

# Family Development

## From the first child to the – not so –empty nest

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### Overview:

- 1. Family as main context of development
- 2. Family development, family stress and families as social systems
- 3. Transitions in psychological studies
  - Transition to parenthood
  - Integrating a second child
  - Transition to adolescence
  - Separation, divorce and stepfamilies
- 4. Launching center and empty nest

# What will you learn?

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- Families adapt to expected and unexpected challenges over their life cycle – transitions
- This includes **change** in
  - **roles**
  - **relationships**
  - **interaction patterns**
- Reaching a new phase in family development as well as not reaching it can impact well-being and mental health
- Good relationships based on mutual trust help with transitions

# Contexts of development

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- Context: from Latin, con = 'together', textere = weave, braid
  - Woven together – cannot be separated any more
- Family is part of the microsystem: **direct interaction**
  - all influences by higher systems are filtered by the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979)
- The family is the closest, the longest lasting and the most important developmental context

# Family – 2 generations

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- 'family' from Latin 'familia' – meaning household
- central for this talk: intergenerational aspect
  - at least 2 generations: a parent generation caring for the offspring generation

# Studying Families:

## 3 major theoretical approaches

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- Family developmental tasks
- Family stress model
- Families as social systems

# Family Developmental Tasks –beginning after WW2

Eveylin Duvall and Reuben Hill (Aldous, 1990; Martin, 2018)

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- Families as a “whole” progress through a series of similar phases
  - Face similar transitions, need to make similar adjustments
- To understand the family, specific challenges in each phase need to be considered
- Families differ how well they master tasks at each stage of development

# Family Developmental Tasks (Duvall, 1957; 1977)

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Phase	Developmental tasks
<b>Couple (without children)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Developing a good spousal relationship</li><li>■ Integrating couple into extended families</li></ul>
<b>Childbearing families</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Caretaking for young baby</li><li>■ Taking role as parent</li></ul>
<b>Families with school-aged children</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Providing optimal support for children</li><li>■ Integrating school-life into family-life</li></ul>
<b>Families with teenagers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Transformation of parent-child relationship</li><li>■ Accepting increased autonomy of children</li></ul>

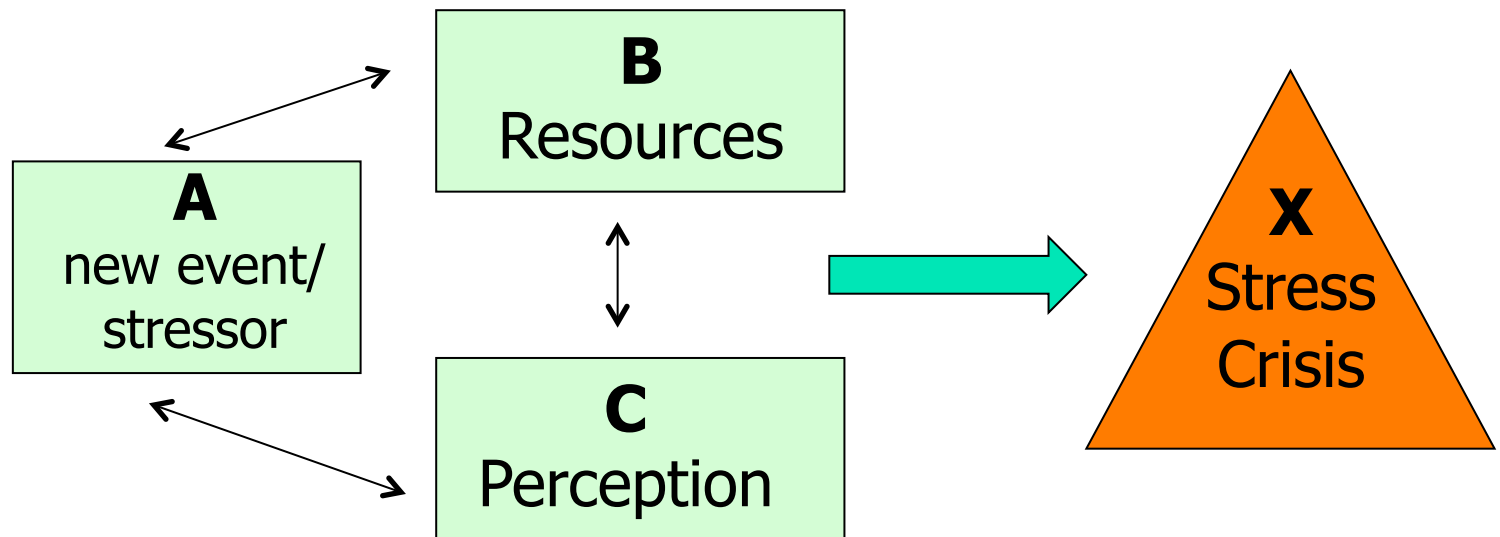
# Family Developmental Tasks

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Phase	Developmental tasks
<b>Families as launching centers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ First child gone to last child leaving home</li><li>■ Maintaining supportive relationship towards children</li></ul>
<b>Middle-age parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Empty nest to retirement</li><li>■ Integrating children's partners into family</li></ul>
<b>Aging family members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Retirement to death of both spouses</li><li>■ Coping with loss/death of relatives</li></ul>

# Family Stress Model (ABCX) – Reuben Hill (1949)

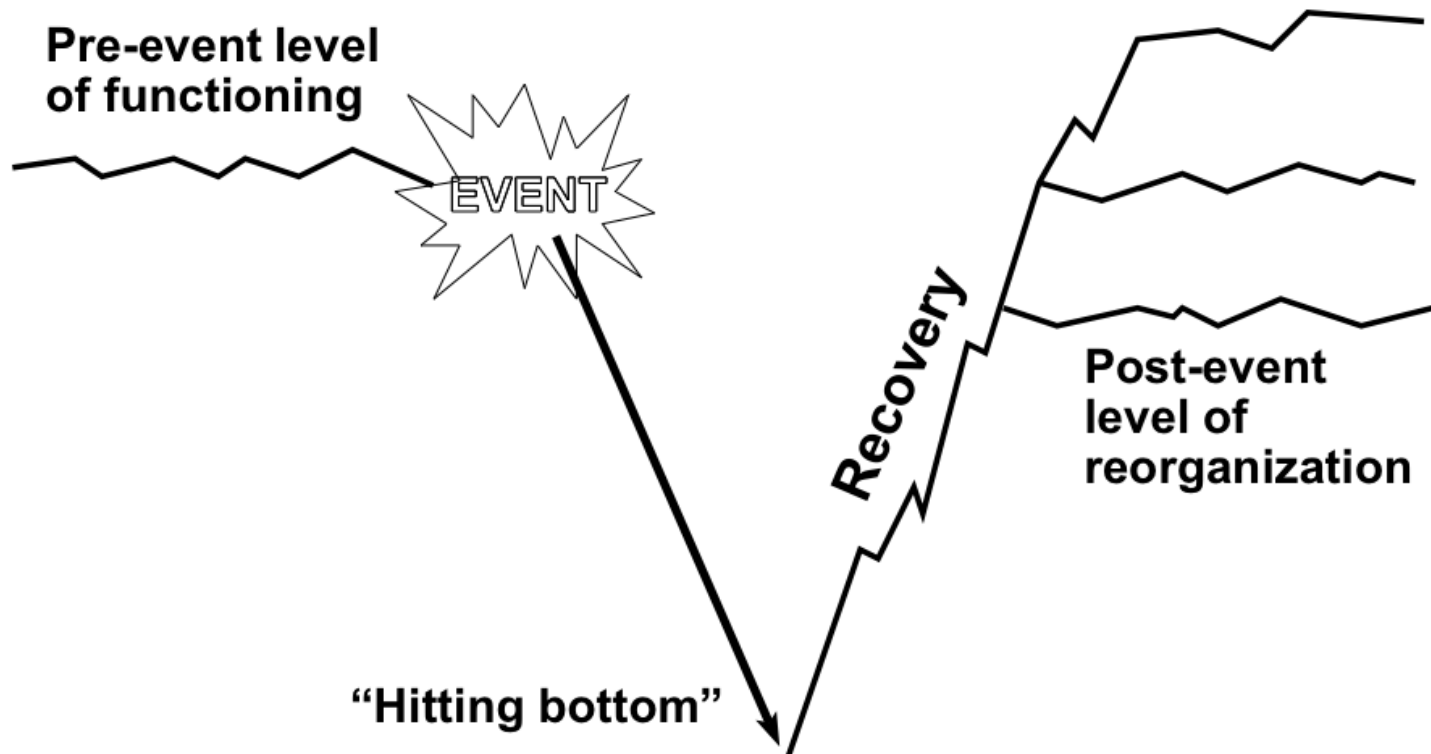
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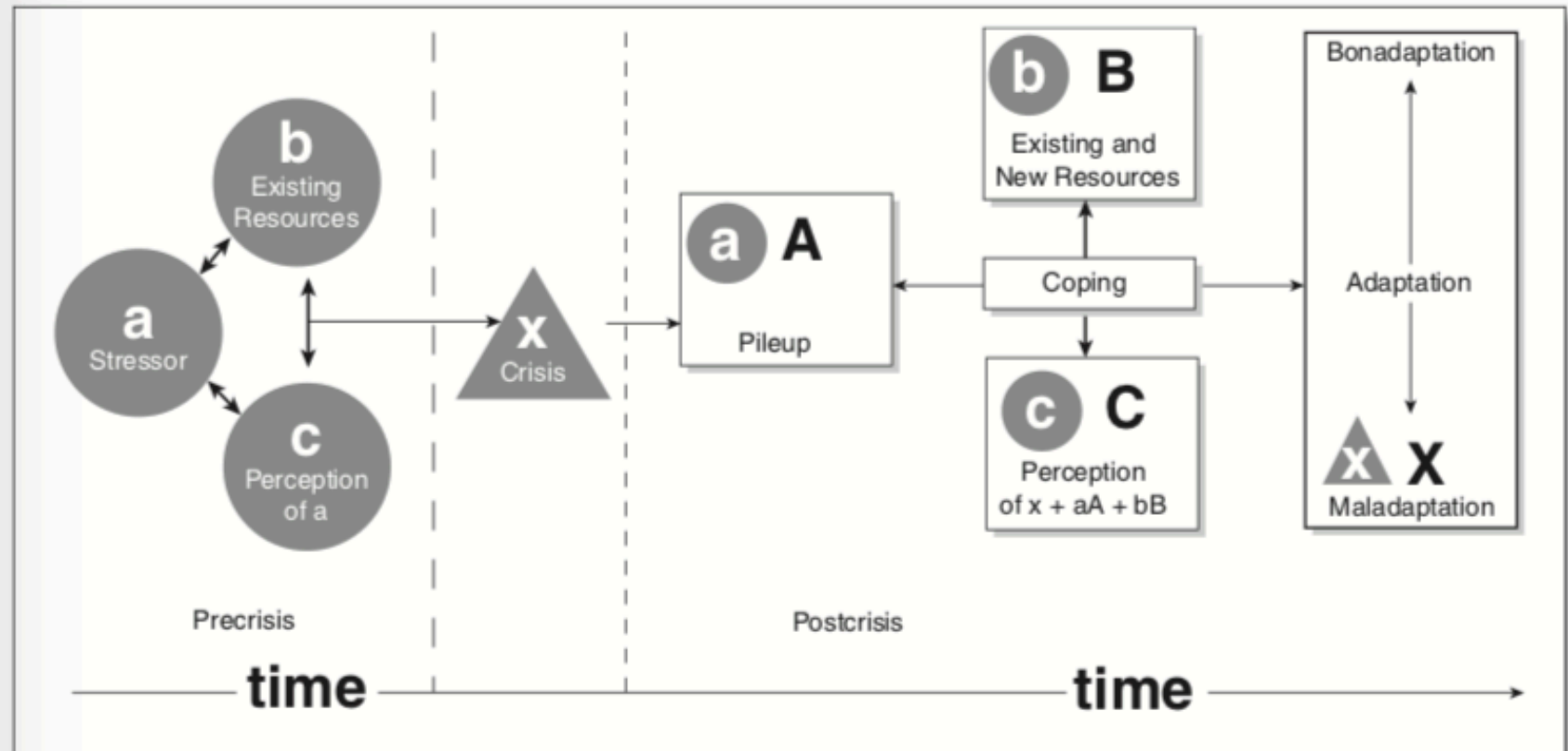
# Psychological “chaos” during time of crisis

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## The “roller coaster” model



# Families coping with stress – Double ABCX



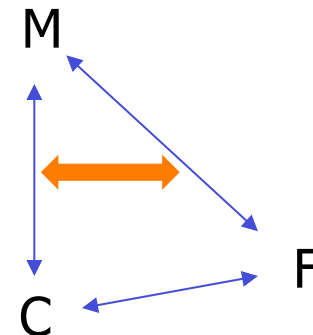
Source: McCubbin & Patterson (1983a).

# The Family: Social Systems Perspective

(P. Minuchin, 1985, 1991, 2002)

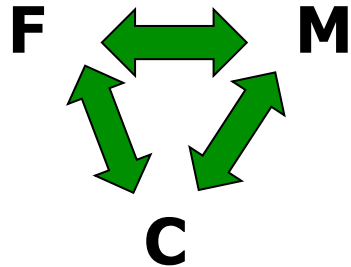
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- Families are complex social systems
  - Reciprocal influences between members and between relationships
    - Mother influences child, child influences mother, parent-parent relationship influences parent-child relationships
  - Indirect, third party effects
    - Relationship between two individuals in family is influenced by third family member
  - Every person and every relationship affects every other person and relationship in the family

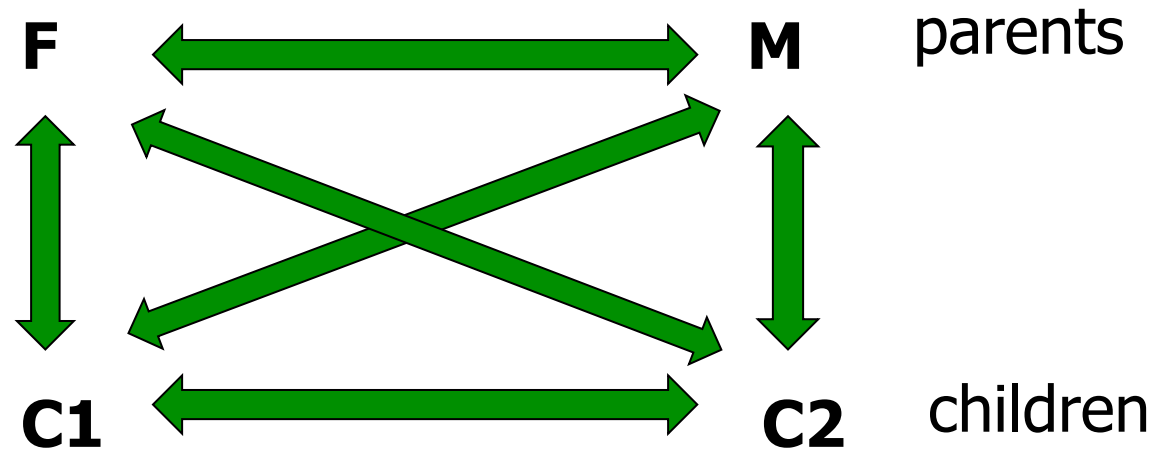


# Relationships in one child and two children families (Kreppner, 1988)

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Integrating a second child as a process:  
6 dyads 4 triads and 2  
subsystems



# Social Systems Perspective over time

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Family system develops:

- Family as a “whole” needs to reorganize at each developmental transition
- Change is triggered by change of individual members
  - Normative change: Foreseeable
  - Non-normative change: Unforeseeable

# Psychological transition

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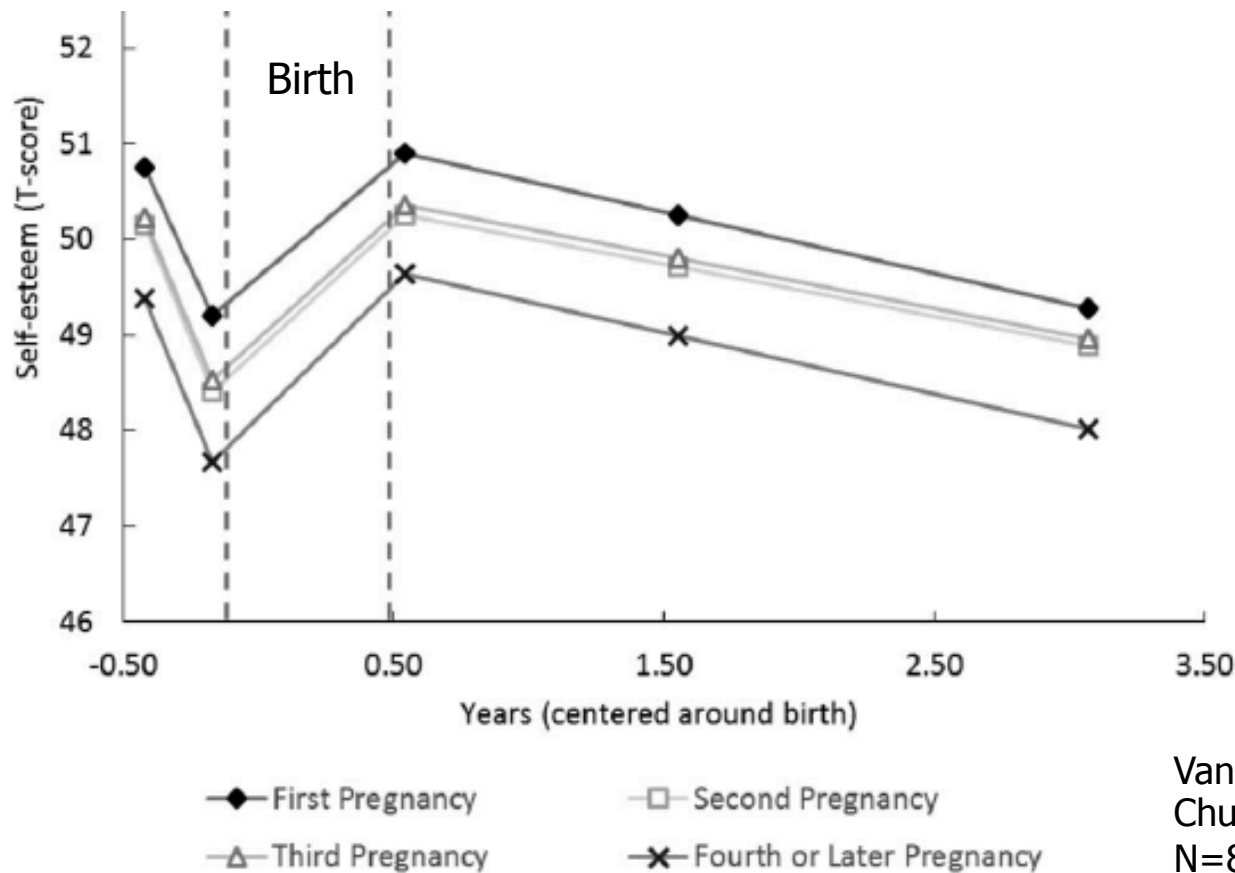
- Transition – individual change on 3 levels:
  - biological
  - cognitive
  - social
- Transition as a family – re-defining of relationships, roles and everyday family life
- Phase of “instability” followed by new defined roles, interaction patterns and relationships

# Partners become parents – birth of the first child

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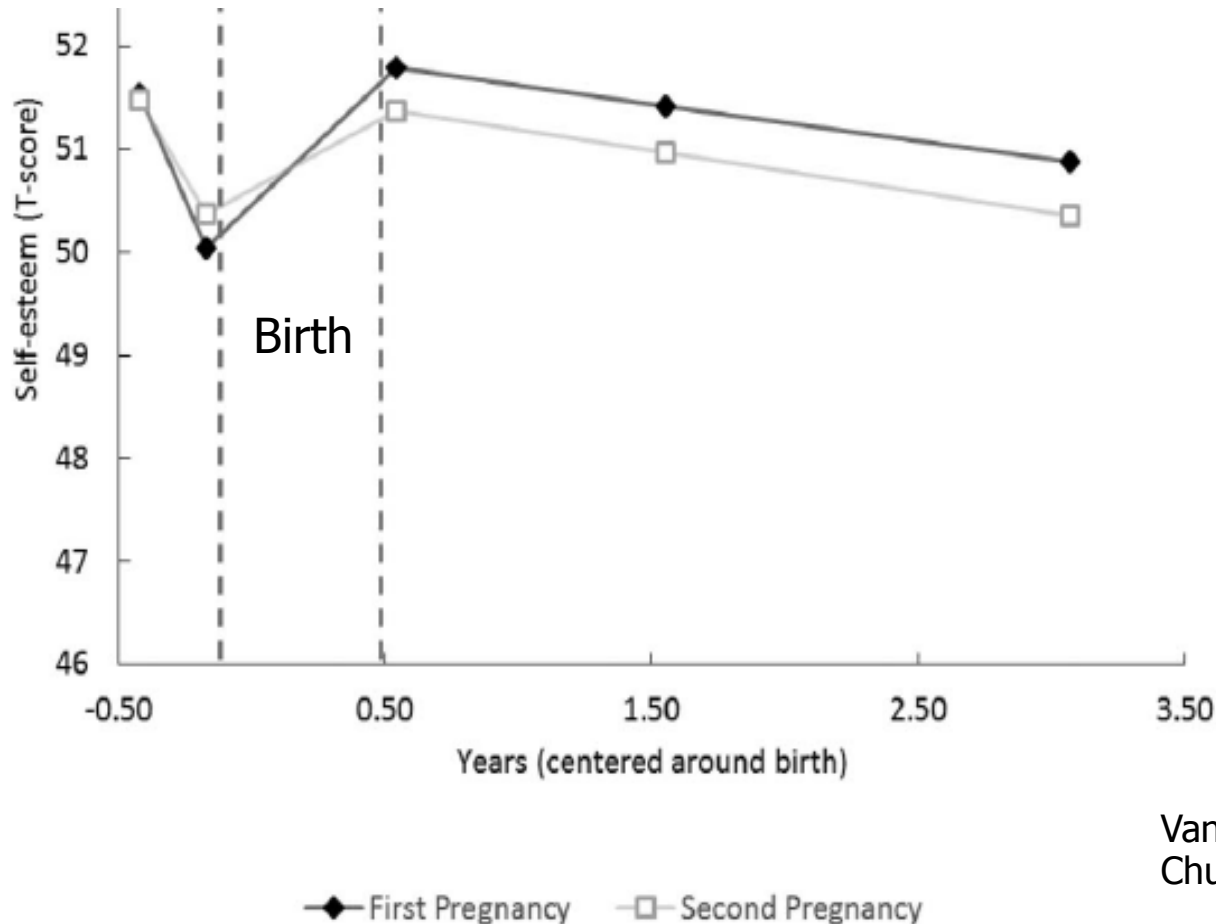
- Major change in life, nothing is like before
- This is an often wished for change, but is still a “developmental crisis” for the partners:
  - drop in relationship satisfaction (Cox et al, 1999)
- Results out of research on couples, gain for life rarely documented
  - parent-role as meaningful
  - loneliness and boredom are gone

# Transition to motherhood: Self esteem



Van Scheppingen, Denissen,  
Chung et al. 2018  
N=84,711 Norwegian mothers

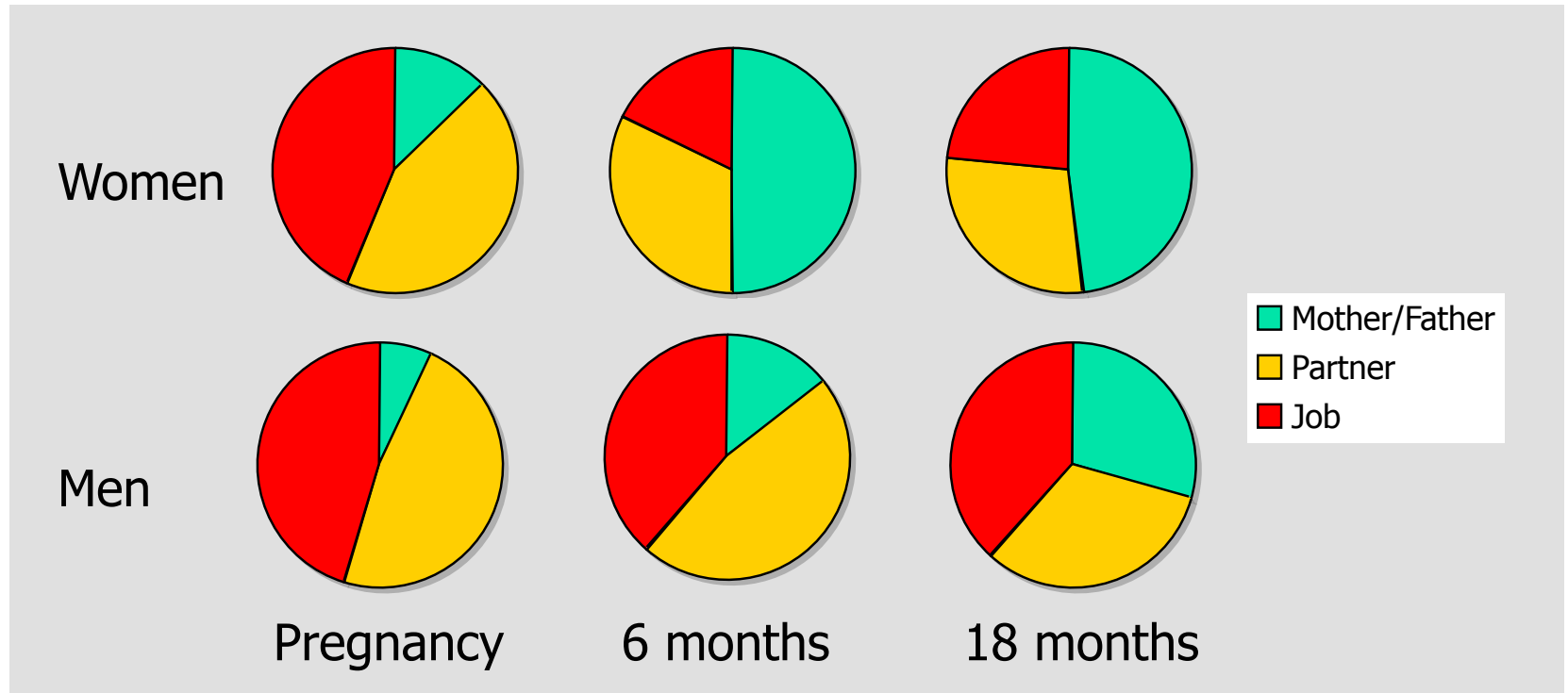
## Transition to motherhood: Self esteem same mothers at 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> child



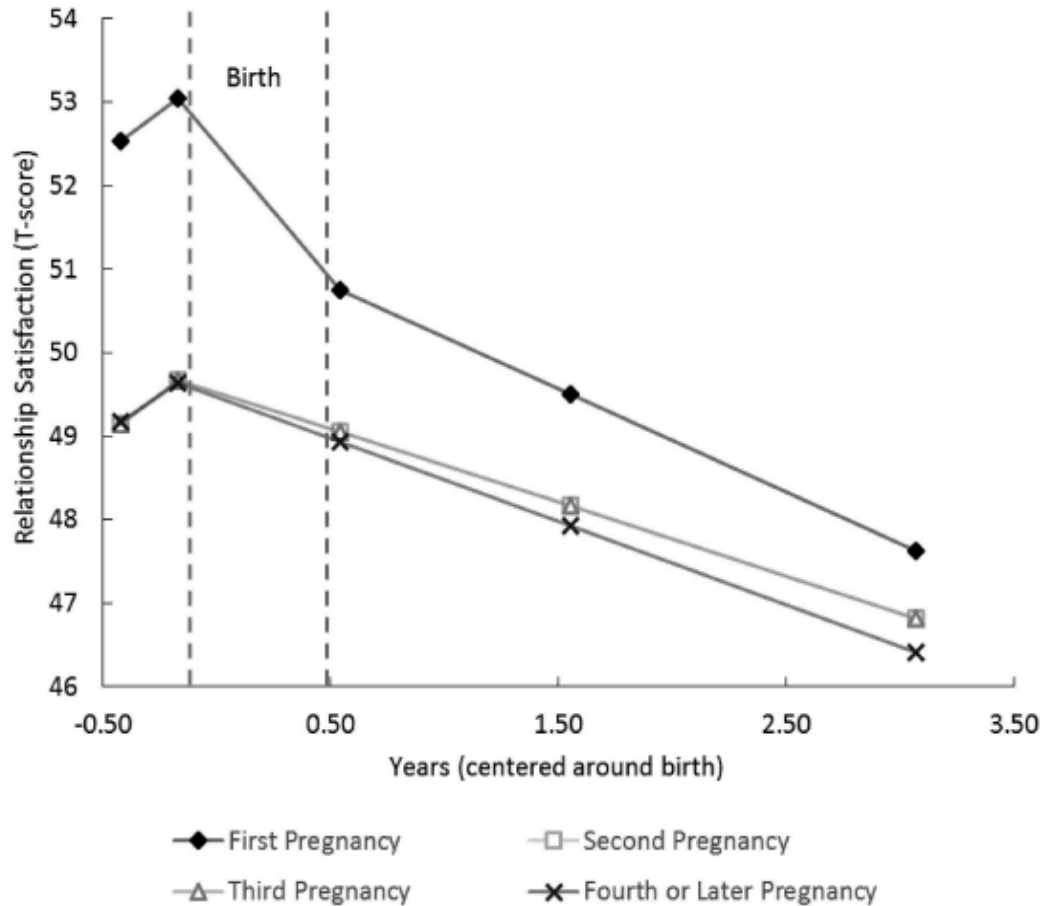
Van Scheppingen, Denissen,  
Chung et al. 2018

# Becoming a parent (Cowan and Cowan, 2000)

- Changes in self-concept: How much do various aspects (father/mother, partner, job) define yourself?



# Transition to motherhood: Relationship satisfaction

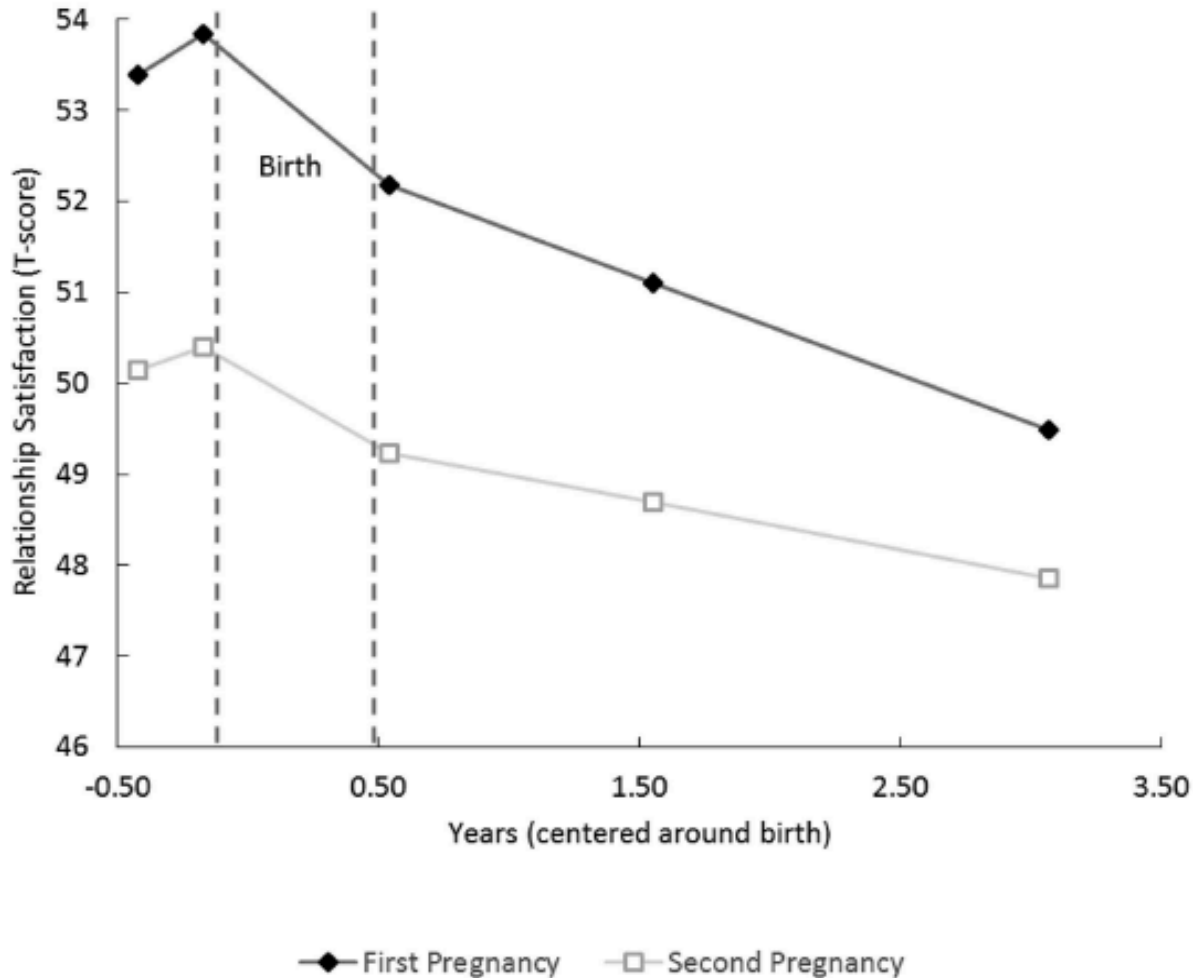


Van Scheppingen, Denissen,  
Chung et al. (2018)

N=84,711 Norwegian mothers

## Transition to motherhood:

### Relationship Satisfaction same mothers at 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> child

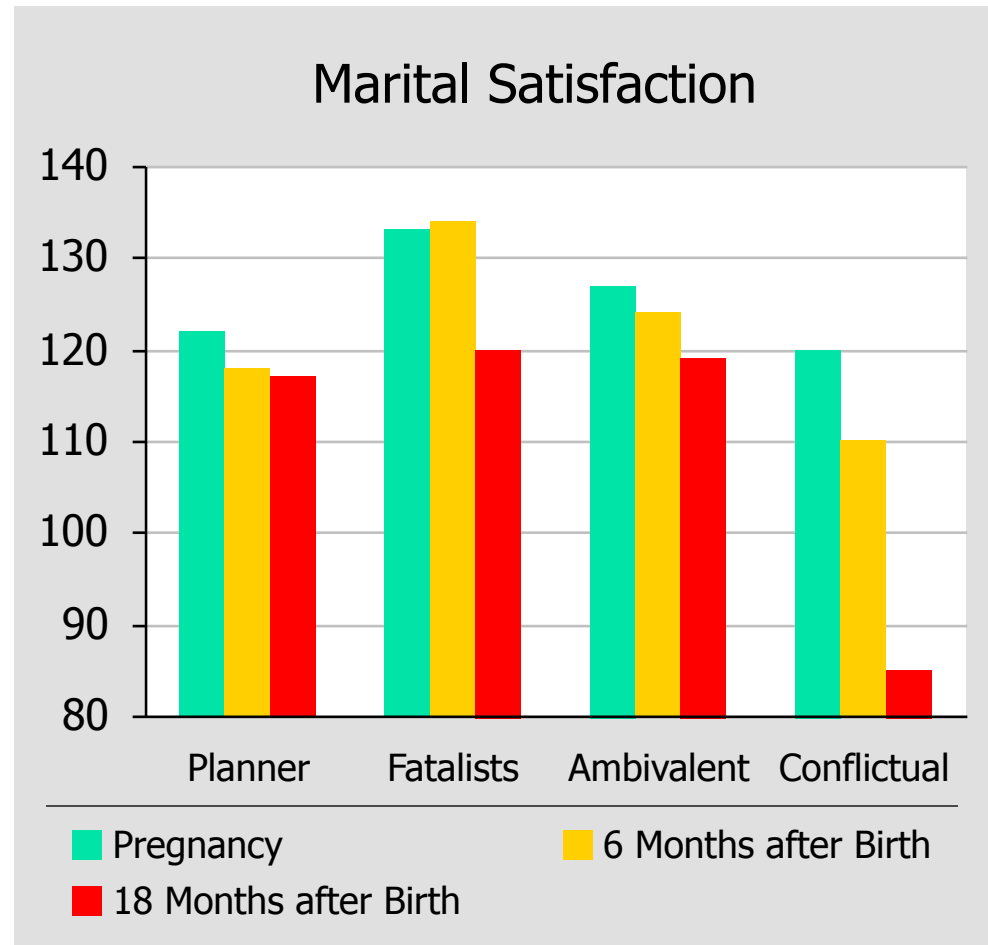


Van Scheppingen,  
Denissen, Chung et al.  
2018, JPSP

# Marital Satisfaction and Pregnancy Decision-Styles (Cowan & Cowan, 2000)

## Decision-Styles

- **Planner:** Pregnancy and timing of pregnancy was planned
- **Fatalists:** Pregnancy was let to happen
- **Ambivalent:** Both parents have mixed feelings about pregnancy
- **Conflictual:** Couple has conflict about birth of child



## Transition to parenthood: Division of work

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- Mothers do most of the additional work:
  - 3 hours a day versus 40 min. a day
  - 4 ½ weeks of 24 hour days per year (fathers 1 ½) or 3 months of 8 hours per day without week-end (Yavorsky, et al. 2015)
- What can partners do: help
  - mother's relationship satisfaction related to actual help with additional work
  - also true: "marital gavotte"
  - Traditionalizing effect on parenting roles

# Transition to parenthood:

## Parent-parent interaction

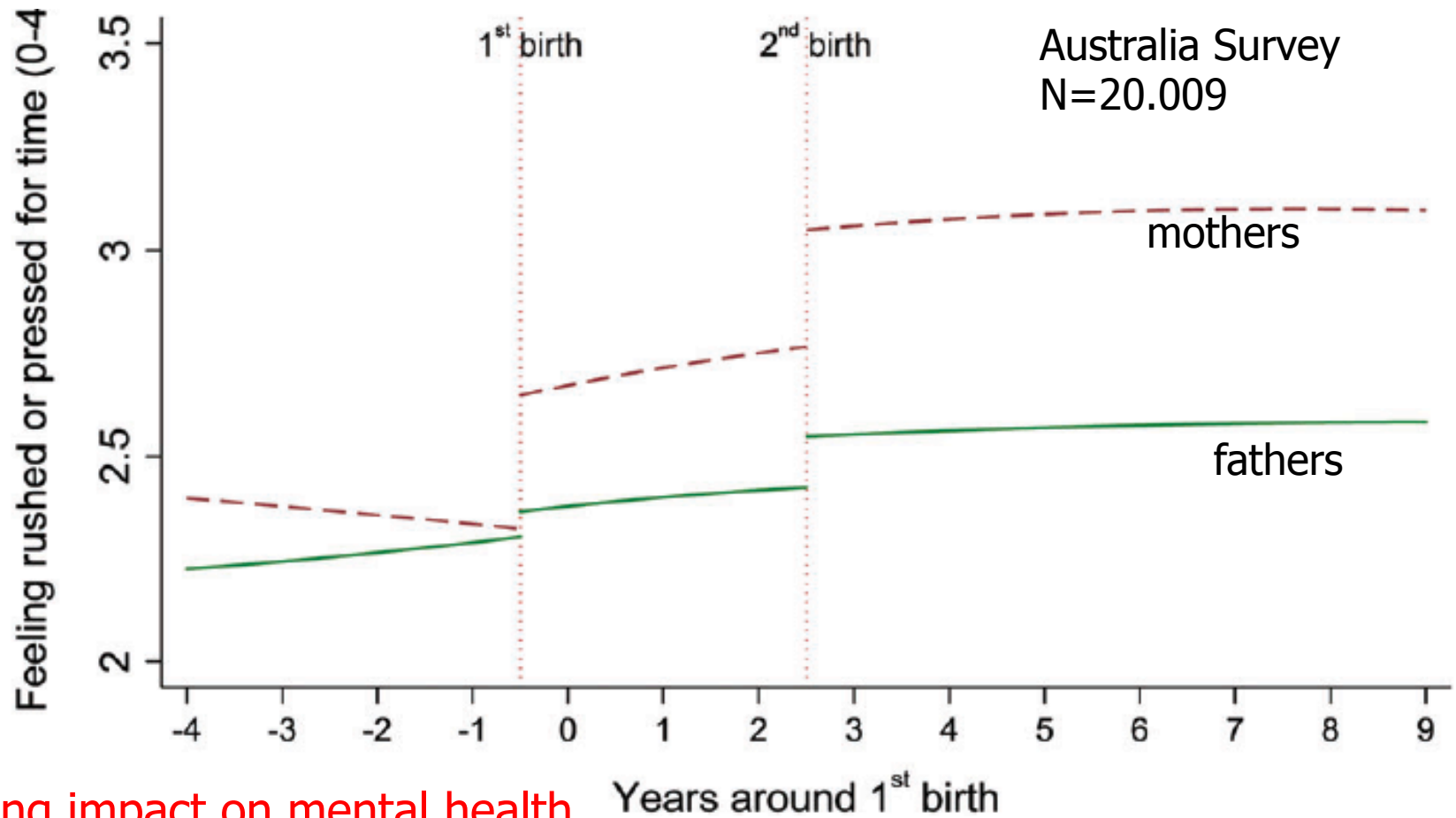
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- What helps:
  - father's positive affection (Shapiro, et al. 2015)
  - father's humor (Theisen, Ogolsky, Simpson & Rholes, 2019)
  
- What makes it worse:
  - father's contempt (Shapiro, Gottman & Fink 2015)
  
- Interventions help

# Parents' subjective stress:

## Time pressure after 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> child

(Ruppanner et al. 2019)



lasting impact on mental health

# Transition to second child:

## Partners' interaction behavior

(Volling et al., 2015, p. 192)

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- Study with 229 married couples, divided into 6 groups according to their positive and negative interaction behaviour over time
- 2 groups (180 couples) did not show much change in their couple interaction – they cope well
  - slight increase in mother's negativity
- About 50 couples quite chaotic change over time
  - Rougher road

## How are these groups different? (Volling et al., 2015, p. 192)

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- higher discrepancy in marital satisfaction
- “indicators of adaptive marital processes”
  - marital interaction
  - less destructive communication
  - social support
- enduring vulnerabilities of spouses:
  - neuroticism
  - depression

## During early childhood:

Crucial role of **family interaction** for child development

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- Still face experiments (E. Tronick)
- Attachment as summary or “working model” of parent-child interaction (J. Bowlby and M. Ainsworth)

## During childhood and adolescence:

Crucial role of **family interaction** for child development

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- Negative family expressiveness related to poor peer relations and aggression (L. Katz and J. Gottman)
- Harsh parent-parent conflict – children and adolescents suffer (Davies and Cummings)
- Spill-over between relationships (Erel & Burman)

# Change in family relationships during early adolescence

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## **Parent-adolescent relationships**

- de-idealization of each parent: “I used to think you know everything”
- way of talking to each other changes (Granic, et al. 2003)
- parents still need to maintain guiding role and final say in some issues (who decides about buying a new car or which brand)

## **Whole family**

- marital satisfaction can get more strained
- financial burden increasing (finding jobs for adolescents)
- relationship between siblings

# Study: From Childhood to Adolescence

Max-Planck-Institute for Human Development Berlin, Germany  
(Kreppner & Ullrich, 1996, 1998, Ullrich & Kreppner, 2001)

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- first child “engine” for change in the family
- peak of parent-child conflicts is around 13 years of age
- parent-child interaction needs to transform

# Study: From Childhood to Adolescence

(Kreppner & Ullrich, 1996, 1998, Ullrich & Kreppner, 2001)

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- Data collection 1990 to 1994 in Berlin, Germany
- Families visited at home, average **age of first child:**

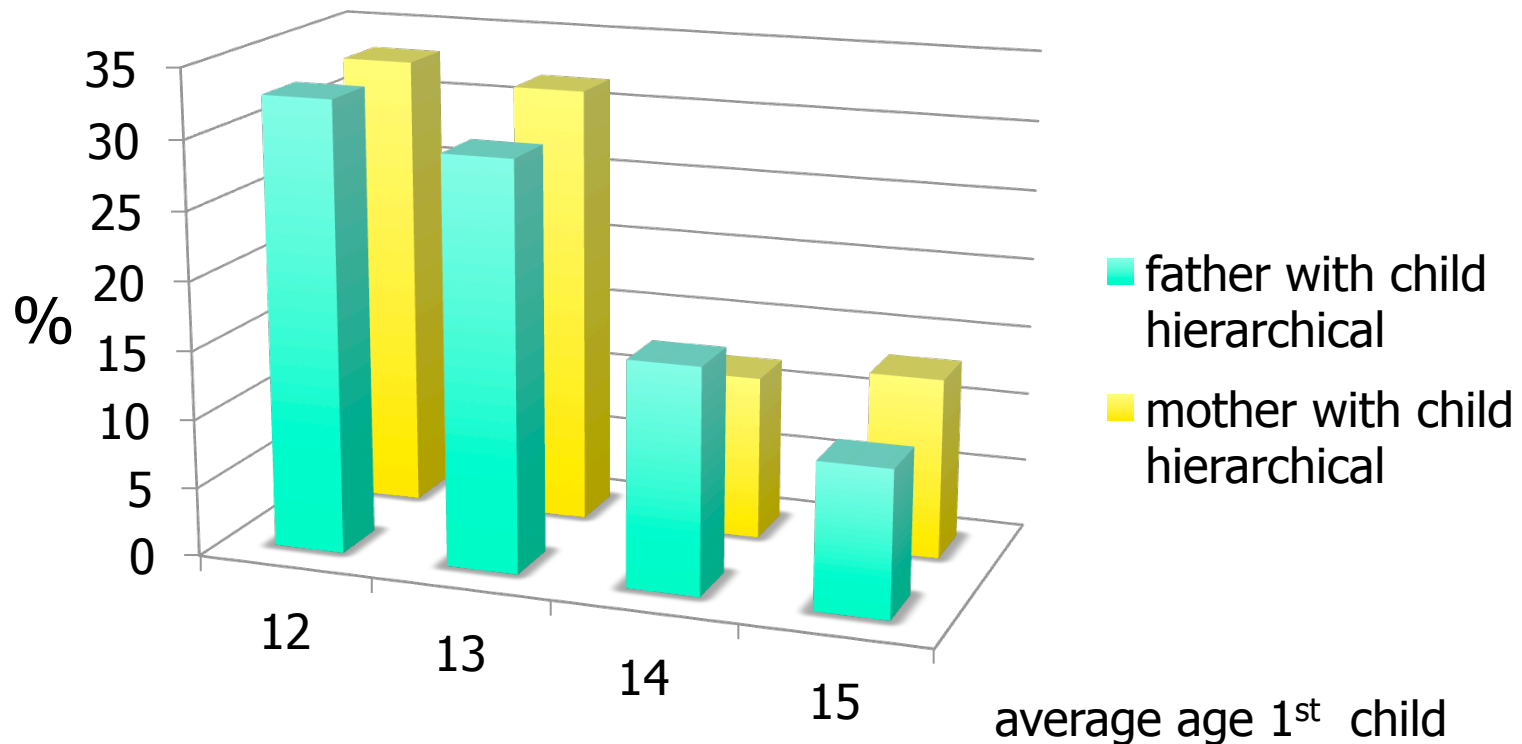
**12 – 13 – 14 – 15**

- Video-taped while talking about everyday topics:
  - “The daughter/the son wants to paint her/his room in an unusual colour”
  - Dyads: mother-father, mother-child, father-child
  - Triads: mother-father-child

# Father with child and mother with child

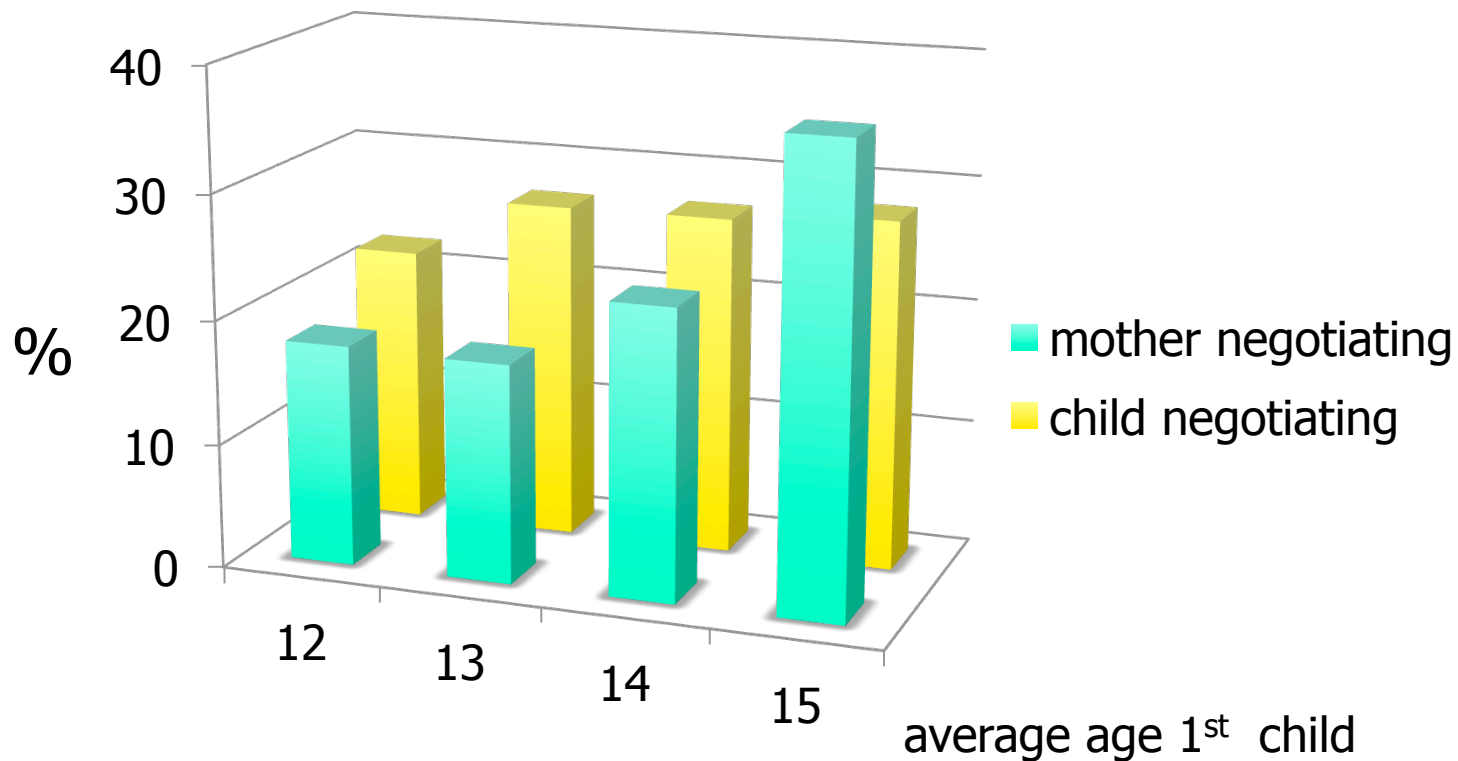
## Hierarchical structure

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# Mother with child: Negotiating

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# From childhood to adolescence

## - change in everyday interaction

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Many indications for change:

- **parent-child:** more egalitarian
- **mother-child:** more negotiating
- **parent-parent:** more conflicts when first child's is 13
  
- **family triads:** less close, new sitting arrangements

Differential change according to

- relationship quality
- family structure (single mothers - mothers from 2 parent families)

# Non-normative transition: Separation of parents

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- General Canadian divorce rate 38% (2019)
- Having a child reduces separation/divorce by about 40%
- About 25% of children from married parents experience divorce (over 60% from common-law)

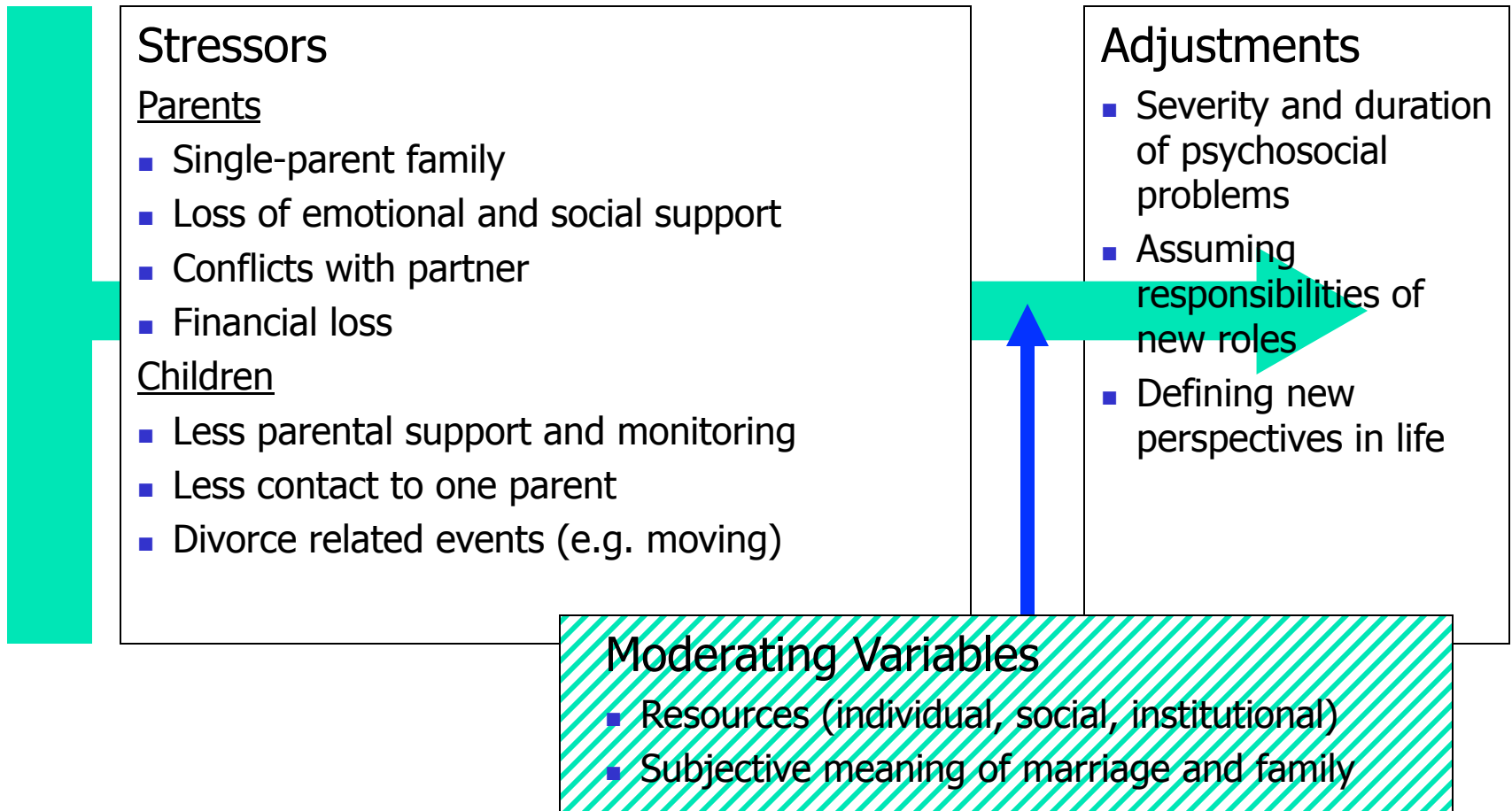
# Non-normative transition: Separation of parents

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Separation means:

- Additional stressor to normative development
- Some time of instability
- Most children suffer from separation
- Paradox: parents decide to separate but need to form a decent “co-parenting” relationship
- Effects on children widely disputed: short term versus long term consequences
- biological father-child relationship important (Suh et al., 2016)

# Non-normative transition: Process Model of Divorce (Amato, 2000)



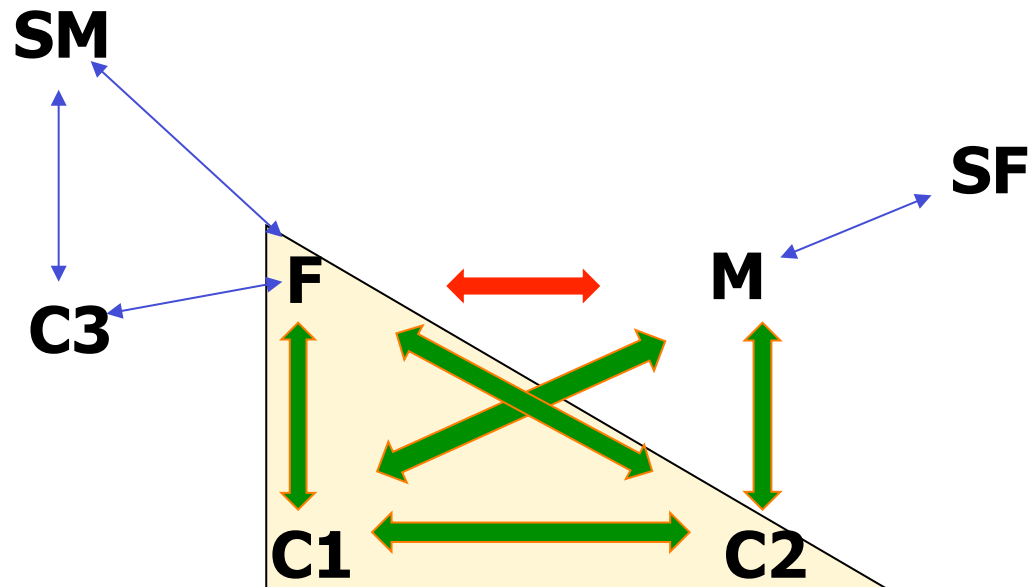
# Separation/divorce in research – effects on children

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- First studies of effects on divorce:
  - short-term stress symptoms like drop in grades, social or mental health issues, disappear after 1 – 2 years
- Exception: “high conflict divorce”
- Long-term consequences:
  - if grown up with divorced parents own divorce more likely
  - lasting distrust in relationships
  - lifelong reproaches, often towards mothers

## After a separation: Co-parenting and blending

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# Additional transition: Integrating stepparents/ blending families

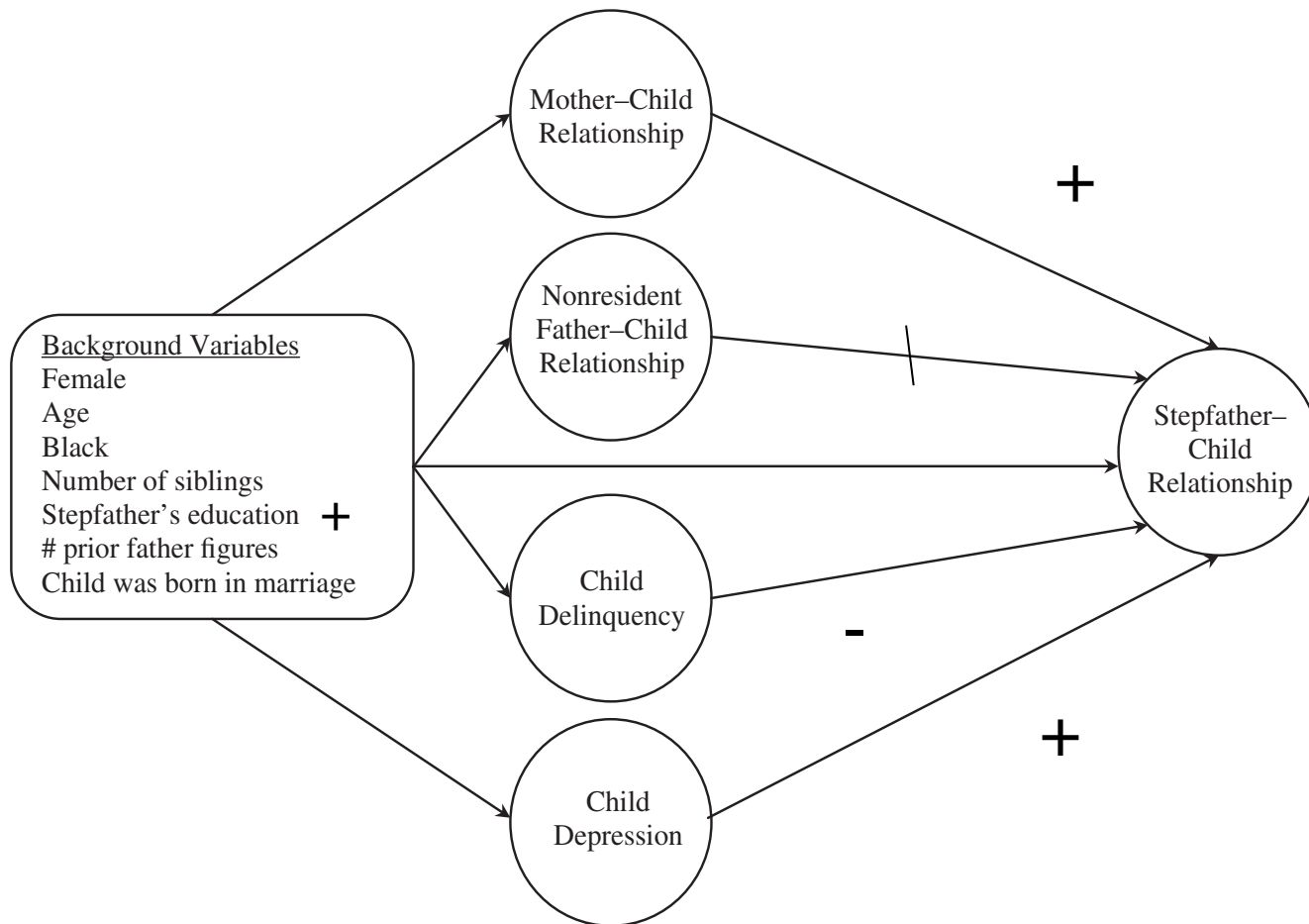
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- Children do not just accept parenting by stepparent
  - "You are not my parent"
- Stepparents are less generous (financially) with stepchildren (own child) (Aquilino, 2005)
  - "We are paying child support, but he (stepchild) sees nothing of it"

Good mother-child relationship helps with accepting new stepfather (King, Amato & Lindstrom, 2015)

# Stepfather-Adolescent Relationship Quality

(during 1<sup>st</sup> year transitioning to stepfamily) (King, Amato & Lindstrom, 2015)



# Families as launching centers: First child leaving up to empty nest

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Next transition after adolescence:

- Starting an education (finding a paying job, partner)
- Psychologically “parent-child trust” helps: transition into marriage and own children more likely if mutual trust higher (Masche, 2008)
  - In general: parent-young adult relations improve after moving out
  - Financial support continues

# The (not so) empty nest

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Sociological trend: moving back in or never leaving

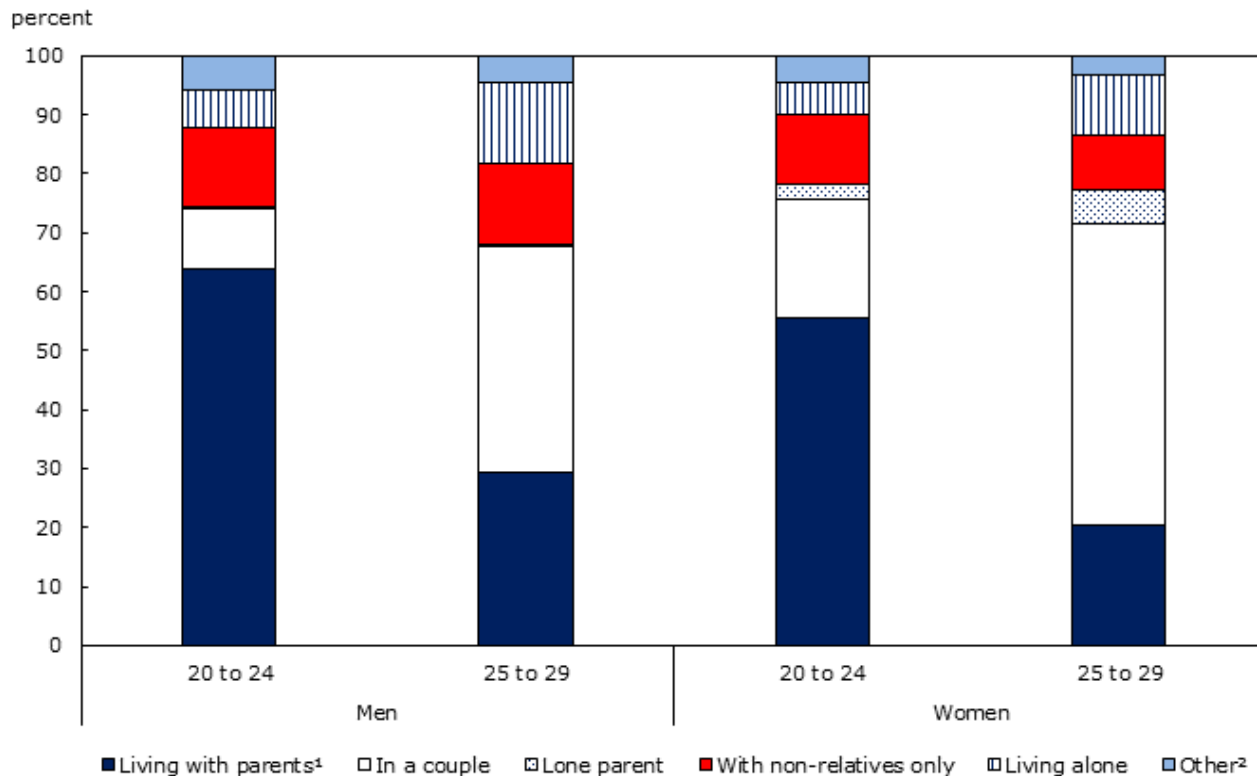
- US 2016 (age 18-34): 32.1% living with parents 31.6% cohabiting or married in own household
- Southern Europe up to 78% of young adults (age 20-29) living with parents
- Northern Europe: Scandinavian countries help with affordable housing for young adults - lowest numbers: 20%

Reasons:

- unemployment rate for young adults (over 50% in Italy or Spain)
- timed contracts 10 times higher than permanent jobs
- cost of housing

# Living arrangements young adults: Canada 2011

**Distribution of the population aged 20 to 29 across types of living arrangements, by age group and sex, 2011**



1. May also be part of a couple, with or without children, or a lone parent.

2. Other living arrangements include living with relatives, as well as children in census families for whom the parent is not the economic family reference person.

**Source:** Statistics Canada, National Household Survey, 2011.

# Late nest leaving in Portugal

(Mendonça & Fontaine 2013)

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What influences the young adult-parent relationship?

Self report: age 20-29:

- Living arrangements related to independence but not related to young adult-parent relationship
- Financial independence not a very strong predictor
- **Only:** Young adults' emotional independence increases relationship satisfaction to parents

# Thanks for listening!

## Summary

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Most families deal well with developmental change and stressors in everyday life

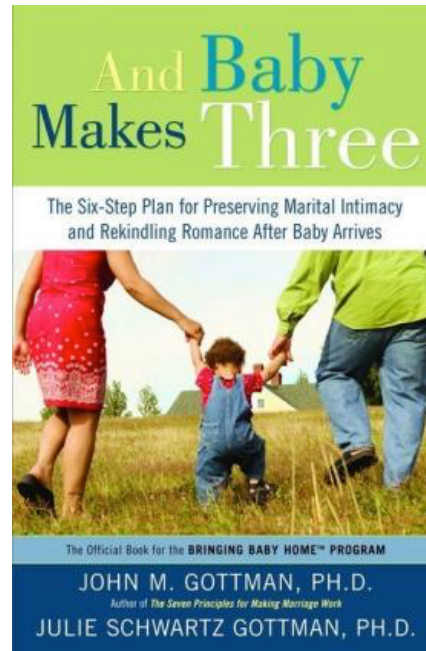
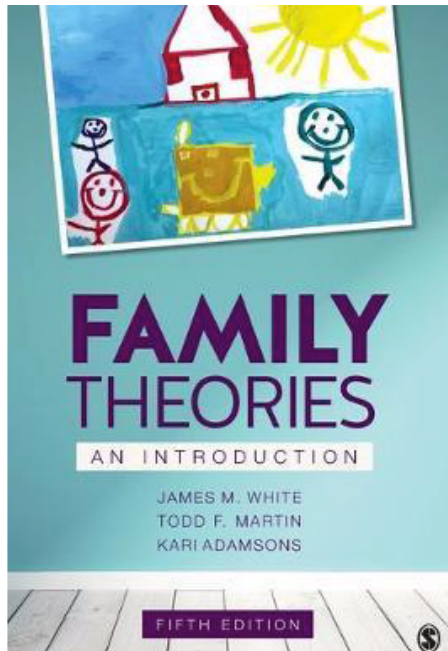
- Reaching a new developmental phase (as well as not reaching it) can impact psychological well-being
- Good relationships based on mutual trust go a long way
- The everyday way of talking to each other has a big impact on quality of family life
- Parents are model for adult relationships (conflicts necessary, not too destructive)
- Children - lifelong responsibility (rewards: grandchildren, help from adult children during old age)

# Reading Suggestions

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## Historical Overview:

Todd E. Martin 2018: "Family Development Theories 30 years later" Journal of Family Theory and Review.



New York Times:  
Young adults living at home,  
article and case descriptions:  
[https://www.nytimes.com/  
2017/02/09/business/  
europe-jobs-economy-youth-  
unemployment-  
millennials.html?emc=eta1](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/09/business/europe-jobs-economy-youth-unemployment-millennials.html?emc=eta1))

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