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Relational support from friends and wives' family relationships: The role of husbands' interference

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ABSTRACT

Informed by Marks's three corners model, this study explored the moderating role of husbands' relational interference in the link between relational support from close friends and wives' marital and family relationship quality. Using data from 52 wives rearing school-aged children, results from a hierarchical regression analysis suggested that husbands' interference moderates the association between support from close friends and both wives' marital satisfaction and mother-child relationship quality. At low levels of interference from husbands,

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support from close friends is positively associated with wives' reports of marital satisfaction, and at high levels of spousal interference, support from close friends is positively associated with mother–child relationship quality. Theoretical implications for studying these processes as they co-occur across multiple close relationships are discussed.

KEY WORDS: marital quality • parent–child relationship quality • relational interference • social support • wives' friendships

Despite growing recognition of the importance of adults' multiple close relationships across the lifespan (Fingerman & Hay, 2002), the literature to date primarily examines these relationships in isolation from one another. With the possible exception of the association between the two most often studied relationships in adulthood (i.e., marital and parent–child relationships; Fingerman & Hay, 2002), the influence of third parties on marriage and other family relationships is rarely examined (Klein & Milardo, 2000). The scant literature that examines the links between close friendship and family relationships suggests that supportive friendships are beneficial to wives' family relationships by both enhancing women's perceptions of marital quality and helping them navigate their relationships with their children (Oliker, 1989; Rubin, 1985). More recent work, however, cautions that the strength of this link may vary as a function of relational processes co-occurring in the marriage (Helms, Crouter, & McHale, 2003).

The current study examines the moderating role of husbands' interference in the positive association between support from wives' close friends and their perceptions of both marital quality and mother–child relationship quality. Although contemporary theorizing suggests that intimate relationships are likely to be experienced as both close *and* problematic (Fingerman, Hay, & Birditt, 2004), few studies have simultaneously studied the intersection of beneficial and problematic components from separate close relationships. In the present study, we focus on relational support from wives' close friends because research suggests that wives' friends are primary sources of support and that this support is associated with wives' family relationships (Fingerman et al., 2004; Oliker, 1989; Rubin, 1985). We focus on the moderating role of interference from husbands because spousal interference is a direct threat within the marriage that is associated with the quality of wives' family relationships (Almeida, Wethington, & Chandler, 1999; Vinokur, Price, & Caplan, 1996) and with wives seeking support from outside others (Marks, 1986).

Previous research in this area typically has operationalized support and interference on a global level, assessing perceptions of the availability (or lack thereof) of support or the occurrence of negative exchanges between partners (Reinhardt, Boerner, & Horowitz, 2006; Vaux, 1988; Vinokur et al., 1996). Studies operationalizing support and interference in these more general terms do not capture some of the specific areas that might be most

salient to wives and mothers (Proulx, Helms, & Payne, 2004). We argue that the inclusion of more specific dimensions, such as routine expressions of support and interference in the domains of marriage and parenting, is of particular importance when considering links with marital and parent-child relationship quality for married women with children (Goldsmith, 2004). As such, we define relational support from friends as the frequency with which wives receive affirmation, opportunity for discussion, or instrumental assistance in marital, parenting, or personal domains, and spousal interference as direct criticism or the refusal to provide instrumental support, emotional support, or aid in these same domains.

Theoretical background

Marks's (1986) three corners model addresses how spouses balance multiple relationships and obligations and provides a useful framework for conceptualizing the links between friendship, marriage, and family relationships (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000) during the child-rearing years. Informed by the family therapy concept of 'triangulation' in relationships (see Bowen, 1966), the model proposes that married individuals are in a constant process of balancing the demands of three corners of a triangle. In this model, each corner represents a domain of activity, and the three primary corners represent the self, the marriage, and important outside interests such as close friendships. Central to the model is the proposition that spouses' involvement in their third corners is closely related to marital dynamics.

Several principles from Marks's (1986) three corners model support a focus on the associations between relational support from wives' close friends and wives' perceptions of marital and family relationship quality as a function of husbands' interference. First, Marks underscores that the ways in which outside interests (e.g., close friendships) influence spouses' perceptions of marital and family relationship quality cannot be understood without acknowledging the influence of marital dynamics on those links. Thus, the relationship processes that spouses engage in with one another have implications for the extent to which involvement with close friends influences their perceptions of family relationships such as marriage and the parent-child tie. Our specific focus on husband's interference is further supported by the model as it emphasizes the role of third corners (e.g., close friends) in relieving tensions or conflict experienced in the marriage. For example, the model suggests that when tensions in the marriage exceed wives' tolerance, they will seek support from their third corner (e.g., a close friend) which generally results in comfort and tension relief via improved perceptions of marital and other family relationships. However, for wives in marriages characterized by high spousal interference and regular triangulation with close friends, the model proposes that support from a close friend may at best have little effect on perceptions of marital and family relationships and, at worst, may compromise relationship quality due to the stark contrast between a supportive close friend and a highly interfering husband.

Close friendships and wives' family relationships

Recent research suggests that close friendships in adulthood are likely to be experienced as primarily close, supportive, and unproblematic (Fingerman et al., 2004; Proulx, Helms, Milardo, & Payne, 2005). More specifically, women's closest friendships are rarely interfering and often serve as important sources of support for marital and parent-child relationships throughout adulthood (Helms-Erikson & Proulx, 2001; Oliner, 1989; Proulx et al., 2005). Past theorizing suggests that work and family demands experienced by married women constrain them to the selective maintenance of a few core friendships (Blieszner & Adams, 1992; Brown, 1981), and thus it is not surprising that women are unlikely to maintain ties with friends who are highly interfering in their family relationships. Indeed, recent research on the occurrence of support and interference in close relationships suggests that relational interference is unlikely to occur in friendships defined by women as close or closest (Proulx et al., 2005).

The role of supportive close friendships in adult women's perceptions of their marriages has been emphasized in several studies that have moved beyond a focus on social networks in general to a focus on women's specific close friendships. In her qualitative study of 300 working- and middle-class men and women, Rubin (1985) found that the wives in her study insisted that their friendships did not cause strain in their marriages, but that their marriages continued to exist, in part, because of the support they received from their friends. Similar to the results in Rubin's study, Oliner (1989) found in her in-depth qualitative study with 17 married women that in general, wives' involvement with supportive friends resulted in improved feelings about their marriages.

Whereas this earlier qualitative work suggests an overall positive effect of wives' friendships on their perceptions of marital quality, recent research suggests that the relationship between wives' friendships and their marriages might be more complex. This literature, though sparse, suggests that wives' friendships might be beneficial for their marriages only under certain marital conditions. In their observational study of spouses' disclosure of marital conflict to a close friend, Julien et al. (2000) found that women who were satisfied in their marriages reported feeling better about their marriages after discussing marital concerns with a close friend. Women who were dissatisfied, however, reported no change in their feelings about their marriages after such discussions. In a study focused on a process labeled 'marriage work,' the extent to which wives engaged in discussions about marital concerns with their husbands moderated the association between wives' marital quality and marriage work with a close friend. More specifically, Helms et al. (2003) found that wives' marriage work with a close friend was unrelated to wives' perceptions of marital quality for wives who engaged in high levels of marriage work with their husbands. In the case of wives who engaged in low levels of marriage work with their spouse, however, wives' marriage work with friend was negatively related to their reports of marital love and positively related to their reports of conflict and

ineffective arguing. These results suggest that the link between marriage work with friends and wives' perceptions of marital quality depends on the extent to which wives talk with their partners about the same concerns. Similarly, Proulx et al. (2004) found that the extent to which wives engaged their close friends in discussions about their husbands' support for them as a parent was negatively associated with reports of marital satisfaction and positively associated with reports of marital conflict when wives engaged in low levels of similar conversations with their spouses. In several of these studies, main effects for wives' involvement with their close friends were nonsignificant, suggesting that the influence of wives' friendships on their perceptions of marital quality is best understood as a function of marital dynamics.

Although there is evidence to suggest that marital processes moderate the link between close friendships and marital quality (Helms et al., 2003; Julien et al., 2000; Proulx et al., 2004), the empirical literature to date has largely ignored the application of this model to parent-child relationship outcomes despite the central role that parenting plays for women in the child-rearing years. The few studies that have explored the association between wives' close friendships and their parent-child relationships suggest that women seek out their friends as often as their husbands as sources of parenting support (Helms-Erikson & Proulx, 2001; Oliner, 1989). Wives also perceive support from their friends to be beneficial to their relationships with their children. Marks's (1986) three corners model would suggest that marital dynamics moderate this link in much the same way as they do the link between close friends and the marriage, but whether the context of the marriage influences the association between support from wives' close friends and their perceptions of the mother-child relationship remains an empirical question.

The moderating role of husbands' interference

Marks's (1986) three corners model suggests it is the negative processes in marriage that are paramount to understanding the association between outside others (e.g., close friends) and the family, yet research on the influence of the marital environment on the link between friendship and the quality of family relationships has yet to examine these negative processes. Spousal interference is one such process that is particularly important to consider. Unlike women's closest friendships, which are characterized as primarily close and unproblematic, relational interference is likely to exist within marriage. More than simply a lack of social support, interference represents a direct threat within marriage via the enactment of specific behaviors that are damaging to the well-being of a marriage (Gottman & Krokoff, 1989; Vinokur et al., 1996) and the family (Almeida et al., 1999). For example, in a study of the links between unemployment and marital satisfaction (Vinokur et al., 1996), the marital satisfaction of wives seeking employment was predicted by increased interference from their husbands,

such that the more negative husbands were toward their wives, the less satisfied wives were with their marital relationship. Within the framework of Marks's three corners model, spousal interference increases the likelihood that wives will turn to outside others for support. If the marriage is characterized by relatively infrequent occurrences of interference, support from wives' close friends is likely to be beneficial to the quality of wives' family relationships. But if these interfering behaviors occur on a more frequent basis, the spousal negativity may prove detrimental to the family environment and negate any positive influence from outside others.

Research hypotheses

In the current study, we hypothesized that relational interference from husbands would moderate the association between relational support from wives' close friends and their reports of both marital satisfaction and mother-child relationship quality. Specifically, we hypothesized that under marital conditions characterized by low interference from husbands, support from wives' friends would be positively linked with reports of marital satisfaction and mother-child relationship quality. Alternatively, we hypothesized that under less optimal marital conditions (i.e., high levels of interference from husbands) the positive association between support from wives' friends and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction and mother-child relationship quality would be attenuated.

Method

Sample and procedure

Data for this study were collected as part of the NICHD Study of Early Child Care. A detailed description of the study can be found in the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network (1994). Participants included 52 wives involved in Phase III (2001) of this longitudinal study from 1 of the 10 data collection sites. Mothers initially were recruited from hospitals in a rural town in a southern state during selected 24-hour sampling periods in 1991. A subset of this group ($N = 137$) was then selected in accordance with a conditional random sampling plan designed to ensure that the recruited families: (i) Included relatively equal groups of mothers who planned to work or attend school full time, part time, or stay home with the child in the first year; and (ii) reflected the demographic (economic, educational, ethnic) diversity of the data collection site. At Phase III, 92 participating mothers completed mother-child site visits as part of the larger study. Fifty-two women completed a series of measures pertaining to marriage and close friendship that were appended to a packet of measures (more specifically focused on the child) as part of the larger study. Of the 40 women excluded from the sample used here, 22 had already completed their mother-child site visit when data collection for the current study began and 18 were un-

partnered at the time of the interview. A series of chi-square tests revealed one difference between the group of participants and those excluded: More women in the sample were not employed (25%) than in the group of women excluded (15%), $\chi^2(2, N = 92) = 11.94, p < .01$.

The majority of participants (92%) were White and had completed high school (94%), with about half having completed some college or beyond. All the women had a 9-year-old child (the target child in the original study) and a mean of 2.3 children ($SD = .89$). On average, the women in the sample had been married 13.70 years ($SD = 4.74$) and the majority (87%) were in their first marriage. The majority of wives' friends were female, married parents who were not kin and were employed at least part time. Most women (73%) reported having relatively long-term friendships, with equal numbers of women reporting they had known their friend 4–10 years or more than 10 years. Twenty-five percent of the women in the sample had known their close friend 1–3 years, and 3% reported they had known their close friend for less than a year.

Measures

Marital satisfaction. Each respondent's satisfaction with her marriage was measured using The Aspects of Married Life Questionnaire (Huston, McHale, & Crouter, 1986). Respondents were asked to indicate their satisfaction with 10 routine domains of marriage (e.g., communication, child care, division of household tasks) on a 9-point scale. For example, respondents were asked, 'How satisfied are you with the way you and your spouse spend free time together?' Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .93.

Mother–child relationship quality. Wives' perceptions of the quality of their relationship with the target child were assessed with the Child–Parent Relationship Scale. This 30-item self-administered scale asks parents to rate items such as 'My child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me' on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('definitely does not apply') to 5 ('definitely applies'). Scores ranged from 15 to 75, with higher scores indicating a more positive relationship between the mother and the child. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .81.

Interference from husbands. The degree to which wives perceived interference from their husbands within the last year was assessed with a self-report measure designed for the current study and adapted from a previous measure of interference (i.e., the Maine Support and Interference Inventories; Milardo, 1989). The interference scale originally consisted of 9 items and used a 9-point rating scale ranging from 1 ('never') to 9 ('very often'). The items assessed interference in domains central to women's daily lives such as parenting (e.g., 'How often did your spouse criticize or have something negative to say about your parenting?'), marriage (e.g., 'How often did your spouse criticize or have something negative to say about your marriage?'), and individual (e.g., 'How often did your spouse ignore you

when you wanted to talk about an interest of yours?). Confirmatory factor analyses suggested a 6-item solution was the best fit to the data ($\Delta\chi^2 = 61.3$, $p < .001$) with acceptable levels of fit (TLI = .94, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .08) occurring after 3 items that loaded poorly were dropped. Further, error terms were allowed to correlate in instances where items were substantively and statistically related. Factor loadings were all significant and ranged from .42 to .87. Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Support from friends. Wives were asked to think about their current friendships and to name a friend (if they had one) that 'you are closest to who is not a member of your immediate family – that is, not your spouse or one of your children.' They then responded to a series of background questions about their friend. The degree to which wives perceived that their close friend provided support was assessed with a 9-item measure also adapted from the Maine Support and Interference Inventories (Milardo, 1989) to reflect individual, marital, and parental dimensions of support. Using a 9-point rating scale ranging from 1 ('never') to 9 ('very often'), the items assessed support in domains parallel to the interference from husband measure (e.g., 'How often did your friend say something positive about your parenting?'). Confirmatory factor analysis suggested that the 9-item unidimensional model resulted in acceptable levels of fit (TLI = .97, CFI = .98, RMSEA = .05) after error terms were allowed to correlate in instances where items were substantively and statistically related. Factor loadings were significant and ranged from .51 to .89. Cronbach's alpha was .90.

Control variables

We also took into account dispositional and contextual factors that are likely to play a role in explaining how relational support and interference are linked to wives' reports of family relationships. For example, structural factors such as social class have been shown to influence the extent to which wives receive support outside of their marriage and their reports of marital satisfaction (Burger & Milardo, 1995; Lee, 1988; South & Spitze, 1986). In addition, dispositional factors such as depression are associated with wives' reports of marital satisfaction (Beach, 1996), whether they have a close friend (Helms-Erikson, 2000), and their ability to garner social support from others (Cutrona, 1996). Thus, we controlled for dispositional and structural factors that might account, in part, for the relationships hypothesized here.

Depression. The extent to which women experienced depressive symptoms was assessed using the 12-item form of The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CESD; Radloff, 1977). Respondents were asked to think about the past week and use a 4-item scale ranging from 1 ('rarely') to 4 ('most of the time') when answering. These 12 items assess cognitive, affective, behavioral, and somatic symptoms associated with depression (e.g., 'I felt that everything was an effort'). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .85.

Educational attainment. Wives were asked to indicate the number of years of education they had completed and what degrees they had earned. For the purposes of this study, educational attainment was coded as 0 = a high school education or less and 1 = some college or beyond.

Results

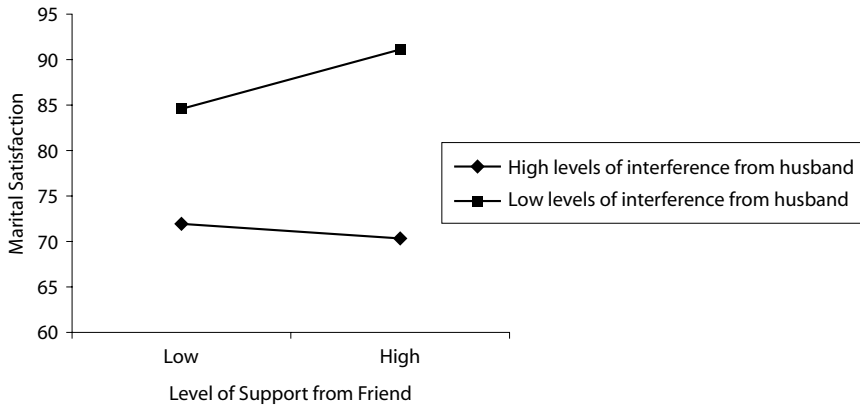
To address our primary research goal, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the moderating influence of interference from husbands in the relationship between support from close friends and wives' marital satisfaction beyond that explained by the set of control variables in Block 1 (i.e., wives' depression and education; see Table 1). Continuous variables were centered when the interaction term was created to reduce multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). The addition of support from friend and interference from husband in Block 2 resulted in a significant change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .18$, F -change = 10.24, $p < .01$). Although there was no main effect for friends' support in the model predicting wives' marital satisfaction, a significant interaction term did emerge in Block 3, and the addition of this interaction term resulted in a significant change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, F -change = 2.98, $p < .05$). To further explain the interaction term, wives' reports of marital satisfaction were regressed onto wives' reports of relational support from close friends for high (i.e., one standard deviation above the mean) and low (i.e., one standard deviation below the mean) levels of wives' reports of interference from husbands (Aiken & West, 1991) while controlling for wives' education and depressive symptoms. For wives who perceived low levels of interference from their husbands, support from friends was positively associated with reports of marital satisfaction ($B = .25$; see Figure 1). Alternatively, for women who perceived high

TABLE 1
Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for support from friend and interference from spouse predicting wives' marital satisfaction ($N = 52$)

Variable	Block 1			Block 2			Block 3		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Education	-2.66	3.76	-.09	-1.33	3.41	-.03	-.99	3.34	-.03
Depression	-1.57	.33	-.59**	-.82	.34	-.31*	-1.00	.35	-.38*
Support				.06	.16	.05	.82	.16	.08
Interference				-.96	.24	-.49**	-.97	.24	-.50**
Support \times Interference							-.02	.03	-.20*
F			11.64**			12.71**			11.18**
R^2			.30			.48			.50

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

FIGURE 1
The relation between marital satisfaction and support from close friend as a function of interference from husband



levels of interference from their husbands, support from close friends was unrelated ($B = -.05$) to reports of marital satisfaction.

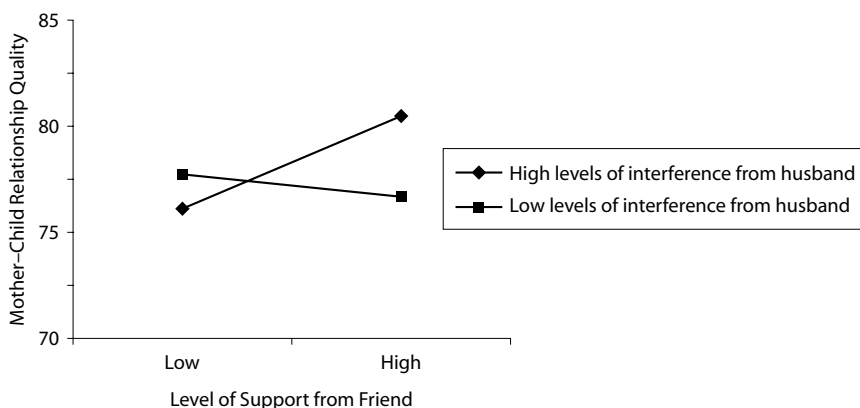
To address our second research goal, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted to examine the moderating influence of interference from husbands in the relationship between support from close friends and wives' reports of mother-child relationship quality beyond that explained by the set of control variables in Block 1 (see Table 2). No main effect for friends' support or husbands' interference in the model predicting mother-child relationship quality was found. A significant interaction term did emerge in Block 3, however, and the addition of this interaction term resulted in a significant change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .06$, F -change = 6.97, $p < .05$). For wives who perceived low levels of interference from their husbands, support from

TABLE 2
Summary of hierarchical regression analysis for support from friend and interference from spouse predicting mother-child relationship quality ($N = 52$)

Variable	Block 1			Block 2			Block 3		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Education	.79	2.16	.05	-.01	2.27	-.00	.29	2.22	.02
Depression	-.62	.18	-.46**	-.64	.23	-.49**	-.76	.24	-.58**
Support				.03	.11	.05	.06	.11	.10
Interference				.07	.17	.07	.07	.17	.07
Support \times Interference							-.01	.01	-.28*
F			6.43**			3.10*			3.27**
R^2			.23			.23			.29

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

FIGURE 2
The relation between mother–child relationship quality and support from close friend as a function of interference from husband



friends was not associated with reports of mother–child relationship quality ($B = -.04$; see Figure 2). Alternatively, for wives who perceived high levels of interference from husbands, support from a close friend was positively associated ($B = .16$) with reports of mother–child relationship quality.

Discussion

In the present study, we examined the role that relational interference from husbands might play in the link between relational support from friends and the quality of wives' family relationships. Although early qualitative studies suggested that wives' friendships enhance their family relationships (Oliker, 1989; Rubin, 1985), contemporary work suggests a more complex association in which it is imperative to simultaneously consider processes occurring in both relationships. We sought to add to the literature on the association between women's friendships and their family relationships by examining the moderating role of husbands' interference in the link between support from wives' close friends and the quality of the mother–child relationship.

Our first goal was to examine whether relational interference from husbands would act as a moderator in the association between relational support from friends and wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction. Although previous research suggests that support from close friends is positively associated with wives' perceptions of marital quality (e.g., Oliker, 1989; Rubin, 1985), we were interested in the marital conditions under which this association might not hold. Informed by Marks's (1986) three corners model, we hypothesized that relational interference from husbands would moderate the link between relational support from friends and wives' marital quality in such a way that at higher levels of interference from

husbands, the relationship between support from friends and marital satisfaction would be attenuated. We found support for this hypothesis, in that at lower levels of husbands' interference, the relationship between support from friends in relational domains and marital satisfaction was positive, whereas at higher levels of interference from husbands, the association was attenuated. The significance of this interaction is particularly noteworthy given that no main effect emerged for wives' reports of relational support from friends on marital satisfaction. Thus, ignoring the marital context in which wives' friendships exist might lead to inaccurate conclusions regarding the associations between wives' friendships and their perceptions of marital satisfaction.

These findings add to previous work which suggests that although supportive friendships may be positively linked with wives' perceptions of marital quality, it is important to simultaneously consider processes occurring within the marriage itself (Helms et al., 2003; Marks, 1986; Proulx et al., 2004). It appears that when wives perceive minimal levels of relational interference from their husbands, having a close friend who is supportive in personal, marital, and parental domains is associated with positive feelings about their marriages. This finding supports previous research (Julien et al., 2000; Oliner, 1989; Rubin, 1985) and theorizing (Marks, 1986) and suggests that having a close friend who is supportive in these domains may help compensate for the occasional low-level relational interference from husbands by offering support and linking positively to wives' perceptions of marital satisfaction. Alternatively, having a husband who is highly interfering in relational areas that are central to women's daily lives appears to nullify the positive association between supportive friends and wives' marital satisfaction. This finding suggests that under certain marital conditions, namely a husband who is highly critical and ignores wives' desires to talk about her interests, relational support from an outsider cannot compensate for the negativity present in the marriage. One possible explanation for this finding is that, in the context of an interfering husband, wives may not view positive remarks from friends about these relational domains as helpful (Burleson, 2003). If a wife is experiencing relatively high levels of relational interference from her husband, she may not perceive positive comments about her husband or her marriage as supportive, particularly if she is seeking affirmation of her experiences. In this way, relational support from friends may not be a boost to wives' perceptions of the marriage.

For our second goal, we again hypothesized that relational interference from husbands would moderate the link between relational support from friends and mother-child relationship quality in such a way that at higher levels of interference from husbands, the relationship between support from friends and mother-child relationship quality would be attenuated. Husbands' relational interference did act as a moderator, though not in the anticipated direction. The association between relational support from friends and mother-child relationship quality was positive at higher levels of interference from husbands, whereas at lower levels of husbands' interference, there was no association. As with the findings for wives' reports of

marital satisfaction, the significance of this interaction is particularly noteworthy given that no main effect emerged for wives' reports of relational support from friends or for husbands' interference.

The findings for mother–child relationship quality stand in contrast to the findings for marital satisfaction. When examining outcomes such as mother–child relationship quality, it appears that when wives perceive higher levels of relational interference from their husbands, having a friend who is supportive in relational domains is positively associated with their perception of the quality of their relationship with their school-aged child. Although this is the first study to date to examine the moderating role of the marital context in the link between support from close friends and the quality of the mother–child tie, the few studies exploring wives' close friendships suggest that women seek out their friends as important sources of parenting support (Helms-Erikson & Proulx, 2001; Oliner, 1989). Our results suggest that having a close friend who is supportive in individual, parenting, and marital domains can make up for some of the higher-level interference from husbands in these same domains and is associated positively with wives' perceptions of their relationship with their child. This finding extends Marks's (1986) three corners model to the parent–child relationship, suggesting that under conditions of relatively higher levels of interference from husbands, triangulation with a third corner in the form of support from close friends – although not linked beneficially with marriage – can offset significant marital tensions that might interfere with the mother–child relationship. Alternatively, for wives who have a husband who is minimally interfering in marital, parenting, and individual domains (e.g., a more optimal marital context), supportive friends are not linked positively with wives' perceptions of the mother–child relationship. This pattern of findings suggests that women's friendships are associated positively not only with their marriages under optimal conditions, but also with their other family relationships in less than optimal marital conditions.

A possible explanation for the divergent pattern of findings for marital versus parent–child outcomes may be that the link between husbands' relational interference (i.e., a dynamic of the marital relationship) and wives' feelings of marital satisfaction is too proximal for friends' support to offset the effect of husbands' interference. However, because of the more distal nature of the link between husbands' interference and wives' evaluations of their mother–child relationship, close friends can serve as an important source of support that potentially enhances wives' perceptions of their relationships with their children despite the negativity inherent in the marital relationship.

Conclusion

This study has several strengths, including the simultaneous consideration of what occurs in both wives' friendships and their marriages. Our study, however, also has several limitations. First, marriage, friendship, and parenthood

are dynamic relationships that develop over time. The cross-sectional, quasi-experimental nature of this study offers only a glimpse of what co-occurs across relationships that are constantly changing, and we are unable to make claims about causal directions of influence between close friendship, marriage, and parent–child relationships. For example, wives experiencing high levels of interference from their husbands and high levels of support from their friends may be experiencing a different level of marital satisfaction than those who receive high levels of support from both relationships. In the former situation, wives may find this level of interference discouraging and instead seek support from their close friend. In addition, future research should examine the role that husbands' interference may have when simultaneously considering their levels of relational support. To date, studies have either omitted the role of husbands' support or constrained its influence to be equal to that of the influence of husbands' interference due to problems of multicollinearity (Vinokur et al., 1996). Neither approach fully captures the complete range of marital behaviors spouses exchange, and it is important to uncover what role spousal interference may have under varying levels of spousal support. It is possible that spousal support, for example, may offset some of the influence of spousal interference, or it may enhance the beneficial aspects of relationships with close friends.

Second, we considered only wives' closest friendships, relationships that are likely to be very supportive. Future work should explore further the role of other important close ties, such as kin, and especially adult siblings, as relationships with kin typically are characterized as both supportive and problematic (Fingerman et al., 2004; Klein & Milardo, 2000). All measures in this study were self-report from the perspective of the wives. Gathering information about husbands' reports of enacted interference, in addition to information from friends about actual support given as well as their assessments of the marriage, may provide a more nuanced look at how and why these types of support and interference are associated with wives' perceptions of family relationships. Lastly, the sample used here is predominantly White, reflecting the geographic region from which it was drawn. Future research should examine the links between support from friends and spousal interference in larger and more diverse samples, including samples of men, as previous research has shown that factors such as social class, gender, and ethnicity might influence reports of marital satisfaction as well as the extent to which outsiders such as friends are involved in marital relationships (South & Spitzer, 1986; Timmer & Veroff, 2000).

Our results suggest that research and theorizing on friendship should more thoroughly account for the marital context in which friendships between spouses and nonmarital close ties are embedded (Milardo & Helms-Erikson, 2000). The current findings underscore the salience of negative interactions with spouses and extend previous work by suggesting that interference from husbands moderates the association between relational support from close friends and both wives' marital satisfaction and mother–child relationship quality, albeit in different ways. We view the current study as a first step in addressing these complex links, and suggest future

researchers build upon this work by continuing to study both positive and negative dimensions of friendship and family relationships from the perspectives of multiple reporters in larger and more diverse samples.

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