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Coparenting and child anxiety

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CHAPTER

General Introduction

1

Parents and parenting are the focus of many studies, and effects of parenting on child development have been demonstrated repeatedly (McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007; Möller, Nikolić, Majdandžić, & Bögels, 2016; Van der Bruggen, Stams, & Bögels, 2008). However, the investigation of mothers' and fathers' individual parenting behaviors overlooks a crucial aspect in parenting: the cooperation between the individuals who are raising a child together (Feinberg, 2003; Majdandžić, de Vente, Feinberg, Aktar, & Bögels, 2012). This parental cooperation is called coparenting. The cover of this thesis shows an animal that is often thought of as a prime example of high quality parental cooperation: the penguin. Male and female penguins share the brooding of the egg, because the egg has to be kept warm at all times in an environment that can become as cold as minus 60°C. The brooding penguin is unable to eat during brooding, so male and female need to take turns. The penguin that is not brooding gets a chance to spend a few days (or even weeks) in the sea to eat (Cherel, Stahl, & Le Maho, 1987). Thus, sharing the brooding task enables penguins to make sure the (unborn) chick and both parents survive the brooding period. Also for humans, sharing the parenting burden may have several advantages for the parents and for the child. The benefits of a positive coparenting relationship on child development and the influences family characteristics have on coparenting are the focus of this dissertation.

Coparenting is a construct that is central to family systems theory, in which the family is perceived as consisting of several subsystems: the mother-father system, the mother-child system, the father-child system, and the mother-father-child system (Minuchin, 1974). This last subsystem comprises the coparenting relationship. Coparenting has been defined in several ways, among others as “the supportive alliance between adults raising children” (McHale, 1997, p. 183), “the quality of coordination between adults in their parental roles” (Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown, & Sokolowski, 2007, p. 83), and “the ways that parents and/or parental figures relate to each other in the role of parent” (Feinberg, 2003, p. 96). The definition by Feinberg (2003) has been leading in the current thesis, encompassing both the positive and negative aspects of the coparenting relationship. Coparenting explicitly concerns the relationship between two individuals who are raising a child together (next to the child's parents, this could be grandparents, aunts, or neighbors; note that in the current thesis, I only studied coparenting relationships between the biological mother and father who are parenting the child together). In addition, coparenting does not include the romantic relationship, even though the coparenting construct is integrally linked to the romantic relationship (Kitzmann, 2002). It is important to note that coparenting differs from the individual parenting role, as it entails the quality of the cooperation in parenting tasks between multiple individuals. Also, coparenting explicitly includes the presence of the child, because the child is at the center of every coparenting interaction; however, this does not mean that the child has to be physically present in coparenting interaction. The child can be at the center of the interaction by being physically present in the interaction, but a child-related issue in the absence of the child can also be the topic of the interaction. Thus,

coparenting involves the way two parental figures cooperate in parenting, which makes this construct different from parenting (because coparenting involves both parents) and from the romantic couple relationship (because coparenting involves the child and the two partners in their parental roles).

Research interest in coparenting has been growing since researchers in the 1980's pointed out the importance of studying this construct. The first mentioning of the coparenting construct goes back to family systems theory, in which Minuchin (1974; 1985) denoted coparenting as the executive family subsystem. This executive subsystem is a determining force in the management of family interactions and family outcomes (Minuchin, 1974; 1985). Also, Cohen and Weiss (1985) stated that "coparenting is the centre about which family process evolves" (Weissman and Cohen 1985, p. 24).", because coparenting interactions contribute to parental self-esteem and the way they manage parenting stress. Feinberg (2003) argues that through these processes, coparenting interactions influence family dynamics and family outcomes.

Feinberg (2003) was the first to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding coparenting and its links with parenting and child adjustment. Feinberg (2003) argues that both marital relationship quality and the parent-child relationship have been extensively studied, but that these two lines of research never have come together. He proposes coparenting as a construct that bridges the two distinct domains of the parent-parent relationship and the parent-child relationship; thus, the coparenting construct is a step forward in studying how family dynamics influence child adjustment. In his framework, Feinberg (2003) distinguishes four components that together make up coparenting: (dis) agreement on childrearing issues, division of (child-related) labor, joint management of family interactions, and support and undermining of the other parent's coparental role. Most studies on coparenting focus on support and undermining and study these constructs separately (e.g., Belsky, Woodworth, & Crnic, 1996; Gordon & Feldman, 2008). In line with these studies, I mainly focus on supportive coparenting and undermining coparenting as measures of coparenting behavior. Supportive coparenting is defined as the "affirmation of the other's competency as a parent, acknowledging and respecting the other's contributions, and upholding the other's parenting decisions and authority" (p. 104, Feinberg, 2003; Belsky et al., 1996; McHale, 1995; Weissman & Cohen, 1985). Undermining coparenting is defined as parental undermining of the other parent through criticism, disparagement, and blame (Belsky et al., 1996; McHale, 1995; Feinberg, 2003). These two behaviors also capture aspects of the other three constructs Feinberg distinguished, such as parents' feelings towards their partner about the way childrearing issues are handled, whether parents agree with the division of labor, and whether joint family management is smooth versus conflictual.

Coparenting and Family Member Anxiety

Coparenting has been found to be linked to externalizing and internalizing problems (Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). More specifically, researchers have called attention to the role coparenting may play in the development of anxiety (Majdandžić et al., 2012). Anxiety disorders run in families (Hettema, Neale, & Kendler, 2001), which means that anxious children are at an increased risk to have anxious parents, and anxious parents are at an increased risk to have an anxious child. The aggregation of anxiety within families may play an important role in the way family dynamics, including coparenting, are shaped and, therefore, coparenting and family member anxiety may be intertwined.

Anxiety disorders are the most common psychological problem in childhood, affecting approximately 15% - 20% of children during a given time in childhood or adolescence (Beesdo, Knappe, & Pine, 2009; Costello, Egger, & Angold, 2005). Child anxiety poses a risk for the development of more anxiety problems later in life, psychopathology other than anxiety such as conduct disorder and depression, drug abuse and poorer educational outcomes (Beesdo-Baum & Knappe, 2012; Bittner, Egger, Erkanli, Costello, Foley, & Angold, 2007; Woodward & Fergusson, 2001). It is uncommon to diagnose anxiety disorders in early childhood, because it is not possible to identify whether young children's fears are persistent, excessive and impair functioning (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Therefore, in research on infancy and early childhood, children's temperament is usually studied as a precursor of anxiety. The broad temperamental dimension of negative affectivity, and fearful temperament specifically, have been identified as risk factors for the development of child anxiety (Hudson, Dodd, & Bovopoulos, 2011; Dougherty et al., 2013; Fox, Henderson, Marshall, Nichols, & Ghera, 2005). Negative affectivity is defined as a proneness to the experience of negative emotions, and is often denoted difficult temperament (e.g., Watson & Clark, 1984). Fearful temperament is a component of negative affectivity and is used to describe children who tend to show inhibition, fear and distress in response to new objects, situations, and people (Fox et al., 2005). Hence, the current thesis focuses on child temperament as well as on child anxiety.

In anxiety research, a family systems view is mostly lacking (Majdandžić et al., 2012). To take into account the interconnectedness between family members' anxiety and family interactions, Majdandžić and colleagues (2012) proposed coparenting as a way to incorporate the family system into anxiety research. The emphasis of parents' individual influences on the development of child anxiety "ignores the potential importance of the family system as an organized whole in anxiety development" (Majdandžić et al., 2012, p. 29). In a theoretical model, Majdandžić and colleagues (2012) discussed the bidirectional associations between coparenting and family member anxiety.

Model of bidirectional associations between coparenting and family member anxiety

The model of Majdandžić and colleagues (2012) is based on Feinberg's ecological model (2003) and on their own literature review on the associations between family member anxiety and coparenting. This model is shown in Figure 1. In the model of Majdandžić and colleagues, the associations between child anxiety and coparenting are included, as well as associations between child anxiety and parenting, and coparenting and parenting; in this thesis, I focused only on coparenting behaviors, and not on parenting behaviors. The model describes two important bidirectional effects: the effects from parental anxiety to coparenting and vice versa, and the effects from child anxiety to coparenting and vice versa.

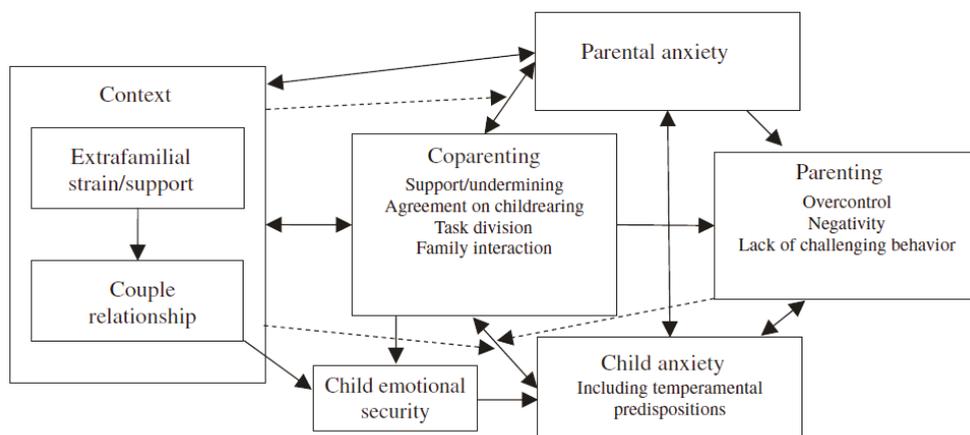


Figure 1: The model by Majdandžić et al. (2012) of bidirectional associations between child anxiety, coparenting, and parenting.

Bidirectional associations between parental anxiety and coparenting

In discussing possible ways through which parental anxiety could affect the coparenting relationship, Majdandžić and colleagues (2012) emphasize the interaction between the anxious and the non-anxious partner. No empirical studies have previously addressed the specific association from coparenting to parental anxiety, but Majdandžić and colleagues (2012) do hypothesize that coparenting can influence parental anxiety. Parents' traits can change in the light of a developing coparenting relationship (McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, & Rao, 2004b); thus, parental anxiety may change due to the quality of the coparenting interactions. For example, a more supportive coparenting relationship may cause an anxious parent to feel more supported by their environment, leading to a decrease in anxiety.

With regard to the associations from parental anxiety to coparenting, Majdandžić and colleagues (2012) proposed several mechanisms through which coparenting and parental anxiety could be related. Anxious parents may be worried about their partner's challenging

or autonomy encouraging parenting practices, as the anxious parent may perceive this as risky or lax parenting. This may lead to disagreement between partners on how to parent, causing less supportive and more undermining coparenting between parents. Anxious parents may also withdraw from coparenting, which decreases supportive coparenting interactions.

The non-anxious parent's behaviors can affect the coparenting interactions with the anxious parent in a positive or a negative way. A non-anxious parent who acknowledges the anxiety of their partner and takes this anxiety into account in their parenting and communication to their partner can foster a supportive coparenting relationship. Also, parents may be able to divide childrearing in such a way that both the anxious and the non-anxious parent can take on those tasks that suit them, thereby avoiding anxious feelings and increasing supportive coparenting interactions. In contrast, the non-anxious parent can oppose their partner's worries and anxieties, thereby undermining the partner.

Stress may be another mechanism through which parental anxiety influences the coparenting relationship. Stressful coparenting situations can induce a fight, flight, or freeze response in anxious parents, because these situations may be perceived as threat (Siegel & Hartzell, 2004). These automatic responses to threat, which happen through the so-called fast route in the brain that acts in interaction with high adrenaline levels, can increase the risk for conflict and undermining coparenting, because it creates a fast and automatic judgment of the situation (Bögels & Restifo, 2010). As anxious individuals experience more stress than non-anxious individuals, anxious parents may be at an increased risk to experience more undermining and less supportive coparenting interactions due to their automatic responses to stressful situations.

Empirical studies on the associations between parental anxiety and coparenting are scarce. Depression, a constructed highly comorbid with anxiety (Moffitt et al., 2007), as reported by fathers has been found to be related to less perceived supportive coparenting behaviors from the partner (Isacco, Garfield & Rogers, 2010). Also, fathers' self-reported negative emotionality (a construct similar to anxiety, as it involves parents' fear, anger, and anxiety; Krueger, Caspi, Moffitt, Silva, & McGee, 1996) is related to higher observed undermining coparenting, but only when parents rate their child as having a difficult temperament (Laxman et al., 2013). Interestingly, mothers' higher levels of self-reported negative emotionality are related to lower levels of observed undermining. One study found that higher levels of self-reported parental anxiety related to lower levels of self-reported coparenting quality, for fathers and mothers (Delvecchio, Sciandra, Finos, Mazzeschi, & Di Riso, 2015). Thus, it is hypothesized that parental anxiety is related to coparenting, and also that these associations may differ for fathers and mothers.

Bidirectional associations between child anxiety and coparenting

Children's (predisposition to) anxiety is hypothesized to relate to lower levels of supportive coparenting and higher levels of undermining coparenting (Feinberg, 2003). Children with a highly negative temperament may demand more coparenting efforts than children with an easy temperament, because it is more difficult to soothe them (Feinberg, 2003). These challenges in parenting may lead to more discussions between parents about their parenting strategies, which provide more opportunities for coparental undermining. In addition, difficult child temperament is suggested to increase general stress levels in the family, which may lead to father's withdrawal from coparenting interactions, increases in conflict, and the formation of coalitions within the family (Feinberg, 2003). These behaviors all relate to poorer child outcomes and lower coparenting quality (e.g., Jacobvitz & Bush, 1996; Kerig, 1995; Kitzmann, 200; Wang & Crane, 2001).

On the other hand, children with a highly negative temperament may also positively affect the coparenting relationship: the increased contact between parents as a consequence of frequent parenting challenges may pull coparents together (Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2003). Several studies have found that children's negative affectivity indeed relates to higher supportive coparenting and lower undermining coparenting (Berkman, Alberts, Carleton, & McHale, 2002). It has been hypothesized that especially parents who are psychologically prepared to become parents experience positive effects from having a difficult child; however, parents who are unprepared to become parents may experience negative effects from having a difficult child (Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2003). Thus the associations between child anxiety and coparenting may be influenced (i.e., moderated) by characteristics of the parents.

With regard to the influence of coparenting on child anxiety, it has been hypothesized that undermining coparenting interactions may lead to children's perceptions of their family environment as insecure, hostile, or threatening (Davies et al., 2006). The exposure to an unsafe environment over longer periods of time may induce anxiety in the child (Majdandžić et al., 2012). Undermining coparenting can also result in the withdrawal of one parent from the family triad, thereby leading to dysfunctional coalitions within the family or triangulation (engaging a child in interparental conflict), which may induce stress and anxiety in the child (Majdandžić et al., 2012). Generally, empirical results are in line with the hypothesis that more undermining coparenting relates to more internalizing problems and higher negative affectivity (Cook, Schoppe-Sullivan, Buckley, & Davis, 2009; Katz & Low, 2004; McHale & Rasmussen, 1998). Similarly, more supportive coparenting relates to less internalizing problems and lower negative affectivity (Davis, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, & Brown, 2009; Gordon & Feldman, 2005; Laxman et al., 2013; Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown, & Sokolowski, 2007; Van Egeren, 2004).

Some researchers have suggested that undermining coparenting interactions may lead to *positive* child outcomes. Based on their finding that highly fearful 10-month-olds became

less fearful at 3 years if parents were observed to be highly undermining at 3 years, Belsky, Putnam and Crnic (1996) suggested that the exposure to moderate levels of coparental conflict may toughen up children who are prone to develop child anxiety (Belsky et al., 1996; Park et al., 1997). An example to explain this process would be the following situation, as described by Belsky and colleagues (1996): when a child falls, the mother may comfort the child, whereas the father expresses that the mother is spoiling the child and tells it to stop crying (i.e., an undermining coparenting interaction). From events like these, children may learn that their behavior leads to conflict between their parents, leading the child to attempt to become tougher in order to reduce such instances of conflict.

Differences between the roles of fathers and mothers

In their literature review on coparenting and anxiety, Majdandžić and colleagues (2012) found that parent gender may play a role in the associations between family member anxiety and coparenting. With regard to the association from child anxiety to coparenting, the authors conclude from the literature that it is especially fathers' coparenting that is related to the child's characteristics, rather than mothers' coparenting. Fathers' parenting behaviors have been hypothesized to be especially important in the development of child anxiety (Bögels & Phares, 2008). This is based on the idea that fathers tend to focus on preparing children to interact with the world outside the family (Paquette, 2004), which may be especially important in the development of child anxiety (Bögels & Perotti, 2011). Mothers are hypothesized to focus more on the internal and caring world inside the family (Paquette, 2004). If fathers' parenting tasks are specifically aimed at preparing their child for the outside world, it is reasonable to assume that family member anxiety may have different effects on mothers' coparenting than on fathers' coparenting. Anxiety influences how people interact with the outside world; therefore, anxiety in children and in fathers would pose a greater risk for fathers' coparenting tasks, whereas anxiety in children and in mothers does not pose the same risk for mothers' coparenting tasks (Majdandžić et al., 2012). Thus, fathers' coparenting may be influenced more strongly by the fathers' own and the child's anxiety than mothers' coparenting is influenced by her own or the child's anxiety.

Next to the specific relations between fathers' coparenting and anxiety and the child's anxiety, anxious children may evoke protective behaviors from the mother which are related to the maternal task of caring, such as maternal gatekeeping. Maternal gatekeeping is defined as maternal behaviors that inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). These kinds of protective behaviors may in turn increase conflict between the father and the mother, withdrawal of the father and dysfunctional family coalitions (Cannon, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Brown, & Sokolowski, 2008; Dienhart, 2001; Mendez, Loker, Fefer, Wolgemuth, & Mann, 2015). Hence, the different roles of fathers and mothers in parenting may result in differences between fathers and mothers in the associations between family member anxiety and coparenting.

Several studies have established that mothers' and fathers' coparenting relate differently to infant negative affectivity. Especially fathers' coparenting behavior is related to negative affectivity in 5- to 15-month-olds, whereas mothers' coparenting did not relate to infant negative affectivity (Gordon & Feldman, 2008; Lindsey et al., 2005; Van Egeren, 2004). In addition, in a study on the longitudinal associations between negative affectivity and coparenting, more child negative affectivity at 13 months only related to more undermining coparenting at 30 months when fathers were high on negative emotionality (Laxman et al., 2013). Thus, empirical research supports the hypothesis that especially fathers' coparenting behaviors relate to fathers' anxiety and to child anxiety.

Coparenting, Moderation and Mediation

The discussed bidirectional associations all concern direct associations between coparenting and family member anxiety. However, coparenting may not only be directly related to family outcomes, but also indirectly through moderation (Feinberg, 2003; Majdandžić et al., 2012). In addition, coparenting could serve as a mediator in child development (Feinberg, 2003; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Feinberg (2003) adds that the importance of a construct is not only demonstrated through the direct effects a behavior has on an outcome, but also by the extent to which a behavior influences associations and is influenced by other factors. In other words, if coparenting is a construct sensitive to changes in specific family factors, this means that coparenting is malleable and may therefore be an effective target in treatment.

According to Feinberg “there are two moderating questions regarding coparenting: Does coparenting moderate the relations between risk factors and family outcomes [...]? And, second, what factors affect the influence of coparenting on parenting and child adjustment?” (2003, p. 115). Thus, it is important to note that coparenting might itself serve as a moderator, but associations between coparenting and family outcomes might also be moderated by other factors. Several studies have demonstrated such moderating effects of coparenting (Altenburger, Lang, Schoppe-Sullivan, Dush, & Johnson, 2015; Kolak & Volling, 2013), and moderation by other factors on coparenting relations (Laxman, 2010; Laxman et al., 2013; McHale, 1995). The hypothesis that family factors moderate the associations between coparenting and child anxiety is in line with the transactional model of Crockenberg and Leerkes (2003), which, as discussed above, posits that some parents may be more ready to become parents and may therefore be less vulnerable to the negative effects of having a highly negative infant.

With regard to anxiety and coparenting, Majdandžić and colleagues (2012) suggested that coparenting may moderate the associations between parenting and child anxiety. For example, overprotective parenting may relate to child anxiety only when parents are undermining in their coparenting, whereas overprotective parenting may not relate to child anxiety when parents are supportive in their coparenting. Majdandžić and colleagues (2012) also noted that relationship satisfaction, parents' age, family of origin, and financial strain

are factors that may moderate the associations between coparenting and family outcomes. Remarkably, parental anxiety is not included as a moderator in the model of Majdandžić and colleagues (2012). However, as described above, parental psychopathology may make parents more sensitive to their child's temperament, and highly anxious parents' coparenting may thus be more vulnerable to infant's negative temperament compared to coparenting of low anxious parents. Therefore, in the current dissertation, I investigated parental anxiety as a possible moderator in the associations between coparenting and child anxiety.

Next to the role of parents' gender and parents' anxiety as moderators, I also investigated the moderating role of relationship satisfaction. Previous research has demonstrated that relationship satisfaction is closely related to coparenting behaviors (Lindahl, Clements, & Markman, 1997; Kitzman, 2000; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004) as well as to child functioning (McHale et al., 2004). Research demonstrated that only for couples with low prenatal relationship satisfaction, more parent-reported infant negative affectivity at 3 months was related to more observed undermining and less supportive coparenting, while for couples with high prenatal relationship satisfaction, more parent-reported infant negative affectivity was related to more support and less undermining (McHale et al., 2004; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2007). Hence, these studies illustrate that having a high relationship satisfaction before child birth may be a meaningful moderator in the relations between infant negative affectivity and coparenting. These findings are in line with the idea that couples with high relationship satisfaction pull together in the event of a negative infant, whereas couples with a low relationship satisfaction drift apart (Crockenberg & Leerkes, 2003). This thesis aimed to replicate and extend the findings of relationship satisfaction as a moderator.

Besides the discussed moderators of the association between coparenting and child outcomes, coparenting itself may serve as a moderator (Feinberg, 2003; Majdandžić et al., 2012). Several studies demonstrated that high levels of supportive coparenting protected infants with low effortful and high levels of negative affectivity from demonstrating dysregulated and externalizing problems later in life (Altenburger et al., 2015; Kolak & Volling, 2013; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2009). Up until now, the moderating role of coparenting in the association from infants' temperamental characteristics to later child anxiety has not been investigated; therefore, I aimed to study the moderating role of coparenting in child development.

Next to the moderating role of coparenting, it may also be the case that coparenting serves as a mediator in the development of child anxiety (Feinberg, 2003; Teubert & Pinquart, 2010). Thus, the development from a fearful infant to an anxious child may occur *through* coparenting. Several studies found that coparenting mediated the associations between marital conflict and parenting behavior (Bonds & Gondoli, 2007; Floyd, Gilliom, & Costigan, 1998; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001; Pedro, Ribeiro, & Shelton, 2012; Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006). With regard to child anxiety, it was found

that if parents displayed high levels of marital violence and were undermining in their coparenting, children were at an increased risk to display anxious symptomatology. One study investigated the role of parental anxiety through coparenting on family maladjustment, and these authors found that when parents are highly anxious and they display undermining coparenting, families had lower scores on family functioning (Delvecchio et al., 2015). Thus, family characteristics may affect child and family outcomes through coparenting.

OUTLINE OF THIS DISSERTATION

The associations that I tested are graphically represented in Figure 2. This model is based on the model of Majdandžić and colleagues (2012) and focuses on coparenting as a central construct in family member anxiety. I investigated the associations between child temperamental predispositions of anxiety (i.e., fearful temperament and negative affectivity) and coparenting, and the associations between coparenting and child anxiety. I also investigated the moderating role of two prenatal parental characteristics, namely relationship quality and parental anxiety. In addition, I investigated the moderating and mediating roles of coparenting in anxiety development. In the next four chapters, I investigated different parts of this model. Chapter 2 investigates the bidirectional associations between coparenting and precursors of child anxiety and the moderating role of parental anxiety in these associations; chapter 3 investigates the moderating role of parental anxiety in the associations between infant fearful temperament, coparenting and child anxiety; Chapter 4 investigates the role of simultaneous coparenting behaviors of fathers and mothers as a moderator of the stability of anxiety from infancy to toddlerhood; Chapter 5 investigates the role of relationship satisfaction in the longitudinal associations between precursors of child anxiety and coparenting.

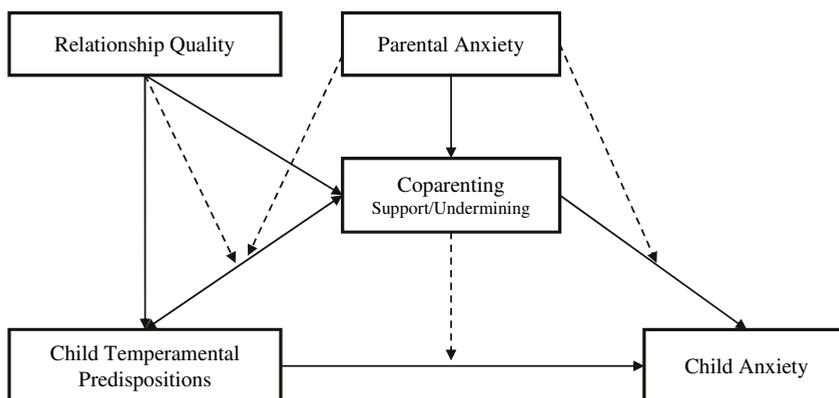


Figure 2: Graphical representation of the associations tested in this thesis (adjustment of the model by Majdandžić et al., 2012). Dashed lines represent moderation effects.

In chapter 2, I test the hypothesis that associations between child fearful temperament and coparenting are bidirectional, using parents' self-reports of their coparenting and parent-reports about children's fearful temperament when children were 4 months, 1 year, and 2.5 years old ($N = 135$). In addition, I investigate whether fathers' and mothers' anxiety disorder severity (based on a clinical interview) influence their coparenting and whether fathers' and mothers' anxiety disorder severity moderates the relations between coparenting and child fearful temperament. The longitudinal design enables me to test concurrent models (in which predictor and outcome occur at the same moment in time) as well as lagged models (in which the predictor is measured at an earlier moment than the outcome). This methodology makes it possible to investigate the direction of effects between child fearful temperament and coparenting.

Chapter 3 presents a study on the role of parental anxiety disorder severity in the associations between observations of child fearful temperament at 1 year and observed coparenting at 2.5 years, and in the associations from coparenting at 2.5 years to parent-reported child anxiety symptoms at 4.5 years ($N = 151$). Coparenting was observed using a global measure of supportive and undermining coparenting behaviors in the triad. Child fearful temperament was observed using several tasks in which children responded to novel stimuli. I aim to investigate whether the associations between child fearful temperament, coparenting, and child anxiety differ between families with high and low-anxious parents. Also, I investigate coparenting as a mediator in the relation from infant fearful temperament to child anxiety.

In chapter 4, I present a study on the role of simultaneity in coparenting behaviors between fathers and mothers in the continuity from parent-reported infant negative affectivity at 4 months to parent-reported child anxiety symptoms at 2.5 years ($N = 116$). I observed coparenting behaviors on a micro-level and coded fathers' and mothers' coparenting behaviors separately. Parents could perform coparenting behaviors simultaneously (i.e., both parents display the same coparenting behavior at the same time), or divergently (i.e., only mother displayed a certain coparenting behavior while father was neutral, or only father displayed a certain coparenting behavior while mother was neutral). These measures of simultaneity made it possible to investigate the role of the co-occurrence of coparenting behaviors in the prediction of child anxiety.

Chapter 5 presents a replication and extension of previous research on the role of prenatal romantic relationship satisfaction in the association between coparenting behaviors and child negative affectivity from 4 months to 4.5 years ($N = 151$). Previous research demonstrated that only in couples with low prenatal relationship satisfaction, more negative affectivity in infancy related to less supportive coparenting; on the other hand, in couples with high prenatal relationship satisfaction, more negative affectivity in 3- to 4-month-olds related to higher levels of supportive coparenting (McHale et al., 2004; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2007). I aimed to replicate these results and to extend the study by separately investigating mothers' and fathers' behaviors, and by extending the developmental period from infancy to early childhood.