earlier work, I this study aims to examine the effects of supportive couple relationships on mothers' ability to engage in competent parenting, which helps promote children's self-regulation development conducted comparative path analysis with a sample of 335 mothers drawn from a larger study of families of first- and second-grade children in public elementary schools in an urban school district in Northern California (n=130) and in the Tokyo metropolitan area (n=157) and 58 teachers (38 teachers in the United States, 20 teachers in Japan). The results indicated a consistency in the association between mothers' satisfaction in couple relationships and their parenting competence across groups in both the United States and Japan. The result also indicated the uniqueness in the couple relationship-parenting competence link across the two nations, especially in terms of the domains of parenting vulnerable to couple relationship quality and its effects upon parenting self-efficacy. The benefits that supportive couple relationships project onto child rearing may be a universal feature of family life. Nevertheless, the values and practices specific to various cultural models of parenting determine which domains of parenting are vulnerable to the quality of couple relationships.

The purpose of the present research is to uncover the cross-national generalizability and differences of the psychological process that links supportive couple to mothers' psychological well-being and parenting competence.

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Title: Revealing the Pathway from Couple Relationship to Children's Social Competence

Introduction

When children begin formal education, a journey of new knowledge and experience awaits both them and their families. This significant developmental milestone nourishes academic, physical, social, and emotional growth. The impact of this particular transitional period on later development has been explored by developmental researchers such as Entwisle and Alexander (1998). Based on their studies and others' work, they argue that the academic and behavioral difficulties experienced by many young students are traceable to adjustment problems and patterns of underachievement that begin in the first years of formal schooling.

Among several important developmental indicators, educational researchers and policy makers have begun to recognize children's self-regulation skills as core capacities necessary for a successful transition to elementary school (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2007). Decades of further research on the long-term repercussions of early development on later achievement continue to show that key factors for successful or unsuccessful transition to schooling are children's self-regulatory skills – the process of exercising control over one's body and mind through self-monitoring and acting so as to obtain desired outcomes (Kopp, 1982) – during the early elementary school years. Consequently, there has been a robust amount of research on factors that contribute to children's self-regulation development. One such critical element is the family context, which provides young children with opportunities to engage in social interaction and establish a set of skills necessary for social competence.

In particular, research in the United States has consistently evinced a significant association between parents' couple relations and the child's self-regulation across developmental stages (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Harrist & Ainslie, 1998). For instance, satisfying couple relationships characterized by mutual understanding and good communication have been significantly correlated with fewer behavioral problems in toddlers (Jouriles, Pfiffner, & O'Leary, 1988), school-aged children (Shaw & Emery, 1987), and young adolescents (Long, Forehand, Fauber, & Brody, 1987), including fewer depressive symptoms and higher social competence. To summarize, a number of reviews and research findings confirmed a strong association between couple relationship satisfaction and children's general social skills (see Davies & Cummings, 1994; Emery, 1982 for a review).

Despite much attention on the association between couple relationship satisfaction and child development, more recent empirical evidence suggests this link is a far more complex family process than earlier studies suggested (Cox & Paley, 1997). In fact, there is still debate about exactly what mediates the association between couple relationship satisfaction and children's self-regulatory skills. Is it because mothers engage in competent parenting as a result of having a sense of control over their children when they get along with their spouses? What happens to their psychological well-being and their thinking about their children and parenting when they are not satisfied with their spouses? These empirical questions have not been fully tested in the field of couple relationships and parenting (Holden, 2010; Maccoby, 1992). Additionally, we still have limited knowledge in terms of whether a similar account is applicable in diverse sociocultural contexts (Belsky & Fearon, 2004; Fincham & Beach, 2010; Grych, 2002).

Addressing this gap in the literature, the question is *how do couple relationships and support affect mothers' parenting behaviors and child development across divergent social*

contexts? To examine this question, the present study used data collected in the two countries to explore the cross-national generalizability and differences of supportive couple relationships as a key contributor to mothers' parenting competence and child development. In particular, my first study goal was to examine the effects on mothers' ability to engage in competent parenting and children's self-regulation development when they are satisfied with their spousal relationships. To uncover the process of the linkage, the present study looked at the mediating role of mothers' psychological states: life stress and parenting self-efficacy. Moreover, this research aimed to expand the traditional notion of the linkage from couple relations to parenting and child development to include its differences across divergent sociocultural contexts, with a specific focus on mothers in the United States and Japan.

Literature Review:

The Effects of Couple Relationship Satisfaction on Parenting and Child Development

The parenting and child socialization literature defines the process of socialization as the manner by which a child, through education, training, observation, and experience, acquires skills, motives, attitudes, and behaviors that are required for successful adaptation to a family and a culture (Ladd & Pettit, 2002; Spera, 2005). Within the socialization literature, ample research has examined linkages among the child's home environment (i.e., family), the school environment that surrounds the child, and child socialization development (Ryand & Adams, 1995; Scaringello, 2002). Within these two developmental contexts, children interact with and are influenced by multiple socialization agents, including their parents, teachers, and peers (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Parke & Buriel, 1998; Wentzel, 1999).

In particular, middle childhood, the developmental period beginning at age five or six, is a particular period of human development in which the interface of the school and home contexts reach critical importance (Holden, 2010; Power & Shanks, 1989). When children begin formal education, a journey of new knowledge and experience awaits their and the family. Formal education is a significant developmental milestone that nourishes the academic, physical, social, and emotional growth (Hughes, Pinkerton, & Plewis, 1979; Ladd & Price, 1987; Margetts, 2002). The impact of this transitional period on later development has been explored by developmental researchers such as Entwisle and Alexander (1998) who indicate that the academic and behavioral difficulties experienced by many young students are traceable to adjustment problems and patterns of underachievement that begin in the first years of formal schooling. Decades of further research on the long-term repercussions of early development on later achievement continue to show that key factors for successful or unsuccessful transition to schooling are children's self-regulatory skills – the process of exercising control over one's body and mind through self-monitoring and regulating one's actions so as to obtain desired outcomes (Kopp, 1982) – during the early elementary school years. For instance, Ladd (1990) found evidence that a child's ability to regulate his or her temper during the child's early years of schooling was the most powerful predictor for gains in his or her later academic performance, while poor self-regulatory skills during early school years predicted less favorable perceptions of school, greater school avoidance (e.g., days absent), and poorer performance throughout the school career. As a result, early school years are not only a time of change for children, but also a time of change for the family unit, as it requires parents' adaptation in terms of child rearing (Cowan, Cowan, Albow, Johnson, & Measelle, 2005; Ladd, 1990).

Several theories have organized and investigated family influence on children's self-regulation skills during the middle childhood years (Criss, Shaw, & Ingoldsby, 2003; Grusec & Goodnow, 1994; Harrist & Waugh, 2002; Ladd & Pettit, 2002). This section first reviews the historical and current research on parenting related to child development outcomes during middle childhood. This section is followed by the review of research findings focusing on the couple relationship and its association with parenting practices and child development, drawing from two theories: stress and coping theory and parenting self-efficacy theory. Finally, the literature review considers family life and parenting both in pre-modern and contemporary Japan.

Theory and Research on Child Development and Parenting

For approximately 75 years, studies on the family–school connection have shed light on the impact of particular types of parenting styles (i.e., typologies characterized by child-centeredness and responsiveness) and specific parental practices (e.g., helping with homework, monitoring of activities outside of school) on child academic and social developmental outcomes (Spera, 2005). Within research on parenting, parenting practices are defined as particular behaviors that parents use to socialize their children. Parenting styles are often conceptualized as a nested hierarchy, with broader parenting styles being more general and more inclusive concepts reflecting an approach to child rearing across situations and domains than parenting practices (Baumrind, 1967; Grolnick, 2003; Power et al., 2013). However, scholars such as Darling and Steinberg (1993) argue that these two constructs need to be distinguished from one another, because general parenting styles are a function of the parents' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, and they are reflection of the parents' socialization goals as well as the emotional climate in which specific parenting practices are embedded (Grolnick, 2003; Power et al., 2013; Spera, 2005). Rather than focusing on specific parenting practices (such as breast versus bottle feeding or physical punishment versus time out), researchers have focused on understanding variations in the general parenting approach, often referred to as parenting styles or dimensions, and its association with the child development outcomes (Grolnick, 2003; Power et al., 2013; Spera, 2005). In the typical study on parenting, trained observers spend considerable time interviewing or observing parents (or sometimes read through large files of material on parents) and rate parents on general trait terms (e.g., strict, accepting, harsh) using Likert scales.

Researchers from the 1930s through the 1960s, employing a variety of theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, used various factor analytic methods to identify the major parenting dimensions, based on observer ratings of general parenting characteristics (Baldwin, 1948; Becker, et al., 1962; Sears, Maccoby, & Levin, 1957; Shaefer, 1959; Symonds, 1939). During the last several decades, researchers have shifted their focus to parenting questionnaires consisting of multiple self-report parenting items, or ratings of parents drawn from observations, which have been factor analyzed. Factor analyses of the data from these primarily European-American, middle-class samples typically identified two dimensions of parent behavior: the quality of parent-child interactions (i.e., warmth or responsiveness) and the nature of parental discipline (i.e., control or demandingness). Investigators differ in how they define these terms. Regardless of what they are called, they appear to be reliably tapping two parenting dimensions (Grolnick, 2003).

Warmth or responsiveness is defined as parental behavior that intentionally fosters individuality, self-regulation, and self-assertion in their children. Aspects of parental warmth or responsiveness include the extent to which parents are sensitive toward and supportive of their children (Baumrind, 1991; Holden, 2010; Spera, 2005). In particular, parenting characterized as

showing warmth is defined as affection for and positive interaction with the child and emotional availability to the child's needs, and it entails the extent to which the parents express warmth toward the child, and enjoy their role as parents and the time spent with the child. Parenting that is characterized as warm and responsive is believed to be an important predictor for a child's social adjustment, as evidenced, for example, by higher self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967) and the child's higher capability to regulate his or her temper when needed. In contrast, the opposite end of parental warmth is often characterized as rejection and hostility (Grolnick, 2003; Schaefer, 1959; Pulkkinen, 1982). Such negative parenting, characterized as rejection or hostility, has been found to impede child social and academic development (Baumrind, 1971; 1989).

Control or demandingness is referred to as discipline and as the teaching of rules and standards that parents impose on their children as a way of integrating them into the family and the society (Grolnick, 2003; Spera, 2005). A demanding parent assists a child in adapting his or her behaviors to socially accepted norms and in developing social skills. Aspects of parental demandingness or control include direct confrontation, providing supervision and direction, and enacting disciplinary actions in response to the child's misbehavior as a means of nurturing the child's maturity and autonomy (Baumrind, 1991; Holden, 2010; Spera, 2005; Power et al., 2013). Thus, effective parental control pertains to setting limits for the child, consistently enforcing rules, and nurturing the child's ability to be accountable for his or her misconduct by providing structures and choices (Grolnick, 2003; Grych, 2002). Studies have shown that firm control, defined as the degree to which the parent consistently attempts to regulate and monitor the child's behavior, is an effective discipline strategy (Grolnick, 2003).

In contrast, ineffective parental control is often associated with permissive parenting (i.e., imposing fewer restrictions and less rule enforcement, permitting extreme independence, and accepting the child's impulses, even when inappropriate) and inconsistent parenting (i.e., exhibiting inconsistency in responding to the child's behavior and in expressing emotions toward the child). These forms of parenting are considered limited in their effects on children internalizing rules and structures (Grolnick, 2003), and they are associated with lower social and emotional skills in children, such as exhibition of low impulse control, increased aggression, and lower self-regulation (Feldman & Wentzel, 1990; Wentzel, Feldman, & Weinberger, 1991).

These two parenting dimensions, when combined, produced four fundamental parenting styles, established by Baumrind (1978; 1989). Based on her longitudinal research, she argued that the authoritative parenting style, which is universally recognized as the most optimal of the four, is the result of parents who are high in responsiveness and high in demandingness. These parents have high maturity demands (e.g., expectations for achievement) for their children but nurture the development of autonomy and maturity through induction (i.e., explanations of their behavior and its consequence) and bidirectional communication. Authoritative parenting is frequently associated with positive child outcomes such as emotional stability, adaptive patterns of coping, and children's ability to regulate their tempers (Baumrind, 1978; 1989).

In contrast, authoritarian parenting is characterized as low in responsiveness but high in demandingness. Authoritarian parents insist on obedience, use punishment, and typically exhibit little warmth toward their children. The third style, known as permissive parenting, is when parents are high in responsiveness but low in demandingness. Permissive parents provide their children with very little guidance and direction, and tend to be excessively flexible in their expectations for their children's level of maturity and their tolerance of misbehavior. The fourth style, uninvolved or neglectful parenting, is the consequence of low responsiveness and low demandingness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Mandara, 2003; Power et al., 2013). In over 40 years

of research, the parenting styles identified by Baumrind, and elaborated on by Maccoby and Martin, are still the most studied parenting styles with the strongest empirical basis (Grolnick, 2003; Power et al., 2013; Spera, 2005).

History: The Development of the Study on the Pathways from Couple Relationship to Parenting Competence

Research has established particular parenting behaviors that foster children's competence. Nevertheless, there are individual differences in how parents raise their children. Recent research on parenting and child socialization has made much progress in identifying the determinants of parenting that affect children's socialization, aiming to identify origins of individual differences in parenting (Belsky & Jaffee, 2006; Holden, 2010; Stolz, 1967), and factors promoting or obstructing growth-promoting parenting (Belsky & Jaffee, 2006; Belsky & Vondra, 1988).

Within the literature on determinants of parenting, one of the well-acknowledged findings is the link between discord in parents' couple relationship and less competent parenting. Until the early 1980s, investigation of couple relationships, parenting, and child development was spread across a variety of disciplines and subfields (Aldous, 1977; Belsky & Fearon, 2004). Family sociologists were interested in how couple relationships changed across the family life cycle as families moved from the dating stage, to that of having the first child, to that of raising young children and adolescents, to the "empty nest" period when children moved away from their family of origin (Anderson, Russell, & Schumm, 1983; Burr, 1970; Duvall, 1971). In the case of developmental psychology, the principal focus of inquiry was the influence of couple relations on parenting, rather than the investigation of changes in couple relationships (e.g., Belsky, 1981, 1984; Feldman, Nash, & Aschenbrenner, 1982; Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1984).

Eventually, these lines of inquiry merged to foster a multidisciplinary investigation of the complexity of the family system, that is, the interrelation of the couple relationship, parenting, and child development (Belsky & Fearon, 2004; Grych, 2002). For instance, studies have found that children are more likely to develop antisocial, aggressive, or otherwise problematic behavior when growing up in families in which marital or partner relations are distressed and/or highly conflicted (Belsky & Jaffee, 2006; Cummings & Davies, 2002; Emery, 1989; Fincham, 2003; Grych, 2002; Porter & O'Leary, 1980).

The major conceptual perspective that has dominated research on the connection between couple relationship satisfaction and effective parenting is family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 1997). Drawing from von Bertalanffy's (1950) writings about general systems theory, family systems theory focuses on a family system that is composed of various relations within a family (Grych, 2002). Within this framework, individual family members are considered to be embedded within the larger family system, and this perspective emphasizes that each family member's behaviors and beliefs cannot be truly understood independent of the context of family (Cox & Paley, 1997; Krepper & Lerner, 1985; Sameroff, 1994). Furthermore, causal relations among the elements within one family system are circular rather than linear such that each element both affects and is affected by the other elements.

Family systems theory became prominent in psychology in the 1960s and 1970s, primarily through the clinical work of family therapists, whose work required deep understanding of the origins of child and family dysfunction as a way to formulate clinical interventions. This perspective has become widespread in family and child research and has provided a justification for how couple relationships affect parenting. However, due to the broad

nature of the theory in terms of its hypothesis and operationalization, a relatively a small number of studies have directly conducted empirical work.

One such study, conducted by Lindahl and her colleagues (Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1997), examined systematic processes of family interaction prior to and five years after the birth of a child. In this study, the authors assessed longitudinally whether couples' negative affect before the birth of a child would predict conflict as well as diminished affective quality within the family relationships five years later. They observed 25 couples before the birth of a child and five years later, focusing on couple interaction as well as parent-child interaction. Consistent with the hypothesis, the results showed a significant association between how couples regulated their negative affect early on in their couple relationship formulation and the quality of the couple relationship five years later. They also found the association between parenting and the present couple relationship to be significant but weak. However, given their research design, the study did not necessarily provide explanation of the *process* by which the couple relationship is related to parenting quality.

Reflecting on the limitation of earlier studies and the empirical progress that utilized family systems theory, researchers' attention shifted to testing the hypothesis using both a more specific theory and influential factors that were clearly operationalized (Belsky, 1981, 1984; Engfer, 1988; Erel & Burman, 1995; Grych, 2002; Levendosky, Huth-Bock, Shaprio, & Semel, 2003). Understanding the process by which the quality of couple relationships influences parenting nevertheless depends on the conceptual models on which studies rely. Amongst several dominant conceptual models in the extant research, I focused on two theories: stress and coping theory and self-efficacy theory.

Uncovering the Pathway from Couple Relationship to Parenting and Child Development: Stress and Coping Theory

Stress and coping theory has been used to uncover a psychological process by which positive and supportive couple relationships promote positive parenting outcomes by decreasing maternal stress. According to stress and coping theory, originally established by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), *stress* is defined as a complex pattern of reactions resulting from a relationship between humans and their environment, whereas *stressor* is defined as external demands that people face in the daily lives (Folkman & Lazarus, 1988).

Stress arises when the individual reacts to stressors seen as endangering his or her well-being or exceeding the individual's ability to cope (Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongis, & Gruen, 1986). This is followed by the stage when the individual makes a cognitive appraisal, the process by which the individual strives to understand the meaning of a given stressor. In particular, cognitive appraisal is defined as the significance or the meaning of the event to the individual (Folkman et al., 1986). There are two particular forms of appraisal: primary appraisal and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal refers to one's judgments of what kind of impact a certain event has on one's emotional well-being. At this stage, the appraisal is primarily about the nature of the event; if one sees the event as stressful, one assesses coping resources and options available to help cope with the event, including physical, social, psychological, and material resources. This stage – secondary appraisal – is also the time period when the individual assesses his or her potential capabilities to gain control of the event, either through assessing what type of strategy would produce a better outcome (outcome expectancy) or assessing whether one has the abilities to conduct the strategy necessary to produce the expected outcome (efficacy expectancy).

Additionally, scholars such as Cohen and McKay (1984) posit that interpersonal relationships are critical to protect one from the potentially negative effects of a stressful event, and that support from such relationships can take many different forms, such as instrumental, informational, and/or emotional assistance (House & Kahn, 1985), emotional and/or tangible support (e.g., Caplan, 1974; Cobb, 1976; Cohen & McKay, 1984), and social, emotional, and/or structural support (Thoits, 1985). Drawing from Cohen and McKay's theory, studies have confirmed the importance of having support from "significant others" such as family members and friends. In particular, O'Brien and DeLongis (1997) state that coping may be facilitated, constricted, or interfered with depending on the available support (O'Brien & DeLongis, 1997).

Application to the study on the linkage between couple relationships and parenting.

Consistent with broader work on stress and coping, research has also identified that positive ties between family members, especially those between spouses, serve as a source of emotional and practical support (Belsky, 1984; Crnic & Acevedo, 1995; Cohen & Weissman, 1984; Floyd, Gilliom, & Costigan, 1998). Satisfying and supportive couple relationships enable parents to confront challenges related to child rearing together, and such relationships help them to maintain positive parenting practices. In turn, they are able and motivated to engage in more positive and growth-promoting parenting practices (Floyd et al., 1998; Stoneman et al., 1989; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2007). In contrast, discord in couple relationships is a source of subjective distress that saps parental resources, energy, and attention, and thus interferes with parents' ability to be attuned to and responsive toward their children (Belsky, 1984; Cox et al., 1989; Crnic & Acevedo, 1995; Grych, 2002).

Application of the stress and coping model was a significant contribution to the field because it was the beginning of using empirical examination to test the effects of couple relationship quality on parenting that promotes children's development. For instance, Cox and her colleagues (1989) examined an association between conflictive couple relationships and diminished parenting competence. They surveyed and observed 38 married couples and their interactions with their children. The study results indicated that mothers who reported emotional closeness with their partners were more likely to show warmth and sensitivity when interacting with their children. The study also found that mothers who rated higher on emotional closeness with their partners reported lower levels of stress and higher levels of parenting competence. Thus, when parents have a conflictual or nonsupportive couple relationship, they are more emotionally drained and may experience a "diminished capacity to parent." Marital frustrations may result in the "emotional unavailability" of one or both parents (Newberger, 1988; Dunn, 1988; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). This lowers parents' capacity to respond sensitively to children's needs and to maintain effective control of children (Block, Block, & Morrison, 1981; Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990; Floyd et al., 1998; Wilson & Gottman, 2002).

Accordingly, findings by Cox and her colleagues support the hypothesis that families that manifest more satisfaction and less conflict in the couple relationship evince more warmth in parent-child interaction and more effective parental control, in addition to reporting lower levels of stress. However, several questions remained: what is the causal association between the two factors, and what does the longitudinal relationship look like? To investigate these questions, Floyd, Gilliom, and Costigan (1998) surveyed and observed 79 couples with school-aged children with mental retardation. They found that parents who were highly satisfied with sharing parenting tasks with their partners reported less stress and exhibited greater maternal warmth, less reliance on permissive parenting, and more supportive parenting (providing praise and

affection rather than using physical aggression or verbal attack). Moreover, they found that mothers' couple relationship satisfaction predicted their future parenting effectiveness. Their longitudinal analysis revealed that parents with lower couple relationship satisfaction demonstrated less sensitivity to their children two years after the initial assessment, and they reported higher stress. Although the characteristics of the sample (parents of a child with mental retardation) limit the generalizability of the findings, the researchers' careful conceptualizations of parenting and longitudinal examination are notable. Later research consistently supports that conflictive couple relationships predict negativity in later parenting, for example, permissive parental control (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Fauber et al., 1990; Lindahl & Malik, 1999; Vandewater & Lansford, 1998), and a disruption in parental/maternal warmth (Belsky, Youngblade, Rovine, & Volling, 1991; Cox et al., 1989; Engfer, 1988; Belsky & Jaffee, 2006).

The integration of stress theory into the research illuminated a process by which, when parents get along with each other, mothers exhibit more competent parenting because they experience lower feelings of life stress. Nevertheless, most of the extant studies have focused on the effects of the spousal relationship on mothers' mental health, whereas very few studies have looked at its positive impact on mothers' perceptions of their children and their child rearing. Although the attention of the powerful effects of parents' self-perceptions on their parenting behaviors has been widely acknowledged since the mid-1980s (Holden, 2010; Maccoby, 2000), we still have limited knowledge of its role in the psychological process that links couple relations to parenting and children's self-regulation development, and more specifically, on *what happens to mothers' thinking about their children and parenting when they are not satisfied with their spouses*. Can mothers engage in competent parenting as a result of having a sense of control over their children when they get along with their spouses? Addressing this gap in the literature, the present study aims to examine the extent that couple relations matter to understand parenting competence and children's growth by testing the mediating role of mothers' perceptions of their parenting – parenting self-efficacy –.

Uncovering the Pathway from Couple Relationship to Parenting and Child Development: Parenting Self-Efficacy

Drawing from larger self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997; 2006), parenting self-efficacy is defined as parents' belief that they are able to exert a positive influence on a child's optimal development and create an environment that fosters a child's growth (Coleman & Karakker, 1998; Jones & Prinz, 2005). In particular, decades of research support that parenting self-efficacy has an important role in mediating the linkage from difficult life conditions to an individual's behavioral competence – that is, protecting oneself from negative experiences, such as parenting stress, anxiety, and challenging life conditions, including poverty (Coleman & Karakker, 1998; Jones & Prinz, 2005). However the relationship among a supportive couple relationship, parenting self-efficacy, and parenting competence is yet only suggestive because of the limited number of studies (Merrifield & Gamble, 2012; Sturge-Apple, Davies, Cicchetti, & Cummings, 2009).

In this section, I introduce the evolution of parenting self-efficacy theory and research as well as relevant empirical work. Then, I review the literature on the association between a satisfying couple relationship and parenting self-efficacy, and how this association relates to parenting competence.

Parenting self-efficacy. Over the years, theories and research have identified the role of parents' perceived parenting self-efficacy as a powerful construct that determines the

effectiveness of parenting and child social adjustment (Coleman & Karakker, 1998; Jones & Prinz, 2005). Parenting self-efficacy is defined as parents' belief that they are able to exert a positive influence on the child's optimal development and to create an environment that fosters a child's growth (Coleman & Karakker, 1998; Jones & Prinz, 2005). Established by Albert Bandura (1977; 1986; 2006), the construct of parenting self-efficacy is drawn from social cognitive theory. In his book *Social Foundations of Thought and Action* (1986), Bandura argues that people proactively act upon a given challenge when they maintain "human agency" (Bandura, 1986), which is the state characterized as self-organizing, self-regulating, and self-reflecting (Bandura, 2006). As a result, having a high efficacious belief exerts a positive impact on one's performance by enhancing and sustaining motivation, endurance, and emotional well-being.

Underscoring the importance of social behavior and the social context in which a given task occurs, Bandura argues that self-efficacy beliefs need to be differentiated across contexts or domains within one's life for more accurate operationalization and measurement. For instance, one person may have high efficacy in one particular domain (establishing good communication with business clients), and may have low efficacy beliefs in another domain (parenting one's children without being emotionally aroused). Also, people may differ in the areas in which they are capable of cultivating their efficacy beliefs as well as in the levels to which their self-efficacy beliefs develop as a result of accomplishing tasks. Drawing from this notion of "domain-specificity" in terms of self-efficacy beliefs, self-efficacy is usually conceptualized within narrower focuses based on specific contexts and roles, rather than being treated as a global notion of self-belief. Drawing from this argument, parenting self-efficacy is a self-efficacy belief that is specifically applied to the parenting context.

Couple relationship as an antecedent for parenting self-efficacy. Bandura also argued that self-efficacy beliefs can be developed from four sources; social influences, prior successful experiences, vicarious reinforcement, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997). In particular, Bandura proposes that development of self-efficacy beliefs requires a good relationship with influential others (e.g., spouse), in which one can gain acknowledgement of competencies (Belsky, 1984; Dumka et al., 2002). Thus, a supportive interpersonal relationship is identified as an important predictor for self-efficacy.

In the parenting context, the theory supports a mediating role of self-efficacy beliefs in the associations between environmental factors (e.g., family network, couple relationship, and family SES) and one's performance (e.g., parenting competence) (Dumka et al., 2010). Insufficiency of social support or a deteriorating neighborhood may impede parenting self-efficacy, which in turn, undermines parents' ability to support the child's optimal development. Similarly, an unsatisfying couple relationship proximately impedes parents' capability to engage in competent parenting, as it saps their agentic beliefs about themselves as parents.

Among a handful of studies that use parenting self-efficacy to examine the linkage from couple relationship satisfaction to parenting competence or child adjustment (Grych, 2002; Fincham & Osborne, 1993), extant research generally supports a significantly positive association between couple relationship and parenting self-efficacy (Dumka et al., 2002; Floyd et al., 1998; Merrifield & Gamble, 2012; Suzuki et al., 2009). In contrast, research indicates that conflictive couple relationships cause diminished parenting self-efficacy (Elder et al., 1995).

For instance, Dumka et al. (2002) examined the extent to which couple relationship disputes contributed to adolescent conduct problems indirectly by diminishing parenting self-efficacy. They conducted surveys and interviews with 161 two-parent families of seventh- and

eighth-grade children randomly selected from schools in low-income, inner-city school districts. In this study, the researchers were particularly interested in the relationship among these constructs: the degree to which a partner perceived couple problems in six selected areas (money, household tasks/responsibilities, friends, sex, religious matters, and relations with family/relatives), parenting alliance within a couple (i.e., sharing responsibilities for childrearing tasks, maintaining constructive communication), and parenting self-efficacy. The authors also asked the participating parents to rate their children's conduct problems and delinquency.

Researchers' Structural Equation Modeling analysis revealed that a strong parenting alliance significantly contributed to higher parenting self-efficacy. Mothers' parenting self-efficacy was also negatively related to adolescent conduct problems. Results suggest that maternal perceptions of low parenting alliance and low maternal parenting self-efficacy are salient risk factors for adolescent conduct problems, and that these two are correlated with one another. Although their analyses revealed that lower levels of parenting self-efficacy is a risk factor for children's developmental outcomes, we still have limited information on whether this finding is generalizable to the parents of younger children, who are likely to spend more time with parents than adolescents do. In addition, because the study analyses did not include any instruments that measured parenting behaviors, it is not clear whether there is an indirect pathway from parenting self-efficacy to child outcome through parenting competence.

Parenting self-efficacy and parenting competence. How is parenting self-efficacy associated with growth-promoting parenting and children's self-regulatory development? Parents' perceptions of their own competence arguably play an important role in developing or maintaining adequate parenting strategies. Self-efficacy theory suggests that parenting self-efficacy beliefs are a major factor in determining which behaviors a parent will attempt and maintain. Moreover, self-efficacy beliefs actively contribute to enhance individuals' performance on challenging parenting tasks by motivating them to persevere in the face of difficulty (Bandura, 1977; Jones & Prinz, 2005; Pierce et al., 2010; Sofronoff & Farbotko, 2002). To summarize, parents with higher parenting self-efficacy beliefs exude confidence in acquiring and exercising effective parenting skills, and conversely, parents with lower self-efficacy beliefs may find it more challenging to parent effectively in the face of challenging parenting situations.

Accumulation of research suggests that when parents believe in their ability to influence their children in a positive way, they are more likely to engage in competent parenting such as showing warmth in the parent-child relationship (deHaan, Prinzie, & Deković, 2009; Gondoli & Silverberg, 1997; Hess, Teti, & Gardner, 2004; Teti & Gelfand, 1991) as well as growth-promoting parental control (Dumka et al., 2010; Elder, Eccles, Ardel, & Lord, 1995; Shumow & Lomax, 2002), which in turn promotes children's better social adjustment (Ardelt & Eccels, 2001; Coleman & Karakker, 1998; Jones & Prinz, 2005).

For instance, Teti and Gelfand (1991) investigated the relationship among mothers' self-efficacy beliefs, their parenting behaviors, level of depression, and perceptions of infant temperamental difficulty. They conducted surveys, and observed mother-child interaction with a sample of 86 mothers (48 clinically depressed and 38 nondepressed mothers) of 3- to 13-month-old infants. The study found a significantly positive relationship between having higher self-efficacious beliefs and mothers' parenting competence, especially their capability to exhibit sensitiveness and warmth in mother-child interactions. This finding offers insight into the powerful association between parenting self-efficacy and maternal warmth and acceptance. Following the study by Teti and Gelfand, other studies based on parents with older children showed the link between higher parenting self-efficacy beliefs and parenting competence

(Dumka, Gonzales, Wheeler, & Millsap, 2010; Elder, Eccles, Ardel, & Lord, 1995; Shumow & Lomax, 2002).

Moving beyond reporting a simple correlation between parenting self-efficacy and parenting competence, more recent research attempts to uncover the direction of the longitudinal causal relationship between the two variables. Current work, such as research by Dumka et al. (2010) revealed that mothers' parenting self-efficacy significantly predicted their later parental practices. Drawing on a sample of mothers and their adolescent children (11 to 14 years old at the first data collection) in 189 families, the study aimed to test the causal association among mothers' parenting self-efficacy, their positive control parenting practices, and the adolescent child's conduct problems over time. They measured family socioeconomic status, mothers' positive control practices, and parenting self-efficacy. Families were interviewed four times: (a) when adolescents were in the first semester of seventh grade (Time 1, $N = 189$), (b) six months later at the end of seventh grade (Time 2, $n = 169$), (c) another six months later during the second semester of eighth grade (Time 3: one-year follow-up, $n = 168$), and (d) a year later during the second semester of ninth grade (Time 4: two-year follow-up, $n = 160$). Additionally, they had both mothers and their children's classroom teachers evaluate the targeted child's conduct problem.

The results of the analysis (a cross-lagged panel design) indicated that after accounting for reciprocal relationships between parenting self-efficacy and positive parental control, parenting self-efficacy predicted future positive control practices rather than the reverse. In other words, having high parenting self-efficacy causes mothers' future positive parental control practices, which in turn leads to less frequency in adolescents' conduct problems. In contrast, when mothers have lower parenting self-efficacy, mothers engage in less competent parenting over time, especially showing more permissiveness and more inconsistency in their later parental control.

Based on the extant work, results from parenting self-efficacy literature indicate its positive, mediating role in the association between satisfying couple relationships and competent parenting that may promote children's socialization processes, especially on two parenting dimensions: warmth and control. However, none of the studies has examined the complete model to uncover the psychological process whereby couple relationship satisfaction causes higher parenting self-efficacy beliefs and parenting competence, resulting in children's higher self-regulation skills. Although we have separate pieces of empirical evidence to support the hypothesized path, our empirical knowledge of the complete picture among these variables is still limited.

To fill in this critical gap in existing literature, the present study aims to test the mediating role of parenting self-efficacy to illuminate the pathway from couple relationship satisfaction to parenting and development of children's abilities to regulate themselves. This approach will offer an important insight into our understanding of how a satisfying couple relationship benefits mothers' self-perceptions and parenting, as well as mitigating their stress.

Conclusion

This section presented the historical trajectory of larger parenting research, followed by a description of the evolution of research on the couple relationship as a potential determinant for parenting quality. Regarding a conceptual process that may explain the linkage, two relevant theories were discussed: stress and coping theory and parenting self-efficacy theory. Stress and coping theory explains the association among couple relationship quality, parenting competence,

and child development via the claim that parents' stress due to conflictive couple relationships is highly associated with a wide array of less growth-promoting child rearing strategies, such as harsher parenting practices, and a reduction in warmth and responsiveness in parent-child interactions. Nevertheless, research based on stress and coping theory only partially explains the psychological process, due to its focus on mothers' general perceptions of their lives rather than those of parenting per se. In particular, the earlier work within this theory rarely offers an explanation to the question of "what happens to mothers' thinking about their children and parenting when they are not satisfied with their spouses?" In order to fill the gap in the literature, the integration of parenting self-efficacy as a potential mediator was proposed as a direction to future studies.

Literature Review: Mothers, Family Life and Culture – The Case of Japan

Although earlier work suggests the possibility of measuring parenting constructs and psychosocial variables across nations, does it also mean that child rearing is universal across the different sociocultural contexts? In what way are child rearing and parents' values situated in histories, communities, or social processes (Johnson-Hanks, 2006)? These questions drive another goal of the study: whether the psychological process that links couple relations to parenting competence and child development is generalizable to families outside of the United States. Thus, the present study is a unique analysis in its attention to cross-national generalizability as well as to the uniqueness of the family processes in the United States and Japan. In particular, the study aimed to analyze individual differences within each nation by testing the potential mediator role of two psychological variables: maternal stress and maternal parenting self-efficacy in the two countries.

In the following, I will focus on Japan, beginning with reviewing classic as well as more recent literature on family life and spousal relationships. Then, the following section will present some theoretically relevant themes of parenting and point out possible differences between Japan and the United States, with a caution against an ethnocentric bias in theorizing about parenting and parent-child relations.

Marriage and Mothers' Roles in Japan: Past and Present

Division of labor within the Japanese household is deeply rooted in the social script of parenting, and the daily and practical parenting tasks and responsibilities are often viewed as the women's role rather than a shared role (Ochiai, 1994; Tsuya & Bumpass, 2004; Yoda, 2000). During the last half of the twentieth century, scholars and media often associated Japanese mothers with their strong commitment to the roles of mother and good wives (Holloway, 2010; Ochiai, 1994; Tsuya, 2002). In this prevalent image, Japanese women were depicted as marrying young and then leaving the labor market to devote their full energy to raising their children and supporting their breadwinner husbands.

In recent decades, Japanese society has changed in terms of women's roles outside of the family. The roles of husbands and wives are also in transition, resulting in the need to change the structural arrangements surrounding family life. At the end of World War II, the average Japanese woman bore 4.5 children in her life time. As of 2009, the birth rate has plunged as low as 1.26 (Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare, 2011), and results of the government-led attempts to motivate young people to have children are not promising (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013; Japan Institute for Labor Training Policy and Training, 2008). Given the tensions that Japan has gone

through between persistent gender role beliefs and rapid modernization, what would Japanese mothers' experiences be like in terms of their satisfaction with their marriage, parenting, child growth, and their mental health?

Indeed, the declining birth rate is a powerful indicator of the obstacles and challenges that mothers and mothers-to-be are facing in contemporary Japan (Nagai & Matsuda, 2007; Rosenbluth, 2007; Tachibanaki & Sakota, 2013). Data from opinions and surveys indicated that Japanese women's perceptions regarding the role of mother and wife are ambivalent (Holloway, 2010; Kashiwagi, 2012; Ohinata, 2000). According to the Better Life Index survey, reported in 2012 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the overall life satisfaction score was 6.1 for Japanese women, ranking them 21st among the 36 participating countries (OECD, 2014; Tienfenbach & Kohlbacher, 2013). Compared to other countries in the West and in other Asian countries, it is also well known that more Japanese women see parenting as a hard task. Holloway (2010, p. 6) cites a comparative survey conducted by National Women's Education Center in 2005. The survey result indicated that when asked whether they enjoyed parenting, only 46% of Japanese mothers agreed, compared to 67% of parents in the United States. Some scholars such as Kashiwagi (1998; 2011) and Makino et al. (2010) emphasize that one of the most serious problems facing families in contemporary Japan is intense social pressure toward mothers to take the entire responsibility for childcare, often called child rearing neurosis (*ikuji fuan*).

History of family life, marriage, and mothers' roles. Nevertheless, the prevalent idea that mothers are the best, sole primary caregiver for their children is not the traditional one. Rather, historians and scholars in other social science fields emphasize that it is a product of the industrialization and modernization in Japan. They argue that in premodernized Japanese society, the more prevalent idea was to see children as members of a larger community. Moreover, family structure in this premodern period was more unstable, reflecting the fact that divorce was common, especially among families with less prestige or those residing in suburbs (Uno, 1999). As a result, all the active members in the community took the responsibility of child rearing and discipline (Kamada et al., 1990; Matsuda, 2008). According to historical accounts, in families among wealthier households, such as those of feudal lords (*samurai*), young married women were not entrusted with the care of their children who were entitled to inherit the family name and its wealth. Under this family structure, women's tasks were mainly taking care of their husbands and mothers-in-law, whereas fathers, in their roles as symbolic, authoritarian figures of the household, were expected to take the full responsibility of training and educating their children (see Uno, 1999 for an overview of Japanese family history).

With a strong emphasis on passing on the inheritance of the eternal prosperity of the clan to their descendants, husbands and wives were not viewed as romantic partners with equal partnership, and typically marriages were arranged so that the union would maximize the family's capability to maintain the social status and prosperity of the household, according to more contemporary work on Japanese family history (Ochiai, 1994; Tsuya & Bumpass, 2004; Watanabe, 1994).

During the Meiji Restoration circa 1868, a transformation of the family roles occurred, coinciding with the separation between the work and home sphere (Kojima, 1996; Jones, 2010; Ueno, 2009). As Japan went through a massive transition to a modern, democratic state, government officials sought to depart from the old legacy of its feudal period by reviving the centrality of the family unit. By using the family as a metaphor for the relationship between the

nation and its citizens, the government's emphasis was to establish the national state based on a patriarchal system, and to promote the idea that men's responsibility should be to support the family financially and to contribute to the national economic growth by being loyal to their company (Muta, 1996; Ochiai, 1989). Subsequently, women's normative duties were increasingly defined as staying home to take care of family needs and their children. The term *good wives, wise mothers (ryosai kenbo)* was also coined at this time, leaving women in the role of those obliged to perform the caring and household tasks, which were considered less valued economically, politically, and socially (Kojima, 1996; Ueno, 2009).

The idea of mothers as the ones who are primed to perform child rearing and household tasks was even more emphasized later on. In the early 1960s, the Prime Minister Hayato Ikeda introduced various policies to promote women's role as homemaker, and commissioned several reports about the importance of early education and the maternal-child bond during the first three years of life. Feminist historians argue that government officials and the mass media in that time period employed ideological devices to convey a strong and symbolic image of motherhood to the young workers who were leaving their hometowns for life in Tokyo and other big cities (Kayama, 2010). Incidentally, Japanese women came to commonly view "marriage as a job" (Vogel, 1996) by seeing marital relationships as detached from romance, partnership, and fulfillment of emotional needs (Kashiwagi, 2013; Tachibanaki & Sakota, 2013).

Present: transformation and continuity. For a brief period between the 1980s and the early 1990s, gender role constraints and a number of restrictions on women's involvement in the workplace seemed to give way to greater equality between men and women, primarily due to the ever-booming economy. Young women were increasingly pursuing higher education. Compared to the previous decade, fewer women expressed a sense of fulfillment in the role of full-time housewife, and more sought to remain employed even after marrying and having children (Kashiwagi, 2008). Furthermore, younger generations of Japanese began to seek more egalitarian marriages based on partnership and fulfillment of individual happiness (Kashiwagi, 2012; Tachibanaki & Sakota, 2013). Subsequently, constant evaluation of marital relationships becomes a new idea in contemporary Japanese marriage, contributing to an increase of social tolerance toward divorce as a last resort. The government and media also took their first steps toward promoting gender equity, not only in the workplace, but also at home, in particular by calling for more men's involvement in childrearing (Shirahase, 2007).

Despite these changes in higher education and in the workplace, patriarchal ideology remains pronounced, maintaining the idea of women's status as subordinate. Women's labor still tends to be discounted compared to men's, and they are regarded as a temporary expediency in the workplace rather than as a permanent commitment. As a result, women's premarital career plans and personal accomplishments tend to be less of a priority for the society at large than their husbands' career (Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Ueno, 2009).

The same patriarchal ideology still continues to underscore the idea that Japanese mothers are primed to feel love for their children and enjoy taking care of the child and other family members (Kashiwagi, 2013; Ohinata, 2013; Ueno, 2009). Reflecting the intensity of Japanese women's caregiving responsibilities within families, the difference between fathers' and mothers' time spent with the child in Japan appeared to be the largest, compared to the United States, Sweden, and Korea (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013). Compared to other countries, Japanese men's involvement in family responsibility is remarkably low. Ranking one of the lowest in OECD countries where the average is 131 minutes, men in Japan spend 59 minutes per day on

domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning or caring for children (OECD, 2014). Moreover, a national survey administered by the Japanese Cabinet office revealed that 80% of surveyed adults believe that mothers should stay home to take care of their children, even as increasing numbers of women expressed a desire to remain in the workplace (Holloway & Nagase, 2014; Kashiwagi, 2011).

Nevertheless, it is possible to speculate that even women go through a dilemma regarding the importance of the two opposing social forces – social transformation in women’s roles on the one hand, and continuity in terms of what they are expected to do to sustain satisfying couple relations on the other hand. It is often reported that Japanese women’s satisfaction with their spousal relationship is significantly lower than men’s; however, women who are not in the workforce tend to have the highest couple relationship satisfaction (Takeuchi, 2007; Maeda, 2004). A similar finding is suggested by other empirical research, with a focus on women’s gender role beliefs rather than employment status per se. Scholars such as Taniguchi and Kauffman (2013) argue that Japanese women’s little expectations regarding their husbands is indeed the cornerstone of sustaining their marital satisfaction and life satisfaction (Fuwa & Tsutsui, 2010; Taniguchi & Kauffman, 2013). Their analysis found that Japanese women have higher life satisfaction and higher couple relationship satisfaction when they have traditional gender role beliefs. In contrast, when women have more liberal gender role beliefs and express their desires to be understood and helped by their partners, they report more anguish and higher disappointment in their spousal relationships and their life in general. Based on these findings, the authors speculate that giving in to the idea of traditional sex-role segregation and having low expectations regarding their husbands remain an important “strategy” for Japanese women to sustain their psychological well-being and their marriage in the Japanese family context.

Similar findings are suggested by studies in the field of Economics. For instance, with a sample size of 6740 participants selected from the Japanese General Social Survey, one analysis found that women were much happier when they embraced the traditional gendered division of labor, especially by opting out from labor force participation and instead staying home for housework (Lee & Ono, 2008).

But does it mean that Japanese mothers can maintain their psychological well-being and abilities to engage in competent parenting even when they have nothing but an unsatisfying level of spousal support and little understanding from their spouses? To address it, a group of scholars supports the powerful effect of spousal relations on what mothers think about parenting in the current Japanese context (Matsuda, 2008; Makino, Watanabe, Funabashi, & Nakano, 2010). Based on the mixed-method, longitudinal work between 1998 and 2003, Matsuda (2008) examined the factors and network that foster mothers’ parenting competence and mental health in Japan. Drawing from the quantitative part of the study followed by a thorough analyses of three nationally representative data sets, his results showed that mothers had less feelings of isolation and less parenting-related anxiety when their spouses spent more time on tasks related to child rearing. And the association was significant even when controlling for the effects of household income and mothers’ educational attainment. In particular, the relationship between men’s family involvement and mothers’ mental health was much stronger for mothers who had a child younger than school age or a child with developmental needs (Matsuda, 2005; 2008).

Other studies also found that a supportive relationship with one’s spouses is important for enhancing mothers’ positive self-perceptions of their parenting competence (Holloway, 2010; Suzuki, Holloway, Yamamoto, & Mindnich, 2009). For instance, Suzuki et al. (2009) investigated the relationship between support available to mothers and their parenting, especially

their self-efficacious beliefs as a parent. While the research focus was on social support, the research included scales to measure mothers' levels of satisfaction with the quantity and quality of child rearing support provided by their husbands, along with measuring parenting self-efficacy and mothers' perceptions of the overall amount of the support that they received from their parents in their own childhood. With a sample of 114 Japanese mothers whose children were in the final year of preschool, the results indicated that when mothers were highly satisfied with the support available from their spouses, they had more self-efficacy beliefs about their own ability to engage in competent parenting.

Consistent with the quantitative study conducted by Suzuki et al., the interview work conducted by Holloway, Suzuki, and their colleagues also indicated an association between partner relationship quality and Japanese mothers' parenting efficacy (Holloway, 2010). Mothers with lower self-efficacious beliefs told the interviewers about their husbands' immaturity, laziness, being estranged from involvement in family, and absence of interest in better communication; in the interviews, the mothers conveyed a sense of sadness, isolation, and in some cases, emotional detachment from their spouses. In contrast, the mothers with higher self-efficacy beliefs consistently told the interviewers stories about how much they trusted their husbands to listen and sympathize when the mothers had experienced conflict with the child or worried about child rearing (Holloway, 2010). This finding is significant because it suggests that couple relationship satisfaction matters a great deal for Japanese mothers, either by enhancing or damping self-efficacious beliefs, which in turn determines effective parenting that promotes children's positive development. In this series of studies by Holloway and her colleagues, they measured neither parenting competence nor indicators for children's social and emotional skills. As a result it remains unclear whether the effects of satisfied couple relationships extend to mothers' efficacious parenting behavior and their children's social and emotional development. Thus, it is important that future studies include measures to quantify mothers' parenting competence and children's social and emotional skills.

As Japanese society goes through a rapid social transformation in terms of its economy as well as women's roles outside of the family, the roles of husbands and wives are also in transition, resulting in the restructuring of family life in Japan. As a result, these "traditional" views of couple relationships are being adapted to meet the evolving norms and contextual demands of contemporary Japanese life (Nagase & Holloway, 2014). In response, even women also face a dilemma as they are asked to choose between the two opposing social forces – social transformation in women's roles and continuity in terms of what they are expected to do to sustain satisfying couple relations. Thus, it is imperative to examine whether Japanese mothers can be relatively satisfied with their spousal relationships, as well as whether mothers in Japan can sustain psychological well-being and their abilities to engage in competent parenting, even when their couple relationship are not even satisfactory.

Parenting in Cross-National Perspectives

As reviewed earlier, previous studies and theories on parenting argue that parenting competence consists of two dimensions, parental warmth and parental control, and that the optimal parent is sensitive to the child's maturity and is also firm, fair, and reasonable. Although these constructs capture parenting behaviors that are effective in promoting children's self-regulation development, there are also complexities that warn us against jumping to a quick, larger generalization. For example, the anthropologist Scheper-Hughes (1992) describes an impoverished community in northeast Brazil, where, if the infant is weak, mothers show little

responsiveness and affection, and sometimes even neglect to the point of the infant's death. Some of these mothers think of their infants as temporary "visitors" to their home. The author writes that in this community, "mother love grows slowly, tentatively, fearfully." These mothers are thus adapting to the harsh environment in which they must raise their children.

As captured in the example in Brazil, in any community, adults have certain beliefs about what it means to parent their children and to be a good person within their community. All parents hope to help their children develop the attributes of a good person, as conceptualized within their community. Scholars such as Quinn and Holland (1987) and Super and Harkness (1997; 2006) argue that parents interact with their children on the basis of cultural values and goals concerning child rearing, so called parental *ethnotheories* or parents' *cultural models* (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Quinn & Holland, 1987; Super & Harkness, 1997; 2006). These cultural models include beliefs and practices that may be passed down from one generation to the next, but that may also be adapted as parents' circumstances change and call for new approaches (Gjerde, 2004; Holloway, 2010).

Even though it is possible to measure the parenting constructs across different communities, in what ways are child rearing and parents' values situated in histories, communities, or social processes (Harkness & Super, 2006; Johnson-Hanks, 2006)? This question drives another goal of the study – to expand traditional notions about the linkage between couple relations and child development, and to examine the similarities and differences across divergent sociocultural contexts. In this section, we review the development of research on culture and parenting, beginning with classic anthropological studies and continuing to the accumulation of socioculturally oriented research within and across several disciplines. We then turn to classic and recent research on parenting in Japan.

Development of research on culture and parenting. In the past few decades, a growing body of research has focused on parenting and child socialization and the profound implications of the social, cultural, institutional, and economic contexts to child development and overall well-being. Recently, the field has expanded into a wide array of disciplines from anthropology and psychology to sociology, although cultural anthropologists were the first to note similarities and differences in parents from various nations (Harkness & Super, 2006; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003; Wisner, 2014; Worthman, 2010).

From 1928 to 1950, researchers conducted early ethnographic work on childhood and personality development (Super & Harkness, 1997; 2006). Scholars such as Sapir (1949), Mead (1928/1930), Benedict (1932/1946), and Malinowski (1927/1929) established the preliminary stage of ethnographic work on childhood and personality development in non-Western cultures. Although their research advanced the methodology and theory of developmental science by rejecting universalist accounts of childhood cognitive development, these scholars tended to view culture as a thing to be represented in artifacts, rituals, and human behaviors, with little connection to how people actually internalized and interpret these aspects psychologically. As a result, it was only later that these scholars shifted their scholarly attention from simple descriptions of various rituals and practices into observing individual's psychological interpretations within the culture being studied (Edwards & Bloch, 2010; Worthman, 2010).

Nevertheless, their research was very influential in shaping later research on human development. Being influenced by Sapir and Spiro, John and Beatrice Whiting and their colleagues began the Six cultural study of socialization in 1954 (Whiting & Whiting, 1975). This research examined the variability in child rearing practices across samples of societies

drawn from various countries by testing hypotheses about the way parenting practices functioned in the production and transmission of culture. The focus of the hypotheses was their consideration of culture as “antecedent” and “consequent” components, linked to each other in a causal sequence, with child rearing at the center in the linkage (Harkness & Super, 2006; Whiting & Whiting, 1975). Based on their cross-cultural studies, they found that the physical ecology, history of each community, and social and political systems formed the structures to which parenting must adapt, and that these structures in turn shaped children’s development, promoting culture-specific patterns of socialization and personality.

By illustrating culturally characteristic beliefs and parenting practices, the Six cultural study was influential to later work that further explored cultural differences in the range of parenting beliefs. Especially, Harkness and Super (1997; 2006) produced one of the most prominent works, in which they introduced the theory of *parental ethnotheories*, a concept that has greatly influenced the field. Social and cultural anthropologists Charles Super and Sara Harkness formulated the concept of “the developmental niche” to see how the child’s microenvironment of daily life is culturally shaped (Harkness & Super, 2006; Super & Harkness, 1997). The developmental niche is conceptualized in terms of three components or subsystems, each of which relates centrally to parents: (1) the physical and social setting of the child’s life, (2) culturally regulated customs and practices of childcare and child rearing, and (3) parental ethnotheories, defined as parents’ cultural belief systems.

Parental ethnotheories are cultural models that parents hold regarding children, families, and themselves as a parents (Super & Harkness, 2006). The term “cultural model,” coming from cognitive anthropology, indicated “pre-supposed, taken-for-granted models and ideas that are widely shared by members of a cultural group (D’Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Quinn & Holland, 1987). Super and Harkness’s view of parental ethnotheories is compatible with the concept of cultural models, and it has a specific emphasis on implicit, taken-for-granted ideas of the “natural” and “right” way to parent a child. Of the three components of the developmental niche, Harkness and Super argue that parental ethnotheories serve as a basis for guiding parenting practices that structure children’s daily lives (Super & Harkness, 2015).

One study using the idea of parental ethnotheories or cultural models compared the middle-class American parents with parents in areas where people have cosleeping customs (Super et al., 1996). They found that parents in the United States hold an ethnotheory on the importance of nurturing independence by putting infants to sleep alone. In contrast, Mayan mothers studied by Morelli et al, (1992) expressed strong disapproval of the American sleeping arrangement as child neglect, and similarly, an Appalachian mother showed disapproval by asking “how can you expect to hold onto them in later life if you begin by pushing them away?” (Abbott, 1992, p. 34). With this perspective, we see how parents’ ethnotheories or cultural models motivate and shape what parents think of as the “proper” way to parent their children.

Also drawing from cross-cultural research on parenting and child development, researchers started to ask whether the traditional conceptualizations of parenting styles, as originally developed by Baumrind, work as well for families outside of European-American heritage (Chao, 1996). In her work, she consistently studied positive relationships between parenting competence, characterized as warmth and control, and child outcomes (e.g., self-regulatory development and academic success) for European-American families (Baumrind, 1967; 1971). Although the positive effects of competent parenting have consistently been demonstrated for European-American families, some scholars such as Chao (1994; 2001) suggested that these effects have not always been found for families in other sociocultural groups.

Other more recent studies that include non-European-American families have also demonstrated the differences in salient aspects and effects of parenting on child as well as adolescent outcomes (Baldwin, Baldwin, & Cole, 1990; Chao, 1994; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987; Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Steinberg, 1996; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

In terms of the Japanese case, it is often pointed out that the Japanese cultural models of child rearing allow researchers to illustrate much sociocultural specificity that has not sufficiently been considered in Western theories of development and socialization (Hess, Kashiwagi, Azuma, Price, & Dickson, 1980; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003). In the following, I will focus on the Japanese mother-child relationships and parenting, which have been studied in cross-cultural research extensively in the last three decades. Using the results of these studies, this section will address some theoretically relevant themes of parenting and possible differences between Japan and the United States, with a caution against an ethnocentric bias in theorizing about parenting and parent-child relations. Drawing from the evolution of research within the field, this study is a cross-national investigation between the United States and Japan, but with recognition of individual differences within each country. In particular, the study aimed to consider individual differences within each nation by testing the potential mediator role of two psychological variables: maternal stress and maternal parenting self-efficacy in the two countries.

Shitsuke: Parenting in Japan

To understand how Japanese children are socialized, it is helpful to know how parents view the basic nature of the child. Some scholars approach this task by connecting societal views about human nature to the religious or philosophical traditions predominant in a particular community (LeVine et al., 1994; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003; Super & Harkness, 2006; Quinn & Holland, 1987). For example, in the United States, it is possible to trace parents' use of corporal punishment to Calvinism and its focus on the notion of original sin. Parents who believe that children are innately predisposed to having a sinful nature think that children need strict discipline to "beat the Devil out of them" (Jolivet, 1997).

In contrast to this forbidding vision of human nature, the Confucian ideology that has deeply affected Japanese society emphasizes the essential moral rectitude of the child. Parents who have been shaped by these Confucian beliefs are more likely to feel the need to nurture these qualities and protect children from the corrupting influence of civilization (Kojima, 1986; Yamamura, 1986). According to Japanese anthropologist Kunio Yanagida (1874-1962), the Japanese of the 19th and 20th centuries believed that a child is closely related to Kami (supernatural beings or spirits) until the seventh birthday. In various Shinto ceremonies, children under seven years old were traditionally given important roles as mediators between the sacred and profane worlds (Kojima, 1989; Hara & Minagawa, 1996).

In the context of such traditional beliefs, children younger than seven years of age are often indulged because an inherently pure and sin-free child is considered to be gradually corrupted by the adult world rather than by indulgence. Nevertheless, this romanticized view of childhood was not something special to the premodern period of Japan. According to Jones' historical account, this notion was even more emphasized by newly rising middle-class families as well as leaders of political and social groups, especially during 1930's, the second wave of Japan's early modernization period (Hirota, 1999; Jones, 2010). In particular, this notion of the pure child became a symbolic emblem for middle-class identity as much as an important locus of attention for the growing empire and its economic growth as a way to produce promising and

productive labor force through children's education (Jones, 2010). These social forces that shaped early modern Japan also further demarcated child rearing and household tasks as women's duty (Kojima, 1996; Ueno, 2009).

Western thinking on child rearing percolated into Japan from the middle of the 19th century, and Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity, and modern science have also influenced Japanese thinking about childhood (Hara & Minagawa, 1996). Nevertheless, the benign view of children's nature gives an insight into our understanding of the mother-child relations in the Japanese context. Using the terms *amae*, defined as the Japanese acceptance of children's dependence on indulgent care from their mothers, Japanese psychiatrist Takeo Doi (1971) argued that a prototype of *amae* begins in mother-child interactions (Behrens, 2004; Doi, 1971). A child craves to be enveloped in maternal warmth through behaviors that are indicative of his or her unwillingness to be separated from the mother, and the mother also enjoys such an exchange. In this context, a child in early childhood is allowed to grow with much freedom and in a nurturing environment (Lebra, 1984; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003).

Studies from the 1960s and beyond suggest that this close, nurturing bond between mother and child is achieved in part by maintaining close physical proximity (sometimes referred to in Japan as "*skinship*") with the infant (Caudill & Plath, 1966). Comparative studies suggest that Japanese mothers are more likely than those from the West to feed their infants on demand and soothe them quickly when they are in distress, and are less apt to engage in verbal interactions or other forms of stimulation (Azuma, 1994; Caudill & Plath, 1966). This level of responsiveness occurs at night as well, as cosleeping has been the norm in Japan for centuries, and persists among most families in contemporary times (National Women's Education Center of Japan [NWECCJ], 2005).

Recent research findings also show some continuity in child rearing beliefs and practices from the premodern era in contemporary Japan (Rothbaum, Kakunima, Nagaoka, & Azuma, 2007; Tobin, Yeh, & Karasawa, 2009). For instance, Rothbaum et al. (2007) compared Japanese mothers' parenting and child behaviors of their child aged three to five with those of mothers in the United States. Rothbaum et al. reported that Japanese mothers desired their child to be more accommodating, whereas US mothers were concerned more with their child maximizing his or her own potential. Furthermore, they also found that Japanese mothers tend to attribute child misbehavior to needs for security and support rather than needs for individual self-maximization. Similar findings are also reported by other studies on Japanese early childhood education practices, where preschool teachers tended to opt out from intervention in child misconduct because they emphasized that expression of aggression was a natural developmental challenge that young children need to experience to learn how to regulate their emotions and resolve conflicts with others (Tobin, Yeh, & Karasawa, 2009).

Parenting goals and beliefs in Japan. As we have seen, both the modern Japanese government and civic leaders have advocated ways of child rearing throughout the 20th century. Their messages and activities, along with modernization and urbanization, have changed the lives of children, but many parents have still retained some traditional childrearing beliefs and practices from the premodern era (Hara & Minagawa, 1996).

Psychologists Kitayama and Markus (2000) argue that the Japanese concept of "self" is one consistent sociocultural theme emphasized in Japan, and provides a framework for values, thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. For example, among Japanese educators, discourse about children's selves is framed broadly in terms of culturally valued qualities such as *omoiyari*

(Hoffman, 2000), which is one's ability to show sensitive and kind consideration for others (Lebra, 1996).

Hess and his colleagues (1980) reported similar findings in regard to the association between Japanese values and parenting. The authors conducted international comparative studies on parenting and child socialization in Japan and the United States, and found that Japanese mothers encouraged their children to acquire such qualities as kindness (*yasashisa*), sensitivity (*sensai*), politeness (*ogyougi*), and compliance with social norms to fit into society (*junnousei*) (Azuma et al., 1994; Hess et al., 1980). The authors argue that Japanese mothers transmit the importance of politeness and sensitivity to the child within the nurturing bond between mother and child. By sensitizing her child to her own feelings and goals, the mother expects the child to develop sensitivity, not only to the mothers' feelings but also, through her, to other people's needs. Based on this emphasis on nurturing the child's sensitivity, it is often reported that Japanese parents tend to emphasize development of interpersonal relationships skills in their child (Hess, et al., 1980). Consistent with the series of studies by Hess and Azuma, later research also indicates that Japanese mothers expect earlier mastery of skills in terms of emotional maturity, obedience, and social courtesy developed through a less authoritarian, more lenient, and more permissive approach, whereas mothers in the United States expect earlier mastery of verbal assertiveness, leadership in peer interactions, and independence (Lebra, 1994; Lewis, 1995; Osterweil & Nagano-Nakamura, 1992; Shand, 1985; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989; Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003).

Despite the fact that post-modern Japan has been undergoing another significant socioeconomic and value change, including increasing economic and social insecurity, there are some studies documenting much continuity in parenting beliefs among current Japanese parents.

In one recent study of parents in Tokyo, Seoul, Beijing, Shanghai, and Taipei, parents in Tokyo still emphasized sensitivity and conformity to group goals in their child rearing, and to a lesser extent, so did parents in the other cities (BERI, 2010). For example, parents in Tokyo reported putting far less importance on their children's learning than did parents in the other cities, whereas they emphasized "teaching a child to greet and say thank you" in their child rearing (BERI, 2010). Comparisons to parents in Western countries yield similar findings. In one International Comparative Research survey, only 11.9% of the Japanese parents strongly expected their children to get good grades in school (as compared with over 70% in the United States and France) (NWE CJ, 2005). When compared to their counterparts in other Asian countries, contemporary Japanese parents also remain more focused on nurturing manners and interpersonal relationship skills than on their children's academic achievement (Holloway & Nagase, 2014).

Parenting behaviors and strategies in Japan. In the context of the sensitive mother-child relationships, children learn to develop their social and emotional skills as well as control their behaviors. Referring to this relationship, scholars such as Trommsdorff (1985; 2003) posit that the Japanese child's sensitivity to the mothers' goals and expectations plays an important role in nurturing children's motivation and compliance with developmental expectations (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003).

As a strategy to achieve the child's realization and understanding of why a certain behavior is wrong, Japanese mothers and professionals who work with small children tend to endorse the use of indirect forms of discipline strategies, especially striving to explain the reasons that good behavior is necessary (Holloway & Nagase, 2014). In particular, it is often documented that Japanese parents tend to avoid direct conflict with their children, and instead

use indirect forms of parenting strategies (Azuma, 1994; Dennis et al., 2007; Hess et al., 1980; Rothbaum et al., 2007). On the other hand, mothers in the United States tend to use more direct instruction as a socialization strategy, such as commands and praise, which are a style of socialization strategy that reflects the emphasis on autonomy and independence (Conroy, Hess, Azuma & Kashiwagi, 1980; Dennis et al., 2002; Kobayashi-Winata & Power, 1989). These mothers often see an absence of direct instruction (e.g., permissive parental control, inconsistent discipline) as inefficient child rearing strategies in terms of nurturing the child's autonomy development.

In other cross-national research by Power et al. (1992), it was revealed that compared to the mothers in the US, Japanese mothers more often chose not to confront their preschool-aged children, instead tending to call the child's attention to the hypothetical consequences of his misbehavior. Based on their observations, Power et al. reported that Japanese mothers made fewer demands, and they were more likely to report responding with reasoning and scolding their child when their young children misbehaved. For instance, these mothers often tended to call their children's attention to the consequences of misbehavior, and often stimulated their sense of what is right or wrong by pointing out the emotional repercussions on other people or even on inanimate objects. In contrast, the authors reported that mothers in the United States expected their children to follow more rules, and they tended to give a child more input into the socialization process by responding more often to child misbehavior with material and social consequences (Power et al., 1992).

Another socialization strategy used by many Japanese mothers is to prioritize the child's understanding of the reasoning behind what is acceptable, as opposed to simply requiring obedience (Bornstein, Azuma, Tamis-LeMonda, & Ogino, 1990; Hess et al., 1980; Kobayashi-Winata, & Power, 1989). Research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s indicated that Japanese parents stress the importance of *wakaraseru* (having the child understand), believing that compliance without a willing desire on the part of the child was of little or no value (Holloway, 2010). To gain the child's understanding, mothers are careful to explain the reasons that good behavior is necessary. They also take a long-term view, tolerating imperfect compliance in the short run as they carefully work on helping a child see the reasons for good behavior.

Yet another parenting technique used by many Japanese mothers is called *mimamoru* (Azuma, 1994; Bamba & Haight, 2011; Sawada & Minami, 1997), and it is used to socialize their children without engaging in a power struggle. The term *mimamoru* can be translated as "watching over" or "looking on from a distance." The intention of this strategy is to allow the child to learn through the consequences of his or her actions rather than by the mother's responses (Holloway, 2010). For example, if a child refuses to share a toy with a playmate and the two begin squabbling, the mother may watch rather than intervene. At a later point, she may initiate a brief discussion, asking what happened or inquiring as to how the playmate might have felt when he or she was not able to play with the toy. *Mimamoru* has also been identified as a strategy used by preschool teachers and others who work with young children (Bamba & Haight, 2011; Tobin, Hsueh, & Karasawa, 2009).

Parenting practices represent the instantiation of parents' socialization goals and the broader-level cultural values or prescriptions for parenting within a particular society. Parenting strategies documented as Japanese child rearing may not imply unidirectional socialization enforcement but instead lead to the child's voluntary acceptance of and compliance with these restrictions. Thus, successful parenting in the Japanese context means inducing children to meet

social expectations and role requirement voluntarily and continuously (Trommsdorff & Kornadt, 2003; Holloway, 2010; Holloway & Nagase, 2014).

However, more recent scholars caution us by claiming that this type of research was based on a strong assumption – that as long as a group of people are classified as those who are from the same country, they are assumed to share common beliefs, values, and perceptions. Critiques such as Gjerde (2004) and Holloway (2010) ask what cross-national differences mean if there is substantial variability within one country, and if there is ongoing negotiation and contestation emerging within a country. Thus, what needs to be done is not only the mere documentation of differences across the sociocultural contexts, but also investigation of universality and divergence of the family processes in which parenting and family constructs are enacted across and within different sociocultural settings (Gjerde, 2004; Holloway, 2010).

For instance, based on the longitudinal survey and interview work in Japan, Holloway and her colleagues found that parents' ideas about what it means to be a “good child” and “good parent” have remained fairly consistent amongst the 16 mothers who were selected for the interview part. Nevertheless, they also found a wide range of parenting behaviors among the participating mothers, ranging from the mothers who obsessively drove themselves to extreme parenting behavior (i.e., seeking out a number of consultation about how to breastfeed her newborn baby or being adamant about having her son's every waking moment occupied with supplementary courses) to those who were open to pursuing an understanding of their own particular child and tailoring their parenting to meet that child's needs (Holloway, 2010). Thus, the finding suggests tension between a particular view of parenting that these mothers appeared to share on the other hand, and on the other, the divergences in their actual parenting practices. Then the question is: what contributes to individual parenting differences within the mothers in Japan?

What Contributes to Variability within Japanese Mothers' Parenting?

Although theories and research have captured cultural differences, there are also complexities that suggest cautions against making quick, stereotypical generalizations about any group. Drawing from this caution, researchers have also investigated intra-national variability, with a particular focus on the range of psychological states and its effects on behavioral outcome within a nation. These studies contributed to the field by illuminating how one's living contexts or psychological states affect behaviors and performances within a given sociocultural context. For example, social scientists across disciplines have examined the relation of family SES and maternal beliefs to children's growth or parenting. Consistent with theories and findings in the US, findings from studies of Japan often demonstrate that mothers with higher SES reported a higher degree of parent involvement during the early childhood period, including accessing formal sources of information and engaging in daily home reading (Maita, 2008; Mimizuka & Makino, 2007; Yamamoto, Holloway, & Suzuki, 2006).

Apart from examining the role of living contexts, cultural differences and behavioral competence due to psychological states, such as depression, stress, and self-efficacy beliefs has been one of the most extensively examined fields. For instance, the powerful negative relationship between mothers' psychological well-being and parenting competence is often suggested in empirical work conducted in Japan (Makino, 2010). In particular, it is reported that mothers' higher stress has a serious effect on children's development of emotional and social skills, including poorer self-regulation skills and less ability to control their impulses (Kato, Ishii-Kuntz, Makino, & Tsuchiya, 2002; Makino, 2010).

Self-efficacy is the most well-researched of the various psychological factors in Japan, confirmed by an accumulation of research on parenting self-efficacy and parenting competence within the Japanese sociocultural context. In the earlier cross-national work on self-beliefs and performance outcome, some have argued that positive psychological resources – having high self-efficacious beliefs – is not important for behavioral competence for people in Japan and other East Asian countries (Kitayama, Matsumoto, Markus & Norasakkunkit, 1997). According to these scholars, East Asians, especially Japanese, tend to critically evaluate themselves, and they are more attuned to negative than positive evaluations (Kitayama, et al., 1997). Drawing from the Confucian ideas, in which being critical about themselves and modesty were believed to improve behavioral outcomes (Heine et al., 1999), cross-cultural psychologists including Heine and Kitayama argue that having positive perceptions about oneself does not necessarily predict behavioral competence for Japanese and others in East Asia. In contrast, Bandura and other psychologists oppose this view, arguing that self-efficacy beliefs are indeed a universal motive to enhance one's attainment of a given goal (Grusec, 1992; Bandura, 1997; Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005). Subsequent work on cross-cultural studies on self-esteem and self-efficacious beliefs has provided evidence that cultural contexts may not matter for the salient impact of self-efficacy beliefs on optimal outcomes and well-being, while cross-cultural differences may exist in how and for what goal people apply self-efficacy beliefs as well as how self-efficacious beliefs are developed and structured in each society (Bandura, 2006; Oettingen & Zosuls, 2006).

To understand the role of parenting self-efficacy beliefs as a factor that differentiates individual parents in contemporary Japan, Holloway and her colleagues conducted longitudinal research on mothers in Japan, combining survey and interview work to investigate childrearing and family lives within Japan (Holloway, 2010; Holloway, Suzuki, Yamamoto, & Behrens, 2005). Their research found significant variation in child rearing practices and their association with the mothers' levels of self-efficacious beliefs in Japan (Holloway, 2010; Yamamoto et al., 2006). In particular, the study reported that those mothers with higher self-efficacious beliefs showed higher emotional well-being and more competence in their parenting strategies, including being motivated to understand their child more and tailoring parenting approaches to meet the individual child's needs (Holloway, 2010). In contrast, the mothers with lower self-efficacy beliefs were more vulnerable to stress and negative emotional arousal when they faced difficulties in parenting. The negative effect of lower efficacious beliefs on their parenting were also captured in mothers' narratives; for the mothers with little efficacious beliefs, their narratives indicated that their parenting strategies tended to be less competent, including being overly permissive, showing little affection and joy to the child, and losing their capabilities of maintaining consistent rule enforcement (Holloway, 2010). However, as the author's research was based on interview work and surveys that didn't include parenting behavior measures, the relationship between parenting self-efficacy and mothers' child rearing behaviors is not clear. Thus, it is imperative to investigate the association between parenting self-efficacy and parenting behaviors as well as its complex interplay with the quality of spousal relations in contemporary Japan.

Conclusion

This section offered the historical trajectory of marriage and family life in Japan, followed by a review of parenting from cross-national perspectives, and concluded with a review of classic and contemporary literature on parenting in Japan. Drawing from the idea of parental ethnotheories or cultural models, psychological and sociological studies comparing Japanese

parenting styles with Western (particularly those in the United States) parenting styles have identified contrasting features of parenting, such as indirect versus direct, indulgent and permissive versus firm, and fostering the development of interpersonal relationship skills versus the development of independence and autonomy.

Nevertheless, as Japanese society continues to change rapidly in terms of its economy as well as women's roles outside of the family, the roles of husbands and wives are also in transition, resulting in the restructuring of family life in Japan. As a result, women go through the dilemma of how to balance two opposing social forces – social transformation in women's roles and continuity in terms of what they are expected to do to sustain satisfying couple relations. Thus, the “traditional” views of couple relationships are being appropriated to meet the evolving norms and contextual demands of contemporary Japanese life. Filling in the gaps in the literature, it is imperative to examine whether Japanese mothers can be relatively satisfied with their relationships with a partner, as well as whether mothers in Japan can sustain psychological well-being and their ability to engage in competent parenting, even in cases when they have little satisfaction in their couple relationships.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Drawing from extant research, the benefits that supportive couple relationships project onto child rearing may be a universal feature of family life. However, the domains of parenting that are vulnerable to challenges in couple relationships are determined by cultural models of parenting – those values and goals concerning child rearing occurring within a particular sociocultural context. In particular, my first study goal was to examine the effects that satisfying spousal relationships have on mothers' ability to engage in competent parenting and children's self-regulation development. To uncover the process of this linkage, the present study looked at the mediating role of mothers' psychological states: life stress and parenting self-efficacy. Moreover, this research aimed to expand the traditional notion of the linkage from couple relations to parenting and child development to include its differences across diverse sociocultural contexts, with a specific focus on mothers in the United States and Japan.

Although prior research has explored the psychological process of the linkage from couple relations to parenting and child development, evidence is limited outside of the United States. Thus, I first evaluated the country-level differences in terms of couple relations and parenting for the mothers in the United States and Japan. Drawing on classic and recent work on parenting and family life in Japan, I expected the findings would indicate that Japanese mothers are less satisfied with their couple relationships, and have lower parenting self-efficacy and higher stress compared to their counterparts in the United States. I also expected that Japanese mothers would describe their parenting as warmer but more permissive and inconsistent in their discipline strategies compared to the mothers in the United States.

Additionally, I tested the cross-national generalizability of the associations between a satisfying couple relationship, parenting, and child outcomes across the two nations. Earlier literature suggests that satisfaction or dissatisfaction with couple relationships may affect parents' engagement in parenting (Cabrera et al., 2012; Katz & Gottman, 1996; Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1997). First, based on these studies, I expected that in both countries, the quality of couple relations would explain the individual differences in mothers' parenting competence, characterized as warmth in mother-child interaction and effective child rearing strategies.

Second, I examined two possible psychological processes that may explain the connection from couple relationship satisfaction to parenting and child development in each nation. As one possible pathway, I first examined the mediating role of life stress. As depicted

in the conceptual model (Figure 1), the first research question examined whether life stress mediates the association between couple relationship quality and parenting, in particular maternal warmth and effectiveness of parental control. I expected that when mothers experience a less satisfying couple relationship, they will feel more stressed about their lives, and that this stress will cause negative effects on their parenting competence, which, in turn, will disrupt the child's self-regulatory development. In contrast, when mothers have a satisfying couple relationship, represented by mutual communication and shared decision making, it lowers maternal stress, and increases their parenting competence, which, in turn, is positively associated with children's self-regulatory skills in each nation.

As another possible pathway, I examined the mediating role of parenting self-efficacy (Figure 1). According to self-efficacy theory, individuals who are supported and understood by others are more likely to develop a strong sense of competence that in turn helps them persevere and accomplish challenging tasks, including those involved in parenting (Bandura, 2006). However, there is an ongoing debate in terms of the effect of self-efficacy beliefs on behavioral competence in Japan and other East Asian countries. Taking the theories underlying this debate into consideration, I examined whether and to what extent parenting self-efficacy mediates the association between couple relationship satisfaction and parenting competence in each nation. I expected that mothers who report having a satisfying couple relationship to have higher parenting self-efficacy, which in turn is associated with positive effects on their parenting competence as well as the child's self-regulatory development.

Following theory and earlier research conducted in the United States and Japan, the present study used the data collected in the two countries to examine cross-cultural similarities and uniqueness of the psychological process that links couple relationship qualities with mothers' ability to invest themselves in competent parenting and children's self-regulatory development. With a specific focus on the mediating role of mothers' psychological states, the present study looked at the following: life stress and parenting self-efficacy. Moreover, this research aimed to expand the traditional notion of the linkage from couple relations to parenting and child development to include its differences across divergent sociocultural contexts, with a specific focus on mothers in the United States and Japan. This study offers insight into whether contemporary Japanese women who perceive their husbands as psychologically supportive are more likely to experience less stress, as well as to feel more self-efficacious than those who perceive their husbands as more distant or less supportive. In particular, Japanese partner relationships have traditionally placed less emphasis on psychological support than those in the United States, and the domains of husbands and wives have been more sharply bounded. Therefore, a major contribution of this research is an emphasis on the role of supportive couple relationships in understanding parenting behaviors and child development across the divergent sociocultural contexts.

Method

Participants

This study is originated from a larger cross-national work on parenting, self-efficacy beliefs, and child development in Asian countries and the United States, directed by Holloway and Suzuki. In this present study, I focused on data collected in Japan and the United States to examine the positive effects of satisfying couple relationships on mothers' ability to engage in competent parenting and children's self-regulatory development.

In this analysis, participants consisted of 335 parents drawn from a larger study of families of first- and second-grade children in a public elementary school in an urban school district in Northern California ($n=130$) and in the Tokyo metropolitan area ($n=157$). Criteria for inclusion for the analyses were that these mothers must (a) be married or in a steady relationship, and (b) be the biological or adoptive mother of at least one child in first or second grade. Also, we asked 58 classroom teachers of each participating child (38 teachers in the United States, 20 teachers in Japan) to rate their students' social competence and self-regulation in the classroom.

As shown in Table 1, about 81.8% of the sample collected in the United States had a college degree or higher ($n=108$), while 3.8% had high school degree or less ($n=5$). In the city where the participants were recruited, the level of education attained by the participants was higher compared to the general population, of whom about 44% completed a college degree or higher and 16.7% completed high school, according to the census data available on this city (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). In terms of household income, 55.7% of the mothers were from households whose income was over \$100,000. Being similar to the distribution of highest education attained, the distribution of the income among the sample is higher than the general population in this city, which had \$74,221 for its median household income (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Among the participants in Japan, about 36.9% of the sample had a college degree or higher ($n=58$), while 17.8% had a high school degree or less ($n=28$). Similar to the sample collected in the United States, the level of education attained for this sample is higher than the general population living in the prefecture where the participants were recruited, as about 15.3% of the general population in the area completed a college degree or higher and 50.7% completed high school, according to the census data available on this area (Statistics Bureau of Japan, 2012). In terms of household income, 24.2% of the mothers were from households whose income was over ten million Japanese Yen (approximately \$94,269.8 in US dollars). Thus the distribution of the income among the sample is higher than the general population in this prefecture, which has a median household income of 5565,720 Japanese yen (approximately \$52,441 in US dollars) (Japan Society of Family Sociology [JSFS], 2012).

As shows in Table 1, mothers in the United States were slightly, but significantly, older than their Japanese counterparts. The mothers in the United States also reported more formal schooling than the Japanese mothers, largely due to a higher percentage of the former having achieving graduate-level degrees. In the United States, over 80% of mothers reported completing at least two to three years of college, whereas just over 36% of mothers did so in Japan. Mothers in the United States were more likely to report being employed full-time than Japanese mothers, but in both samples the majority reported at least part-time employment. Moreover, children in the United States were slightly, but significantly, older than their Japanese counterparts because of differences in terms of flexibility in the age at which children may enter elementary school. Families in the United States have the option of delaying when children begin elementary school, whereas age requirements for their Japanese counterparts are more rigid, being solely based on the child's birth years. However, the two samples are comparable to each other because the two locations where the samples were collected are similar, being relatively affluent and located in urban areas in each nation.

Procedure

In the United States, the research team first obtained the support from the school district's administrators in assisting recruitment and data collection. After receiving the support letter from the participating school principals, the research team distributed an invitation letter to each parent of all the first and second graders at eight public elementary schools located in a single school district in a large metropolitan area in the United States. The research team invited all public schools in the targeted school district in order to recruit participants from diverse backgrounds. On the whole, 1,760 invitation letters were distributed, and 321 people responded to the first survey (18.2%).

Upon the establishment of the principals' support, the research team asked classroom teachers to distribute survey packets to the parents. The first survey was administered in February 2012, and the second survey in May 2012. Upon completion of the first parent survey, the research team contacted the classroom teachers of each participating child to ask them to fill in a survey regarding to the child's self-regulation skills in the classroom. Participating parents received a \$15 gift certificate for completing the first survey, and another \$10 gift certificate for completing the second survey, and the participating teachers received \$5 for completing a survey for each child.

The data collection in Japan also followed the same procedure. The Japanese research team contacted several elementary school principals to recruit parents in a major metropolitan area in Japan. The parent survey was first administered in December 2012, and a second survey in January 2013 in four public schools. The Japanese research team contacted classroom teachers of each child to request that they complete an assessment of the child's social competence, using the same instrument that was used for the United States. Participating parents and teachers received a small gift upon the completion of the survey.

Procedures, including the use of consents and the contents of survey instruments, were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board. The measures used in this study are taken from both first and second parent surveys in each country.

Measures

The survey for parents consisted of scales to measure their self-efficacy as a parent, their everyday interactions with their children and family members, and parents' activities to promote children's academic and socioemotional development.

Although most of the measures in the survey are used extensively in extant research, they were originally developed in English. To assure equivalence in the conceptualization of theoretical constructs relevant to the study as well as to standardize administration of surveys across the participating countries, the research team did the following procedure (Erkut, 2010; Peña, 2007; van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). First, measures were translated into Japanese and back translated into English by separate bilingual Japanese native speakers who were also fluent in English, according to recommendations by Foster and Martinez (1995). Translators received assistance from educational researchers both in the United States and Japan for clarifications regarding the items that were difficult to translate due to linguistic and cultural relevancy. The research team conducted a pilot study in both countries to see whether parents had difficulties responding to the survey items. The research team discussed the preliminary results and comments from participating parents, and modified several items to increase the clarity of the questions. The majority of the parents in the pilot study did not have any difficulty completing the questionnaires.

Couple relationship satisfaction. Couple relationship satisfaction is referred to the degree to which respondents are content and satisfied with their relationships with the spouse or partner. For the present study, it was measured using the ENRICH (Enriching and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication and Happiness) couple relationship satisfaction scale (Fowers & Olson, 1993). The ENRICH scale items are designed to assess couple relationship satisfaction as one construct, and are frequently used by family and marriage therapists.

The ENRICH contains 10 items, such as “I am very happy with how we manage our leisure activities and the time we spend together.” Respondents indicate their level of satisfaction by choosing 1 of 5 options for each question (1 = Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree). The study used all the ten items, which were averaged to create a scale score for couple relationship satisfaction; higher scores represent greater relationship satisfaction. Cronbach’s alpha revealed a moderately high internal reliability of .83 for the sample in the United States, and a low reliability of .58 for the Japanese sample.

Self-reported parenting competence. Data were obtained from parents’ self-reports of parenting competence. The present study used the Weinberger Parenting Inventory-Parent version (Weinberger, Feldman, & Ford, 1989). The scale was validated with a larger sample of young children and adolescents and its association with parenting and child development outcomes (Feldman & Wentzel, 1990). The Weinberger Parenting Inventory consists of 49 items, containing six dimensions: parental warmth (9 items), psychological intrusiveness (13 items), permissiveness (6 items), harsh discipline (8 items), inconsistent parenting (6 items), and harsh and inconsistent parenting (7 items). For 30 items, respondents use a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = Almost never to 5= Almost always), reflecting frequency of particular parenting behavior. The rest of 19 items asks participants to answer agreement to each statement relevant to daily parenting experiences, with another 5-point Likert scale (1= False or mostly false to 5= True or mostly).

Adapting this inventory, our research team drew 28 relevant items, and excluded questions about punitive discipline practices, then 20 items were particularly selected for this present study, in order to ensure cultural appropriateness as well as adequate number in each of the three subscales of the study interest: Parental warmth (8 items) measures the extent to which the parent expressed warmth toward the child, and enjoyed the time spent with the child versus expressed rejection toward the child or toward the role of parents (e.g., “I feel weighed down by the burdens of being a parent”); Permissiveness (6 items) captures the extent to which the parent engaged in permissive parenting to discipline the child by imposing few restrictions and little firm rule-enforcement, and by accepting the child’s impulses even if inappropriate; Inconsistent parenting (6 items) is referred to the extent to which the parent was inconsistent in responding to the child’s behavior and expressing emotions toward the child (e.g., “I have a habit of suddenly getting upset about things after letting them “slide” for a while.”).

The average each for *frequency* and *agreement* was combined to calculate a composite score for the indicators representing each of the three dimensions for parenting competence. Higher scores for the parenting warmth construct represents greater parental affect and joy toward the child and child rearing. Higher scores for the permissiveness construct represent their parenting being highly permissive. Finally, higher scores for the inconsistent parenting construct represent a higher level of inconsistency in their discipline strategies

For the sample in the United States, Cronbach’s alpha revealed an acceptable internal reliability of each subscale: .78 (parental warmth), .76 (permissiveness), and .82 (inconsistent parenting). For the Japanese sample, Cronbach’s alpha revealed a slightly lower internal

reliability for all the subscales: .72 (parental warmth), .68 (permissiveness), and .61 (inconsistent parenting).

Child self-regulation. Teacher rate of children's self-regulatory skills was measured using the Social Competence Scale-Teacher version (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 1990). The scale includes 25 items that indicates children's social skills featured with three dimensions: peer relations and communication skills, emotional regulation skills, and behavioral self-regulation. Teachers are asked to rate the child using a 5-point response scale (1=Not at all to 5=Very well). The scale has been validated in a variety of settings and cultural contexts (Corrigan, 2003). The average of all the 25 items was calculated. To correct for skewness, the present study used the square of this composite for the measured indicator representing the child's self-regulation skills. Higher scores indicate higher child self-regulation. Cronbach's alpha revealed a very high internal reliability for each country; .98 for the sample in the United States, and .97 for the Japanese sample.

Parenting self-efficacy. Parenting self-efficacy is defined as parents' sense of estimation about their ability to positively influence a child's development and create an environment that leads to a child's optimal development. The present study measured it using the Parenting Self-Agency scale (Dumka et al., 1996). The scale includes five items, which elicits parents overall confidence in their ability to parent successfully (e.g., I feel sure of myself as a parent). Respondents indicated their levels of parenting self-efficacy beliefs by using a 5-point Likert scale for each question (1 = almost never, 5= almost always or always). All five items were averaged to create a scale score for parenting self-efficacy; higher scores represent greater sense of efficacious beliefs as a parent. Cronbach's alpha revealed an acceptable internal reliability for each country: .82 for the sample in the United States, and .78 for the Japanese sample.

Life stress. Life stress was measured using Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), developed by Cohen, Kamarck and Mermelstain (1983). The scale includes 10 items to ask frequency for irritable experiences such as "found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do." Respondents indicates their level of perceived stress by using a 5-point Likert scale for each question (1= never, 5= very often). All the 10 items were averaged to create a score for perceived life stress; higher scores represent a higher level of perceived life stress. Cronbach's alpha revealed a moderately high internal reliability for each country: .89 for the sample in the United States, and .81 for the Japanese sample.

Control variable. The level of mothers' highest education and their household income were included as control variables in the models, because a number of studies conducted within the United States and Japan showed these variables to have powerful, positive associations with children's social development as well as parenting (Cabrera et al., 2012; Walker et al., 2011).

In both countries, the highest level of education attained was measured as a 6-category that indicated each participant had: no formal schooling; 11th grade or less; high school graduate, GED or equivalent; some college, vocational school, or junior college; college graduate; Graduate or professional degree. Based on the distribution and preliminary analysis, the category was then collapsed to a 4- category: completed up to high school, GED or equivalent; some college, vocational school or junior college; college graduate; Graduate or professional degree.

Household income was measured in the United States, by using a 7-category that indicated if the household's income was below 15, 000 US Dollars, between 15,001 to 25,000 US Dollars, and so on to 100, 000 US Dollars and above as the highest increment. In Japan, household income was measured as a nine category: between 1million and 1.99 million Japanese

Yen, between 2 million and 3.99 million Japanese Yen, and so on to 16 million Japanese Yen and above as the highest increment.

Analytic Strategies

Drawing from extant research, the primary goal of the study is to investigate whether a satisfying couple relationship matters to parenting competence and child self-regulatory development in a diverse sociocultural context. Specifically, I sought to address these two research questions about the ways in which satisfying couple relationships function in the United States and Japan. First, the study starts with the research question to compare mothers in the two nations; are Japanese mothers less satisfied with their couple relationships, and have lower parenting self-efficacy and higher stress compared to their counterparts in the United States? Also, I examine how their parenting qualities are different between the two nations. To examine these national differences, my analysis started with preliminary analysis between the US and Japan as well as within each country. This stage involved bivariate correlational analysis among key variables and ANOVA by country.

Second, the study extends the investigation, by examining the two mediators – maternal life stress and parenting self-efficacy. In particular, the research asks whether a satisfying couple relationship, represented by communication and shared decision-making, lowers maternal stress, and increases their parenting competence as well as children's self-regulatory skills. Also, does it increase mothers' parenting self-efficacy, which in turn is associated with positive effects on their parenting competence as well as child's self-regulatory development?

To test this, I examined the hypothesized models and model fit within each country by running a series of path analyses. It has been frequently used in social science research since the 1960s, for its capacity to estimate an entire system of indirect and direct relationships between variables (Kline, 2009). The analysis followed the research methodology of Edwards and Lambert (2007), who proposed the simultaneous testing of mediation effects. By integrating regression analysis and path analysis, Edwards and Lambert's proposed that mediation should be tested in the form of direct, indirect, and total effects.

The equations are estimated with OLS regression, utilizing bootstrapping techniques (Edwards & Lambert, 2007); a procedure that repeatedly estimates coefficients with a bootstrap sample to create a large number of the samples for the purpose of approximating the sampling distribution of a statistic (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). Each bootstrap sample consists of N cases (N is the size of the original sample) randomly sampled with replacement from the original sample. Coefficient estimates from each bootstrap sample are used to compute the product, and these products are rank ordered to locate percentile values that bound the desired confidence interval. Bias corrected confidence intervals are estimated by correcting for differences between the product from the full sample and the mediation of the products estimated from the bootstrap samples (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). As recommended, this study used a bootstrap sample of 3000 to yield reliable estimates. Once the coefficients were estimated and confidence intervals established, direct, indirect, and total effects were estimated.

The hypothesized models were tested using the AMOS (Analysis of a Moment Structures) program 21.0. First, the model described in Figure 1 was tested, including all the indicated paths. Then, paths with a statistical significance less than .05 were then removed from the analyses yielding overidentified models for the subjects. To evaluate the model fit, the present study used several indices in addition to the standard chi-square index (the χ^2 statistic), because the χ^2 statistic is sensitive to sample size and violations of normality: the root mean

square error of approximation (RMSEA; Cole & Maxwell, 2003), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973), and the comparative fit index (CFI; McDonald & Marsh, 1990) (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011). It is suggested that good models have values that are $<.05$ for the RMSEA, close to 1.00 for the TLI, and $>.95$ for the CFI (Browne & Cudeck, 1994; Kline, 2011), in addition to $>.05$ for the probability associated with the χ^2 value for the overall model fit.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Table 2 presents the results of descriptive statistics for the key variables in the present analysis, for each of the United States and Japan. The results for analyses of variance (ANOVA) are also reported to show the mean-level differences across the two countries.

On average, the results revealed a significant differences between the two countries at the .05 level, except for life stress ($F(1, 333) = 2.89, p = .09$). Contrary to the hypothesis, there was no statistically significant difference on life stress for the mothers between the two nations. Mothers in Japan reported lower levels of couple relationship satisfaction, lower parental warmth, lower parenting self-efficacy, and higher level of permissiveness and higher inconsistency in their parenting, compared to their counterparts in the United States. Also, according to reports by teachers, children in Japan were reported to have lower scores of their self-regulation skills, compared to their counterparts in the United States.

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix for the variables in the model for each country. In terms of the relationship between couple relationship satisfaction and parenting, the results were mostly consistent with the earlier studies in supporting the association between highly satisfied couple relationships and the quality of parenting. For the mothers in the United States, they engage in parenting that is less permissive and less inconsistent ($r = -.31, p < .001, r = -.35, p < .001$, respectively), when a mothers are highly satisfied with the couple relationship. Japanese mothers would engage in more warm and less permissive parenting when having a highly satisfying couple relationship ($r = .33, p < .001, r = -.17, p < .05$, respectively). Based on comparing these coefficients, permissiveness and inconsistency in parenting appear to be the parenting aspects that are the most influenced by couple relationship satisfaction for the mothers in the United States. In contrast, the association with parental warmth is particularly powerful for Japanese mothers.

How do life stress and parenting self-efficacy each relate to couple relationship and parenting competence? In terms of stress, the significant association between less satisfying couple relationships and higher life stress was consistent across the United States and Japan ($r = -.47, p < .001$ for the mothers in the United States, $r = -.30, p < .001$ for the mothers in Japan). Also, being consistent with earlier research, when their stress level was higher, their parenting also exhibited less competent. In particular, when mothers reported a higher rating of life stress, mothers in both countries engage in less warm parenting ($r = -.31, p < .001$ for the mothers in the United States, $r = -.41, p < .001$ for the mothers in Japan). They would also engage in less effective parenting strategies, such as higher ratings in permissiveness ($r = .42, p < .001$ for the mothers in the United States, $r = .16, p < .05$ for the mothers in Japan), and higher levels of inconsistent parenting ($r = .47, p < .001$ for the mothers in the United States, $r = .24, p < .05$ for the mothers in Japan). Based on comparing these coefficients, permissiveness and inconsistency in parenting appear to be the parenting aspects that are the most influenced by life stress for the

mothers in the United States. In contrast, the association between maternal life stress and parental warmth is particularly powerful for Japanese mothers.

In terms of parenting self-efficacy, the association between highly satisfied couple relationships and mothers' efficacy beliefs as a parent was significant only for the Japanese mothers ($r = .19, p < .05$). On the other hand, in terms of the association between parenting self-efficacy and parenting, there was a significant association between parenting self-efficacy and all of the three indices for parenting competence for the mothers in both countries. In particular, when mothers report a higher rating of parenting self-efficacy, they would engage in more warmth in parenting ($r = .42, p < .001$ for the mothers in the United States, $r = .56, p < .001$ for the mothers in Japan). Also, these mothers would engage in more effective parenting strategies, such as less permissive ($r = -.34, p < .001$ for the mothers in the United States, $r = -.18, p < .05$ for the mothers in Japan), and less inconsistent parenting ($r = -.40, p < .001$ for the mothers in the United States, $r = -.26, p < .05$ for the mothers in Japan). Based on comparing these coefficients, it is consistent across the two nations that parenting self-efficacy is particularly powerful to parental warmth.

Contrary to the hypothesis, child self-regulation skills do not have statistically significant bivariate associations with any variables in the analysis, both in the United States and Japan. Based on the results, the following analysis and results thus address what mediates the link between couple relationship satisfaction and parenting competence for mothers in the United States and Japan (Figure 2).

Path Analysis

In this study, I conducted a series of path analyses for the samples in the United States and Japan separately. Path analysis is a statistical technique that can test variables as an independent or dependent variable by solving multiple equations simultaneously. To test this, I examined the hypothesized models and model fit within each country by running a series of path analyses. It has been frequently used in social science research since the 1960s, for its capacity to estimate an entire system of indirect and direct relationships between variables (Kline, 2009). The analysis followed the research methodology of Edwards and Lambert (2007), who proposed the simultaneous testing of mediation effects.

First, I tested a model that examined the mediating role of life stress in the association between couple relationship satisfaction and parenting competence with controlling for mothers' educational attainment and household income (Stress model). Adding control variables is an important aspect of this analysis, as it allows us to see the effect of relationship quality on parenting regardless of difference in socioeconomic status, which is often suggested to be another important factor that impact on couple relationship quality and parenting (Belsky & Jaffee, 2006).

Second, I conducted another separate set of path analysis to test the mediating role of parenting self-efficacy in the relationship between couple relationship satisfaction and parenting with controlling for mothers' educational attainment and household income (PSE model).

Table 6 presents the overall model fit indices for both of the stress model and the parenting self-efficacy model for each country, along with the results of chi-square test to see the differences of the model fit within each country. To evaluate the model fit, the present study used several indices other than the standard chi-square index (the χ^2 statistic), because the χ^2 statistic is sensitive to sample size and violations of normality: the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA; Cole & Maxwell, 2003), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI; Tucker &

Lewis, 1973), and the comparative fit index (CFI; McDonald & Marsh, 1990) (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011). It is suggested that good models have values that are $<.05$ for the RMSEA, close to 1.00 for the TLI, and $>.95$ for the CFI (Browne & Cudeck, 1994; Kline, 2011), in addition to $>.05$ for the probability associated with the χ^2 value for the overall model fit. Following the convention in the field, I interpreted only parameters that were significant below the .05 level.

Life stress as a mediator (Stress Model). Figure 3 displays the standard path coefficients for the model estimating the influence of mothers' report on couple relationship satisfaction, parental warmth, permissiveness, and inconsistent parenting with maternal life stress as a mediator (Figure 3a for the mothers in the United States, Figure 3b for the mothers in Japan). Table 4 presents the results in each of the United States and Japan, with total, direct, and indirect standardized path coefficients and its significance level for each parameter. In terms of model fit, both nations had a fairly good fit to the data ($\chi^2(3) = 10.82, p = .08, CFI = .96, TLI = .62, RMSEA = .09$ for the United States, $\chi^2(3) = 6.7, p = .08, CFI = .97, TLI = .79, RMSEA = .09$ for Japan) (Table 6). Although the model fit for the sample in Japan had a slightly better model fit than that for the United States, the difference was not statistically significant based on Chi-square test ($\chi^2\Delta = 4.12, p > .20$).

In both countries, the results indicated the mediating role of maternal life stress in the association between couple relationship satisfaction and parenting competence controlling for household income and mothers' educational attainment. However, the result showed stark differences between the two countries, in terms of which domain of parenting was associated with couple relationship satisfaction. The results suggested that all of the three parenting competence indices – parental warmth, permissiveness, and inconsistent parenting were indirectly related to couple relationship satisfaction through life stress for the mothers in the United States ($\beta = .14, p < .001$ for parental warmth, $\beta = -.16, p < .001$ for permissiveness, and $\beta = -.17$ for inconsistent parenting). Furthermore, the comparison of standardized path coefficients revealed that mothers' ability to maintain consistency in parenting had a stronger association for the mothers in the United States, compared to the two other parenting indices.

On the other hand, for the mothers in Japan, permissiveness did not have a significant association with couple relationship satisfaction either directly or indirectly through life stress ($\beta = -.14, p = .18$ for direct association, $\beta = -.04, p = .13$ for indirect association). In terms of parental warmth and inconsistent discipline, couple relationship satisfaction had a significant direct association with each of parental warmth ($\beta = .1, p < .001$) and inconsistent parenting ($\beta = -.07, p < .001$). When comparing the standardized path coefficients, mothers' ability to facilitate warmth in parenting has a stronger association with conflict in couple relationship and maternal life stress more than consistency/inconsistency in parenting for the mothers in Japan.

Parenting self-efficacy as a mediator (PSE model). Figure 4 displays the standard path coefficients for the model estimating the influence of mothers' report on couple relationship satisfaction, parental warmth, permissiveness, and inconsistent parenting with parenting self-efficacy as a mediator (Figure 4a for the mothers in the United States, Figure 4b for the mothers in Japan). Table 5 presents the results in each of the United States and Japan, with total, direct, and indirect standardized path coefficients and its significance level for each parameter. In terms of model fit, both nations had a fairly good fit to the data ($\chi^2(3) = 9.75, p = .09, CFI = .96, TLI = .83, RMSEA = .08$ for the United States, $\chi^2(3) = 5.93, p = .12, CFI = .98, TLI = .86, RMSEA = .08$ for

Japan) (Table 6). Although the model fit for the sample in Japan again had a slightly better model fit than that for the United States, the difference was not statistically significant based on Chi-square test ($\chi^2\Delta = 3.82, p > .30$).

Only the result on the sample from Japan indicated the mediating role of parenting self-efficacy in the association between couple relationship satisfaction and parenting competence controlling for household income and mothers' educational attainment. Although the model for the mothers in the United States had a good fit, none of the indirect paths from couple relationship satisfaction and parenting self-efficacy to parenting were significant at the .05 level ($\beta = .06, p = .08$ for parental warmth, $\beta = .04, p = .06$ for permissiveness, and $\beta = .05, p = .08$ for inconsistent parenting).

On the other hand, for the mothers in Japan, the result revealed that when having satisfying and supportive couple relationships, mothers would have higher sense of efficacious beliefs about executing parenting tasks. As a result, they would have more capacity to engage in competent parenting, in particular showing parental warmth ($\beta = .11, p < .001$), having discipline strategies less permissive ($\beta = -.03, p < .05$), and maintaining consistency in parenting ($\beta = -.06, p < .001$). When comparing the standardized path coefficients, mothers' ability to facilitate warmth in parenting appeared to have a stronger association with satisfying couple relationship and mothers' increased parenting self-efficacy, more than consistency/inconsistency in parenting for the mothers in Japan.

Model Comparison: Stress or Parenting Self-Efficacy as a Mediator?

To follow the convention in testing which model fits to the data better than the other, I conducted a Chi-square test, which enables us to identify which model better explains the pathway from couple relationship satisfaction to parenting. Neither country had statistically significant differences in the model fit between the stress model and the PSE model at the .05 level.

However, its consequence has different meanings between the United States and Japan. For the mothers in the United States, the analysis did not support the mediating role of parenting self-efficacy. On the other hand, it supported the stress model, indicating that when mothers are in a highly satisfied couple relationship, their parenting shows not only warmth in parent-child interactions but also effectiveness in parental control, and the pathway between couple relations and parenting is mediated by their stress level.

In contrast, for the mothers in Japan, the analysis supported mediating roles of both life stress and parenting self-efficacy. The results suggest that stress mediates the pathways from Japanese mothers' couple relationship satisfaction to inconsistent parenting and parental warmth. In a similar vein, parenting self-efficacy mediates the effects of couple relationship on all of the three indices for parenting competence for the Japanese mothers. To summarize, couple relationship satisfaction in the Japanese family context has a powerful association with parenting quality through both their life stress as well as parenting self-efficacy.

Summary

The results of this study suggest that in Japan and the United States, satisfying couple relationships promote mothers' parenting competence, whereas difficulties in couple relationships undermine parenting ability. Furthermore, in the United States, maternal life stress mediated the association between couple relationship satisfaction and parenting competence whereas in Japan both life stress and parenting self-efficacy mediated this association.

Additionally, the results showed a difference between the two countries in terms of which domain of parenting had a stronger association with couple relationship satisfaction and maternal stress. In the American sample, life stress mediated the association from couple relationship satisfaction to all three indicators of parenting competence (warmth, permissiveness, and inconsistent parenting), with the pathway from couple relationship satisfaction to inconsistent parenting being particularly powerful. In Japan, the indirect path to permissiveness was not significant whereas the pathway associated with parenting warmth was particularly powerful.

Discussion

Following the theory and earlier research conducted in the United States and Japan, the present study used the data collected in the two countries to examine cross-cultural similarities and uniqueness of the extent that the couple relationship influences mothers' self-report on their ability to engage in competent parenting and children's self-regulation development. In particular, my study goal was to expand the traditional notion of the linkage between couple relations and range of parenting competence to include not only mediating factors but also differences across divergent sociocultural contexts.

Drawing from earlier literature, the main hypothesis of this study was that when mothers are satisfied with their couple relationships, characterized by emotional closeness and effective communication, they are more equipped to engage in competent parenting, regardless of mothers' educational attainment and household income. The results supported the hypothesis for mothers both in the United States and Japan. My study goal was to test the process of the interplay among couple relationship, mothers' self-report on their parenting, and children's self-regulation. In particular, I expected that the quality of couple relationships would be associated with children's self-regulation skills, either directly or indirectly through parenting and mothers' psychological well-being for the families both in Japan and the United States. To uncover the process of the linkage, the present study also looked at the mediating role of mothers' psychological states: life stress and parenting self-efficacy. The significance of the research findings is the uncovering of the cross-national generalizability and differences of supportive couple relationships as a key contributor to mothers' psychological well-being and their parenting competence (Cowan et al., 2005; Grych, 2002; Ishii-Kuntz, 2013).

What Are the Differences between Japan and the United States?

Since most extant studies have been conducted in the United States, I first showed basic differences between the participating mothers in the United States and those in Japan. Based on the preliminary analysis, there are a few notable differences across the two nations. First, the results showed that Japanese mothers had less positive views in terms of their couple relations and psychological well-being. In particular, Japanese mothers are less satisfied with their couple relationships, and have lower parenting self-efficacy compared to their counterparts in the United States. Although the difference was not significant, Japanese mothers also had a higher level of life stress than mothers in the United States. The findings are consistent with my expectation, based on the fact that Japanese partner relationships have traditionally placed little emphasis on psychological support, and the domain of husbands and wives have been clearly demarcated.

The second major difference is parenting competence. Drawing also from the extant comparative research on parenting, I expected that Japanese mothers would describe themselves as showing more warmth in their interactions with the child, but more permissiveness and more inconsistency in their discipline strategies compared to the mothers in the United States. The

results are partially consistent with the hypothesis. Results showed that Japanese mothers' self-reported parenting strategy was significantly more inconsistent and permissive compared to their counterparts in the United States. Counter to previous research, however, Japanese mothers reported engaging in less warm parenting compared to their counterparts in the United States. Also, its larger standard deviation indicated the broader individual variability among Japanese mothers' reported warmth in their parenting compared to their US counterparts.

To summarize, the results on the preliminary analysis indicate Japanese mothers report that they do not utilize socialization methods that parenting researchers normally considered as competent. In contrast, mothers in the United States report utilizing a broader range of socialization methods, from fostering warmth when interacting with the child to maintaining consistency and firmness in parental control. In a similar vein, the lower scores on their couple relationship satisfaction and psychological well-being indicate the tensions and dilemmas that Japanese mothers experience due to having to contend with two opposing social forces – social transformation in women's roles on the one hand, and continuity in terms of what they are expected to do to sustain satisfying couple relations on the other hand.

Beyond the comparison between the two countries, the study also found three major cross-national similarities in terms of the associations among well-functioning couple relations, mothers' parenting competence and psychological well-being, and the child's self-regulation growth.

What Are the Similarities Between the Two Nations?

As the first similarity between the two nations, I expected a positive relationship between the quality of couple relations and mothers' parenting competence. The results support the hypothesis in each nation; when mothers are satisfied with the quality of their spousal relationships, they are likely to engage in more competent parenting. In particular, the strong associations are manifested in permissiveness and inconsistent parenting for the mothers in the United States who are unsatisfied in their spousal relationships. In contrast, the association between couple relationship satisfaction and self-reported parental warmth is particularly powerful for the mothers in Japan.

As the second similarity, results in each country also indicated the positive association between couple relationship satisfaction and mothers' psychological well-being. When mothers are not satisfied with their spouses, they feel stressed and overwhelmed due to difficulties in their daily life. Moreover, whereas mothers' stress level has no significant association with children's self-regulatory skills, higher life stress is shown to have a deleterious association with all three indicators for mothers' parenting competence in each country.

To put all the bivariate associations together, an additional goal of the study was testing the cross-national validity of the mediating role of maternal life stress on the relationship between couple relations and parenting. In particular, my question was as follows: *To what extent does maternal life stress mediate the association between conflictive couple relationships and parenting competence?* As the third cross-national similarity, the present analysis supports the hypotheses in each nation; highly satisfied couple relationships work indirectly through reduced maternal life stress to nurture mothers' parenting competence. On the other hand, conflictive couple relationships would undermine mothers' ability to engage in warm parent-child interactions and/or effective parental control because it causes mothers to feel more stressed. In the United States, mothers who report higher satisfaction in their couple relationships have lower life stress, and their parenting is more competent, including expressing

more warmth in the parent-child interaction and maintaining their parental control without being inconsistent and permissive. Similarly, highly satisfied couple relationships within Japanese families are also related indirectly through reduced maternal life stress to more warmth in mother-child interaction as well as more consistency in parenting. These findings in each nation support the notion that acrimonious interactions and poor communication within a couple is detrimental to mothers' parenting quality directly or indirectly through life stress across the divergent social contexts (Cowan et al., 2005; Ishii-Kuntz, 2013).

Complexity and Its Interplay with the Sociocultural Context

These three cross-national similarities show the significance in terms of the association among couple relationship satisfaction, mothers' self-reported parenting competence, and mothers' psychological well-being. As we move to a more detailed analysis, the picture gets more complicated, as results elicit important differences between the United States and Japan.

First, the study supports a cross-national difference in terms of the parenting domain with which the quality of couple relations has a more powerful association. For the family context in the United States, a highly satisfying couple relationship has both direct and indirect associations with promoting and maintaining effective parental control, specifically in maintaining consistent and firm discipline. Within the context of Japanese families, only the affective nature of parenting characterized as parental warmth has an association with couple relationship quality both directly and indirectly.

Drawing from extant literature on parenting and culture, I argue that unsatisfying couple relationships reduce mothers' capability to engage in the parenting dimensions that may be valued more in a given sociocultural context (Chao, 2001; Wu et al., 2002). Comparative work on parenting – both classic and recent literature – indicates a number of differences between Japan and the United States. For instance, mothers in the United States expect earlier mastery of verbal assertiveness, leadership in peer interactions, and independence, whereas Japanese mothers expected earlier mastery of skills in terms of emotional maturity, obedience, and social courtesy within the close, *amae/amayakasu* relationship, characterized by warm parent-child interaction (Behrens & Kondo-Ikemura, 2011; Dennis et al., 2007; Doi, 1971; Hess et al., 1980; Rothbaum et al., 2007). In particular, establishing emotional closeness was one of the salient parenting themes amongst the mothers in Japan, and one of the major socialization strategies is to sensitize children to others' feelings and to emphasize harmony in interpersonal relationships (Dennis et al., 2007; Lewis, 1995; Tobin et al., 2009). Building upon earlier works on culture and parenting, the findings in the present study illuminate that the influence of couple relations on parenting is aligned with cultural models on parenting, specifically, differing parenting emphases and child rearing goals across social contexts. Thus, rather than treating the influence of couple relationships as monolithic and universal, the findings highlight the complexity inherent in studies of culture, family relations, and parenting. The findings also highlight the importance of conceptualizing the role of culture as a factor to determine which parenting dimension in any given culture is more susceptible to positive or conflictive couple relationships.

In addition to the mediating role of mothers' life stress, the present study also examined the role of mothers' self-efficacy beliefs in executing parenting tasks. In particular, the study hypothesized that when mothers are in a highly satisfying couple relationship, it would promote competency in their parenting because support and emotional closeness available from their spouses promote a mother's self-efficacious beliefs as a parent. The hypothesis was supported only for mothers in Japan, consistent with the earlier work on Japanese mothers in the

contemporary Japanese family context (Holloway, 2010; Suzuki, et al., 2009). This finding is an important contribution to the theory on parenting self-efficacy because it challenges the idea that self-efficacy is not relevant in an East Asian context where the value systems are seen as emphasizing achievement of collectivistic goals and fitting into a group (Heine et al., 1999; Kitayama et al., 1997)

The present findings also challenge the idea that Japanese mothers are primed to feel love for their children and enjoy taking care of the child and other family members, echoing the more current discourse on Japanese family life (Kashiwagi, 2013; Ohinata, 2013; Ueno, 2009). Within the norms and traditions of Japanese family life, spousal relations have rarely been recognized as determinants for mothers' abilities to parent. As scholars such as Ohinata (2013) and Kashiwagi (2013) argue, this misleading assumption widely endorsed in Japan has regarded mothers as those who can fully function for the sake of family and child welfare without their spouses' help. Moreover, the post-war cultural ideas about child rearing and mothers' roles have placed much emphasis on physical proximity and emotional sensitivity between mothers and young children. These illusive pictures of women and motherhood are a major drive to family policies and employment conditions, where women are expected to support men who work for long hours. In recent policy reforms, the Japanese government and industries have devoted much effort to implementing family-friendly policies such as relaxing the conditions required to take parental leave as well as providing parent education workshops to promote a sense of parenting responsibility among both men and women.

Nevertheless, to what extent does the Japanese government's current effort toward the welfare of mothers and young children include men's commitment to the family arena? Scholars such as Yamato (2008) and Ueno (2009) dismiss its efficacy by arguing that these policies are incapable of removing obstacles for women in work and family life; that is, these policies cannot intervene in the persisting social system, which is based on the presence of men who devote many hours to work and are "allowed" to be disconnected from family responsibilities (Yamato, 2006, 2008). Thus the present study contributes to the field by emphasizing supportive and mutually understanding spousal relationships as a key contributor to individual differences in mothers' mental health and parenting in the contemporary Japanese family context. Moreover, the results urge further investigation on Japanese mothers as well as their dilemma between the two opposing social forces – continuity and change in terms of family life and maternal roles in the midst of the drastic social transformation.

What Contradicted the Hypotheses?

Issues on child outcomes. Overall, there were two results that contradicted my expectations. First, the results for each nation found no associations between children's self-regulation development and key variables in the analysis. Counter to my expectations, children's self-regulation skills rated by their classroom teachers did not have a significant association with the quality of couple relations or mothers' parenting behaviors. The results were surprising because earlier work repeatedly indicated that the quality of spousal relationships and parenting competence are important determinant factors to children's abilities to regulate their impulses in the classroom during young childhood (Cabrera et al., 2012; Finger et al., 2010).

What could explain the gap between these results and the earlier work? First, it should be noted that children's social development, in particular, self-regulation, is influenced by other factors in addition to parenting and family contexts (Fincham & Beach, 2010). As children enter elementary school, they spend longer periods of time in the classroom, interacting with people

beyond parent-child dyads, such as peers and teachers. Thus, their growing capacity to control frustrations and to be considerate of others may arise from classroom environments and child characteristics (e.g., gender, age) as much as from parenting, because the social contexts in which children are embedded consist of many layers (Karreman et al., 2006; Li-Grining, 2012; Raver, 1996).

In both Japan and the United States, we have seen a rising emphasis on “globalization” and “competition” in the discourse of education, and early childhood education is no exception (Tobin et al., 2009). Thus, it is possible to speculate that the influence of school curriculum and teachers upon child development is becoming powerful. Under this larger trend that surrounds education, early education is also increasingly operated by the underlying logic that all the money invested in young children needs to yield a significant economic and social return, including the future competitive labor force of a community. At the same time, this movement heightens pressures and tension among educators and schools to comply with these expectations in their curriculum and students’ learning outcomes in the name of achievement and accountability (Tobin et al., 2009). Well told in ethnographic work on preschools conducted by Tobin et al. (2009) going back more than a generation, preschool directors both in the United States and Japan commented that it is an important mission for preschools to help children develop social skills that they are not necessarily learning at home. Thus, when thinking about what contributes to individual differences in self-regulation development, it is essential to consider the interplay between children’s dispositional characteristics as well as the layers of social context that each child resides in, such as school characteristics.

As a second explanation for this finding, self-regulation is multidimensional (McClelland & Cameron, 2012; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). Rather than treating it as a single dimension, scholars have recently addressed the importance of measuring the specific dimensions of self-regulation. As McClelland & Cameron (2012) point out, it is becoming a common practice for researchers in childhood self-regulation to measure specific aspects separately, such as attentional flexibility, inhibitory control, and working memory (Carlson, 2005; Smith-Donald et al., 2007). Because separate measures of self-regulation or executive function are often weakly related to each other (Blair, 2003; Lan et al., 2011), there is an ongoing debate in terms of the measurement and conceptual ambiguity on what self-regulation as a broader construct means. Thus, the results might have been different if the present study had measured children’s self-regulation skills by integrating attentional flexibility, working memory, inhibitory control, and other behavioral demands children exhibit in naturalistic settings such as classrooms (McClelland & Cameron, 2012).

Although this analysis did not show that children’s self-regulation development had a significant association with parents’ couple relations or parenting, it does not necessarily exclude the possibility of such associations. Based on the reasons mentioned above, I argue that the results are still inconclusive in terms of whether family relation factors contribute to individual differences in children’s self-regulation development.

Parenting self-efficacy for the mothers in the United States. As another surprising finding, the results in the United States did not show an association between couple relationship satisfaction and parenting self-efficacy. This contradicts earlier studies conducted in the United States that indicate a strong correlation between couple relationship satisfaction and parenting self-efficacy. However, based on two major factors, I argue that it is still premature to rule out the potentially important role of parenting self-efficacy in the context of families in the United States.

First, it is possible to speculate that factors other than couple relationship satisfaction or support available in spousal relationships may contribute to individual differences in these mothers' self-efficacious beliefs. For instance, research conducted by Suzuki et al. (2009) indicates the significance of support from mothers' friends and intergenerational support from their mothers as other important determinants for mothers in the United States.

Second, the majority of the sample in the United States was highly educated and/or in middle- to upper-middle class households. Earlier works have suggested that mothers who are more educated are more efficacious in the parenting role (Conger, Elder, & Lorenz et al., 1990; Cutrona & Troutman, 1986; Suzuki et al., 2009). Certainly, the sample in this study shows the same pattern, as the descriptive statistics indicate that their parenting self-efficacy appeared to have a ceiling effect.

Third, an ongoing debate on how to measure parenting self-efficacy should be noted. This study used the Parenting Self-Agency scale (Dumka et al., 1996), a scale that measures overall parenting self-efficacy. This scale has been widely used in many studies, and it has been established as a reliable measure to broadly capture how competent a parent feels in the parenting role and is more suitable for a range of child ages. Despite the advantages of general measures like the Parenting Self-Agency scale, Bandura argues that it is adequate to measure parenting self-efficacy with more a specific, narrowly defined measurement because it provides more accurate measurement and operationalization. Following his argument, some scholars claim that general parenting self-efficacy measures are less sensitive to specific parenting tasks (Crnces, Barnett, & Matthey, 2010; Jones & Prinz, 2005). Instead, these scholars recommend using a parenting self-efficacy measure that is specific to a given task within parenting (i.e., how a parent feels for specific child rearing tasks) or that is narrowly defined in terms of a given parenting domain (e.g., discipline, teaching, or communication), or combining general and specific scales to measure parents' self-efficacy beliefs (Crnces, Barnett, & Matthey, 2010; Jones & Prinz, 2005).

Based on these three factors, I argue that it is still premature to rule out the potentially important role of parenting self-efficacy in the context of families in the United States. Undoubtedly, further examinations with more accurate parenting self-efficacy measures and longitudinal associations of parenting self-efficacy involving couple relationship and parenting seem imperative.

Research Limitations

This investigation advances the study of the interplay between family relations and parenting by examining cross-national similarities and uniqueness on the psychological process that connects mothers' couple relationship satisfaction to parenting competence and child development, with a specific focus on life stress and parenting self-efficacy. Nevertheless, the results must be interpreted in the light of its limitations.

First, it is important to acknowledge that the assessment of mothers' satisfaction with the couple relationship as well as parenting competence consisted of a brief, self-reported survey, which may not fully capture the *quality* of various family relationships. This is particularly important because there is no definitive consensus made yet in terms of what is an appropriate way to "quantify" couple relationships or parenting, and this causes methodological ambiguity regarding what aspect of couple relationships or parenting would predict child development (Erel & Burman, 1995; Fincham & Beach, 2010; Grych, 2002; Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000). For instance, scholars such as Fincham and Beach (2010) argue that children's perception and

interpretation of interparental conflict has the most powerful relationship with child development. On the other hand, scholars such as Erel and Burman (1995) argue that it is more accurate to use multiple indices to measure overall partner relationship quality in a more holistic manner (e.g., how a couple initiates and engages in sharing parenting tasks) rather than relying on a single scale.

In a similar vein, cultural similarities in patterns of mother-child contingent interaction could be culturally relative (Dennis et al., 2007). For example, decreasing commands could serve to encourage child relatedness among parent-child dyads in the United States context, but among Japanese dyads might instead reduce relatedness by downplaying the interdependent hierarchical relationship between mothers and children (Dennis et al., 2007; Kagitcibasi, 2005). Hence, it is important to obtain a more complete, multidimensional picture of various facets of interpersonal relationship quality within a family, instead of solely relying on self-reported measures.

Second, a majority of the sample both in the United States and Japan was in middle- to upper-middle class households, based on their household income. Furthermore, the majority of the sample collected in Japan wasn't in the labor force. Given broader social and economic trends, it is important to examine divergence in family life across different types of women's employment status (i.e., full-time employment, part-time employment) and in the ways in which various families negotiate work with family life. Future studies need to illuminate such complexity by including different types of families (i.e., married couples, cohabitation, adaptation, same-sex couples) or various demographic characteristics (ethnicity, SES, or contrast between urban and rural areas) (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001).

Finally, the cross-sectional design of our study largely precludes us from making causal inferences. Thus, the results do not necessarily inform us about the longer-term trajectory of couple relationship quality to life stress, parenting self-efficacy, and parenting competence. In terms of "changes" across the life span within an individual or one family, the meanings and effects of parenting practices are not static across the children's developmental stages. As Darling and Steinberg (1993) have put it, future work needs longitudinal studies that track the interplay between parenting experiences and parents' couple relationship quality across the child's developmental periods. Hence, it is important to conceptualize "parenting competence" in a more developmental approach.

Study Implications

By finding the complex nature of direct and indirect relations within family life, this study emphasizes that parenting is an intricate matter that may be influenced by processes and multiple elements within the family. Despite the limitations, these research findings contribute to uncovering the process by which couple relationships that do not provide mutual communication, support, conflict resolution and sensitivity do harm to mothers' psychological well-being and how they parent the child. Findings from this study emphasize that practitioners need to be aware of the family-interpersonal relationships and their contribution to mothers' parenting competence and psychological well-being. In other words, considering only mother-child dyads is insufficient to understand how to best support mothers. Intervention programs and clinical services designed to promote parenting should focus on how couples, as a team, can foster a positive partnership and mutual respect and sensitivity.

Based on the results in each country, what should be transformed is not only macro level ideas about family and gender roles but also individual men's and women's sense of

responsibility as an active member of the household. Both in the United States and Japan, many younger fathers, compared with their fathers' generation, have become more aware of the importance of paternal involvement to their families, due partly to governmental campaigns (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013; Robertson & Suzuki, 2002). At the same time, attitudinal variables such as how they see fathers' roles and their gender role beliefs are found to determine paternal involvement among men (Ishii-Kuntz, 2013). Thus, attitudinal dimensions and gender role beliefs are also potential fields that need urgent transformation. In terms of transforming men's perceptions of fathers' roles and gender role beliefs, the education system also needs to transform, including issues surrounding the "hidden curriculum."

This study also highlights the importance of research addressing practical problems faced by partners in relationships and families as a compass to navigate policy-level interventions. Specifically, these findings regarding Japanese mothers will allow us to better inform the policy goals in Japan. The illusive picture of Japanese family and motherhood has pushed women's needs and desires for fulfilling their personal goals to the margins of the society. As a result, Japan's earlier intervention programs designed to promote mothers' welfare and parenting capabilities tend to have solely focused on mother-child dyads, rather than situating mothers and children within the family context. Future interventions should be informed by research findings on the dynamic process of family relations and parenting competence.

In summary, the aim of this study was a cross-national investigation between the United States and Japan, but with recognition of individual differences within each country. The study nevertheless contributed to the literature on the relationship between couple relations and parenting in two respects. First, the findings show some consistency in the process that links satisfaction in couple relationships to parenting competence across the United States and Japan. It is thus able to show the importance of looking at parenting beyond mother-child dyads, underscoring that how well a mother can function as a parent does not exist in a vacuum, separate from the family dynamics.

Second, the results also indicate the sociocultural uniqueness within the process that links the couple relationship to parenting competence. Taken together, these findings suggest that the benefits that satisfying couple relationships project onto child rearing may be a universal feature of family life; nevertheless, the values and practices specific to various cultural models of parenting determine which domains of parenting are vulnerable to the quality of couple relationships.

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Appendix 1 Tables

| | United States | | Japan |
|---|--|------------|--------------|
| Number of children in the family, <i>n</i> (%) | 1 | 18 (13.6%) | 30 (19.1%) |
| | 2 | 84 (63.6%) | 81 (51.6%) |
| | 3 or above | 28 (21.3%) | 46 (29.3%) |
| Target child's gender, <i>n</i> (%) | Male | 57 (43.2%) | 77 (49%) |
| | Female | 73 (55.3%) | 80 (51%) |
| Children' age in month, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)^a | 90.64 (7.04) | | 82.56 (6.96) |
| Mothers' age, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)^a | 40.97 (5.29) | | 39.02 (3.95) |
| Race, <i>n</i> (%) | White or Caucasian | 75 (56.8%) | |
| | Asian or Pacific Islander | 32 (24.2%) | |
| | Latino, Latin American, or Hispanic | 10 (7.6%) | |
| | Filipino | 13 (9.8%) | |
| | Black or African American | 2 (1.5%) | |
| Highest level of education, <i>n</i> (%) | Up to High school, GED, or equivalent ^b | 5 (3.8%) | 28 (17.8%) |
| | Some college, vocational school or junior college ^b | 19 (14.4%) | 71 (45.2%) |
| | BA (college graduate) | 49 (37.1%) | 55 (35.0%) |
| | Graduate or professional ^b | 59 (44.7%) | 3 (1.9%) |

| | | | | |
|--|---------------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|
| | degree | | | |
| Employment status, <i>n</i> (%) | Not employed ^b | 28 (21.2%) | 63 (40.1%) | |
| | Part time ^b | 86 (65.2%) | 83 (52.9%) | |
| | Full time | 13 (9.8%) | 11 (7.0%) | |
| | Missing | 5 (3.8%) | 0 (0%) | |
| Annual household income, <i>n</i> (%) | under \$15,000 | 2 (1.5%) | 1-1.99 million yen | 2 (1.3%) |
| | \$15,001-\$25,000 | 1 (.8%) | 2-3.99 million yen | 15 (9.6%) |
| | \$25,001-\$35,000 | 3 (2.3%) | 4-5.99 million yen | 32 (20.4%) |
| | \$35,001-\$50,000 | 8 (6.1%) | 6-7.99 million yen | 45 (28.7%) |
| | \$50,001-\$75,000 | 15 (11.4%) | 8-9.99 million yen | 25 (15.9%) |
| | \$75,001-\$100,000 | 24 (18.2%) | 10-11.99 million yen | 18 (11.5%) |
| | over \$100,000 | 73 (55.3%) | 12-13.99 million yen | 9 (5.7%) |
| | unsure | 5 (3.8%) | 14-15.99 million yen | 6 (3.8%) |
| | Missing | 1(.8%) | 16 million yen and above | 5 (3.2%) |

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

| Variable | United States | | | | | | Japan | | | | | |
|---|---------------|------|----------|----------|------|------|-------|------|----------|----------|------|-------|
| | M | SD | Skewness | Kurtosis | Min | Max | M | SD | Skewness | Kurtosis | Min | Max |
| Couple relationship satisfaction ^a | 4.13 | .67 | -.78 | -.13 | 2.30 | 5.00 | 3.35 | .51 | -.31 | -.28 | 1.80 | 4.50 |
| Parental warmth ^a | 4.36 | .47 | -.71 | -.14 | 2.89 | 5.00 | 3.95 | .52 | -.24 | -.53 | 2.56 | 5.00 |
| Permissiveness ^a | 1.78 | .57 | .28 | -.94 | 1.00 | 3.17 | 2.08 | .61 | .36 | -.24 | 1.00 | 3.83 |
| Inconsistent parenting ^a | 2.15 | .82 | .22 | -1.04 | 1.00 | 4.00 | 2.84 | .58 | .15 | -.03 | 1.50 | 4.33 |
| Child self-regulation ^a | 17.35 | 6.05 | -.57 | -.76 | 3.10 | 25. | 13.90 | 5.47 | .20 | -.60 | 2.69 | 25.00 |
| Parenting self-efficacy ^a | 4.12 | .60 | -.89 | 1.22 | 2.20 | 5.00 | 3.01 | .78 | .09 | -.20 | 1.40 | 5.00 |
| Life stress | 2.31 | .61 | .28 | -.14 | 1.10 | 4.00 | 2.41 | .52 | .46 | 1.34 | 1.10 | 4.50 |

a. Significantly different means between the United States and Japan based on ANOVA results, $p < .05$

Table 3
Correlation Coefficients among Key Variables

| <i>USA</i> | Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| | 1. Couple relationship satisfaction | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| | 2. Parental warmth | .17 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| | 3. Permissiveness | -.31** | -.30** | 1.00 | | | | |
| | 4. Inconsistent parenting | -.35** | -.34** | .60** | 1.00 | | | |
| | 5. Child self-regulation | .04 | -.03 | -.14 | .05 | 1.00 | | |
| | 6. Life stress | -.47** | -.31** | .42** | .47** | .01 | 1.00 | |
| | 7. Parenting self-efficacy | .14 | .42** | -.34** | -.40** | .11 | -.33** | 1.00 |
| <i>Japan</i> | Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| | 1. Couple relationship satisfaction | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| | 2. Parental warmth | .33** | 1.00 | | | | | |
| | 3. Permissiveness | -.17* | -.18* | 1.00 | | | | |
| | 4. Inconsistent parenting | -.08 | -.25** | .44** | 1.00 | | | |
| | 5. Child self-regulation | .05 | .08 | -.12 | -.03 | 1.00 | | |
| | 6. Life stress | -.30** | -.41** | .16* | .24* | -.12 | 1.00 | |
| | 7. Parenting self-efficacy | .19* | .56** | -.18* | -.26** | .01 | -.40** | 1.00 |

* Significantly correlated at $p < .05$,

** Significantly correlated at $p < .001$

Table 4
Standardized Coefficients and Significance Level from Path Analysis on Life Stress and Parenting

| | Predictor | Dependent Variable | Total Effect | Direct Effect | Indirect Effect |
|--------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| <i>USA</i> | Couple relationship satisfaction | Life stress | -.45** | -.45** | 0 |
| | | Parental warmth | - | - | .14** |
| | | Permissiveness | -.28** | -.24* | -.16** |
| | | Inconsistent parenting | -.31** | -.26** | -.17** |
| | Life stress | Parental warmth | -.32** | -.32** | 0 |
| | | Permissiveness | .36** | .36** | 0 |
| | | Inconsistent parenting | .38** | .38** | 0 |
| | | | | | |
| <i>Japan</i> | Couple relationship satisfaction | Life stress | -.3** | -.3** | 0 |
| | | Parental warmth | .35** | .25** | .1** |
| | | Permissiveness | - | - | - |
| | | Inconsistent parenting | - | - | -.07** |
| | Life stress | Parental warmth | -.35** | -.35** | 0 |
| | | Permissiveness | - | - | 0 |
| | | Inconsistent parenting | .24** | .24** | 0 |
| | | | | | |

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .001$

- Nonsignificant

Table 5
Standardized Coefficients and Significance Level from Path Analysis on Parenting Self-Efficacy and Parenting

| | Predictor | Dependent Variable | Total Effect | Direct Effect | Indirect Effect |
|--------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|
| <i>USA</i> | Couple relationship satisfaction | Parenting self-efficacy | - | - | 0 |
| | | Parental warmth | - | - | - |
| | | Permissiveness | -.3** | -.25* | - |
| | | Inconsistent parenting | -.33** | -.28** | - |
| | Parenting self-efficacy | Parental warmth | .42** | .42** | 0 |
| | | Permissiveness | -.29** | -.29** | 0 |
| | | Inconsistent parenting | -.33** | -.33** | 0 |
| | | | | | |
| <i>Japan</i> | Couple relationship satisfaction | Parenting self-efficacy | .22** | .22** | 0 |
| | | Parental warmth | .35** | .24** | .11** |
| | | Permissiveness | - | - | -.03* |
| | | Inconsistent parenting | - | - | -.06** |
| | Parenting self-efficacy | Parental warmth | .5** | .5** | 0 |
| | | Permissiveness | -.16* | -.16* | 0 |
| | | Inconsistent parenting | -.27** | -.27** | 0 |
| | | | | | |

* Significant at $p < .05$

** Significant at $p < .001$

- Nonsignificant

Table 6
Fit indices for the two models in each country

| USA | | χ^2 | degrees of freedom | <i>p</i> -value | CFI | TLI | RMSEA | χ^2_{diff} |
|--|---------------------------|----------|--------------------------|-----------------|-----|-----|-------|-----------------|
| Model 1. | Life stress as a mediator | 10.82 | 3 | .08 | .96 | .62 | .09 | |
| Model 2. | PSE as a mediator | 9.75 | 3 | .09 | .96 | .83 | .08 | |
| Difference between Model 1 and Model 2 | | | | | | | | 1.07 |
| Japan | | | | | | | | |
| Model 1. | Life stress as a mediator | 6.7 | 3 | .08 | .97 | .79 | .09 | |
| Model 2. | PSE as a mediator | 5.93 | 3 | .12 | .98 | .86 | .08 | |
| Difference between Model 1 and Model 2 | | | | | | | | .77 |

CFI = Comparative Fit Index, TLI= Tucker Lewis Index, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

* Significantly different at $p < .05$

Appendix 2 Figures

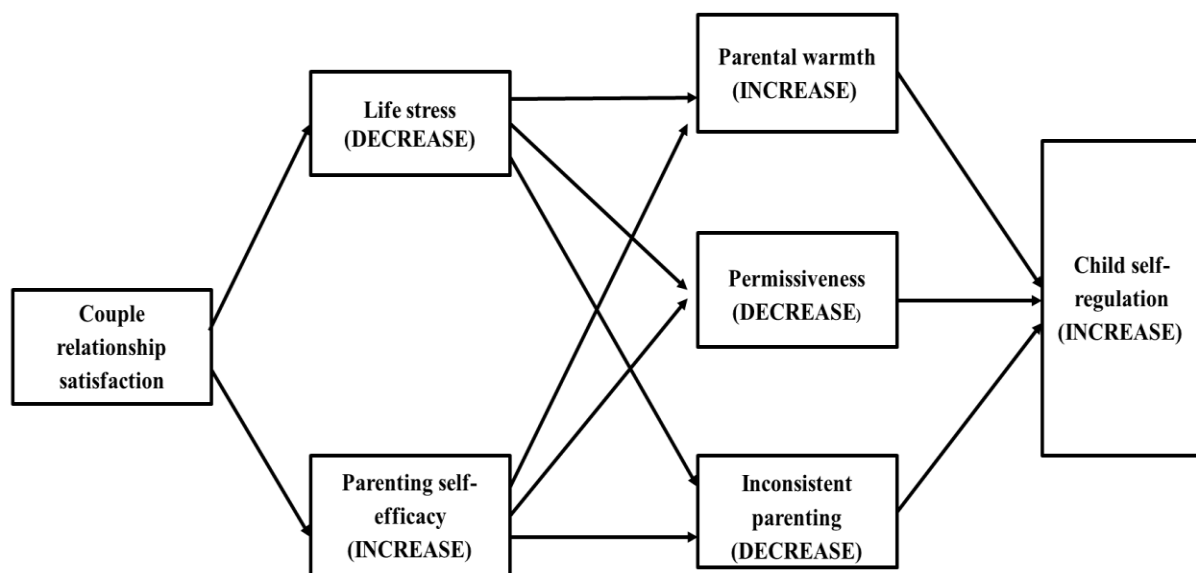


Figure 1
Conceptual Framework with Child Outcome

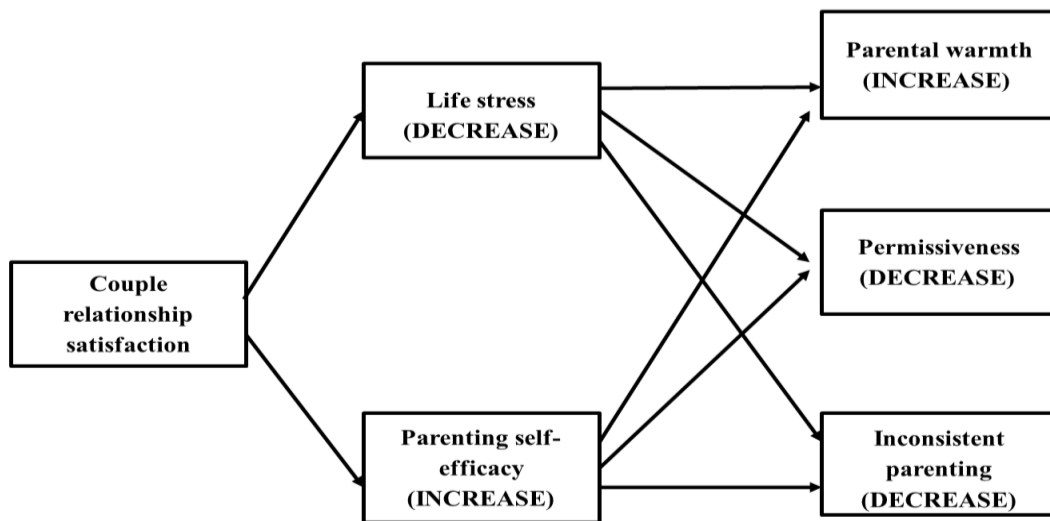


Figure 2
Final model with Parenting as an Outcome

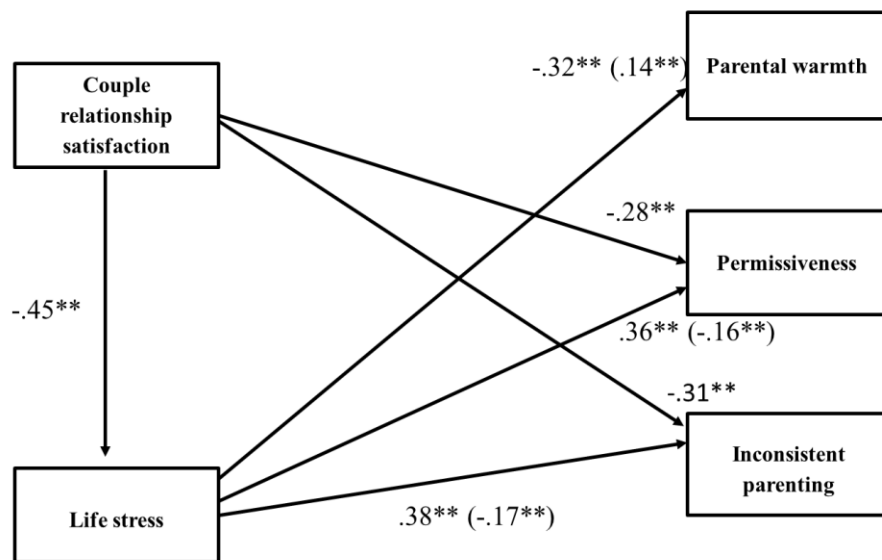


Figure 3a

Stress model (United States)

Only significant paths are included, and standardized indirect path coefficients from couple relationship satisfaction to parenting are reported in parentheses.

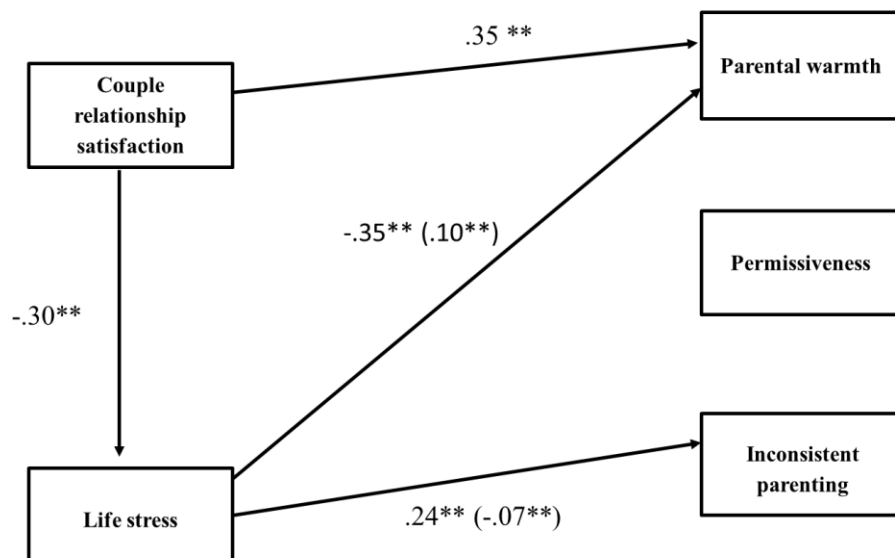


Figure 3b

Stress model (Japan)

Only significant paths are included, and standardized indirect path coefficients from couple relationship satisfaction to parenting are reported in parentheses.

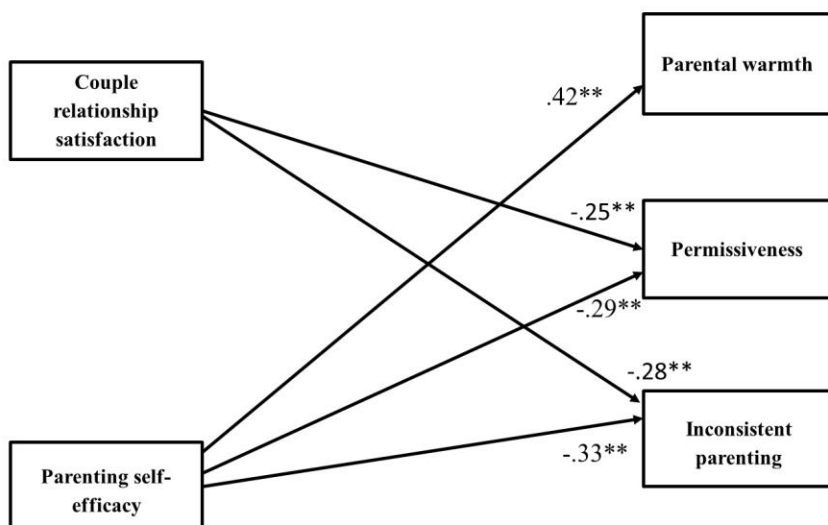


Figure 4a

Parenting Self- Efficacy model (United States)

Only significant paths are included, and standardized indirect path coefficients from couple relationship satisfaction to parenting are reported in parentheses.

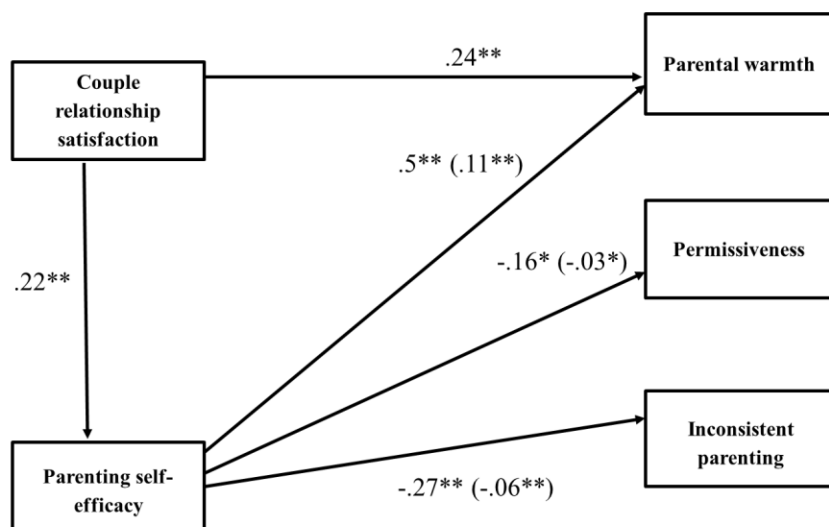


Figure 4b

Parenting Self- Efficacy model (Japan).

Only significant paths are included, and standardized indirect path coefficients from couple relationship satisfaction to parenting are reported in parentheses.