Published in final edited form as:

J Fam Psychol. 2012 October ; 26(5): 767–775. doi:10.1037/a0029470.

Maternal History of Parentification, Maternal Warm Responsiveness, and Children's Externalizing Behavior

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Abstract

Destructive parentification occurs when children are expected to provide instrumental or emotional caregiving within the family system that overtaxes their developmental capacity. According to parentification theory, destructive parentification in family of origin poses a risk to child development in subsequent generations; however, there is a paucity of empirical research examining the impact of a maternal history of destructive parentification on parenting quality and child outcomes in subsequent generations. The present study examined the potential risk of maternal history of parentification on child adjustment by hypothesizing that a maternal history of parentification in family of origin would have a negative impact on quality of maternal warm responsiveness at 18 months of age which would, in turn, be associated with increased children's externalizing symptoms at 36 months. Results indicated that there was a significant indirect effect of maternal history of destructive parentification in family of origin on child externalizing behavior in the next generation through maternal warm responsiveness, supporting the hypothesized model. This finding suggests that facilitating the development of maternal contingent responsiveness among mothers with a history of destructive parentification may promote more adaptive child development in the next generation.

Keywords

parentification; warm responsiveness; transition to parenthood; parenting quality; boundary dissolution

Boundary dissolution refers to a complex set of phenomena all involving the breakdown of expected generational roles and the loss of psychological distinctiveness between individuals in a family (Kerig, 2005). Boundary dissolution dimensions are non-orthogonal and include: enmeshment, spousification, intrusiveness, and role reversal/parentification (Kerig, 2005). In the case of parentification, which is the focus of this study, the parent turns to the child for nurturance or support and overburdens a child with the responsibility of protecting and sustaining parents, siblings, and the family system (Boszormenyi-Nagy, 1965; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Boszormenyi-Nagy & Krasner, 1986; Jurkovic, 1997). There are two types of caregiving that may be expected of children: an instrumental caregiving role requires children to assume responsibility for concrete functions in support

of the family, whereas an expressive or emotional role requires the child to assume responsibility for a caregiver's socioemotional needs (Jurkovic, Jessee, & Goglia, 1991).

Although providing a moderate amount of caregiving to parents is a naturally occurring element of parent-child relationships that is considered normative and healthy (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973), parentification becomes destructive when the child's expressive and/or instrumental overt responsibilities are excessive, developmentally inappropriate, become the child's source of identity, and violate the child's personal and familial subsystem boundaries (Jurkovic, 1997). Under these circumstances, children are over-taxed by the responsibility of fulfilling a role that is greater than their developmental capacity, which, in turn, interferes with their ability to navigate salient developmental tasks. Therefore, destructive parentification is a form of emotional abuse or neglect (Kerig, 2005; Hooper, Marotta, & Lanthier, 2008) and often co-occurs with childhood sexual abuse (Fitzgerald, Salstrom, Schneider, Zinzow, Jackson, & Fossel, 2008) and physical abuse (Macfie, Toth, Rogosch, Robinson, Emde, & Cicchetti, 1999). Given this co-occurrence of parentification and physical and sexual abuse, empirical work on parentification should seek to isolate the influence of parentification on outcomes above and beyond the affects of abuse.

Much of the parentification literature has sought to identify child outcomes associated with destructive parentification. For example, destructive parentification has been linked to difficulties with child self-regulation, externalizing problems, and attention problems in toddlerhood, to poor social competence in early and middle childhood (Macfie, Houts, McElwain, & Cox, 2005; Sroufe, Bennett, Englund, Urban, & Shulman, 1993), and to internalizing problems, externalizing problems, low self-worth, and psychiatric symptoms in adolescence (Shaffer & Egeland, 2011). In addition, research on boundary dissolution has shown that pathological role processes in the parent-child dyad that are initially driven by parent behaviors are later reciprocated by the child during adolescence, thus maintaining the dysfunctional family dynamic (Shaffer & Egeland, 2011).

Inappropriate engagement in familial roles may extend from reciprocation in adolescence to dysfunctional adult relationships. Those engaged in parentified roles in their family of origin may display a relational deficit in adulthood characterized by attempts to control relationships by performing "compulsive caretaking," expressing the belief that they know what's best for themselves and for others, and being overly quick to control interactions in the absence of cues (West & Keller, 1991; Valteau, Bergner, & Horton, 1995). Such a method of relating to others is dysfunctional in relationships expected to be egalitarian, as is the case in romantic relationships and friendships (Valteau et al., 1995), which extends the findings in childhood that children who are parentified have difficulty maintaining appropriate social relationships and boundaries (Macfie, Houts, et al., 2005; Sroufe et al., 1993). In addition, individuals who were engaged in destructive parentification in childhood may assume that others will be unresponsive to one's needs and, therefore, avoid forming new attachment relationships as a means of self-protection (West & Keller, 1991). Furthermore, some research suggests that young adult women who report destructive parentification/inappropriate familial boundaries in childhood are more likely to undergo a series of failed romantic relationships during the transition to adulthood (Fullinwider-Bush & Jacobvitz, 2004), perhaps due to these relational deficits.

The theoretical consensus that individuals who experienced parentified roles in childhood engage in dysfunctional relational patterns in adulthood suggests that parentification may similarly lead to difficulties with parenting, though empirical work is needed to better understand these relationship disturbances (Shaffer & Egeland, 2011). This gap in the literature is particularly problematic when thinking about whether or not destructive

parentification in family of origin is a risk factor for poor parenting and, subsequently, poses a risk to child development in the next generation. Parentification theory argues that individuals internalize the relationship roles and parenting practices they experience in their family of origin and recreate these patterns during parenthood (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973; Kretchmar & Jacobvitz, 2002), which establishes destructive parentification in the family of origin as a theoretical risk factor for poor quality parenting. This idea is consistent with the broader parenting literature, as it has long been hypothesized that the quality and nature of parenting are transmitted across generations (Serbin & Karp, 2003). Indeed, there is a substantial body of literature supporting the intergenerational transmission of both negative and positive parenting behaviors (Belsky, Conger, & Capaldi, 2009).

Specific to parentification, a small but growing body of empirical literature has begun to identify links in the intergenerational transmission of parentification. Mothers' history of parentification in family of origin predicts mother-toddler parentification role reversal at 24 months over and above attachment disorganization at 12 months (Macfie, Fitzpatrick, Rivas, & Cox, 2008). In addition, prenatal retrospective reports of maternal role reversal parentification in the family of origin have been found to predict mother-daughter role reversal parentification in the next generation at two years of age; however, maternal parentification history did not predict maternal engagement in parentification roles with sons (Macfie, McElwain, Houts, & Cox, 2005). These studies support the theoretical model of the intergenerational transmission of destructive parentification and illustrate the importance of elucidating the differential influences of gender pairings.

Although there is empirical support for the intergenerational transmission of parentification, there is a lack of research examining the specific caregiving behaviors and quality of parenting provided by individuals with a history of parentification in their family of origin; two early studies lend support to the existence of a relationship between familial boundary dissolution in family of origin and subsequent deficient parenting in adulthood. First, the spousification dimension of boundary dissolution, which is defined by maternal seductive behavior, has been associated with greater use of threats and physical punishment and less supportive and effective guidance of sons than mothers who did not engage in seductive behavior (Sroufe & Ward, 1980). Second, maternal history of intrusiveness in her family of origin has been associated with poor parenting in the next generation when the infant was three months of age (Cox et al., 1985). Although spousification and intrusiveness are dimensions of boundary dissolution that are related to parentification, research examining the specific parenting behaviors associated with parentification is needed. Moreover, Sroufe and Ward (1980) and Cox et al. (1985) did not examine child outcomes. No published studies have sought to understand child adjustment outcomes associated with a parental history of destructive parentification in family of origin although it is crucial that child outcomes in the second generation are examined in order to determine the risk associated with maternal parentification history.

It is likely that the relational deficits reviewed above cause difficulty in the role of parent by interfering with a mother's ability to interact with her child in a warm and responsive manner. Maternal warm responsiveness is a broad dimension of dispositional parenting defined by two dimensions: warmth and contingent responsiveness (Landry, Smith, Miller-Loncar, & Swank, 1997; Landry, Smith, Swank, Assel, & Vellet, 2001; Steelman, Assel, Swank, Smith, & Landry, 2002). Maternal warmth is defined by display of positive affect and positive tone of voice, physical affection aimed at the child, as well as praise and encouragement for the child (Landry et al., 1997). Maternal contingent responsiveness is defined by displaying sensitivity and contingency to their child's affective cues, acceptance of and prompt response to their child's needs and interests, and support of their child's need for exploration and independence (Landry et al., 1997; Landry, Smith, & Swank, 2006;

Guttentag, Pedrosa-Josic, Landry, Smith, & Swank, 2006). Individuals with a history of parentification in their family of origin who are overly quick to rescue or to control interpersonal interactions in the absence of cues (West & Keller, 1991; Valteau et al., 1995) may have difficulty responding to their child in a contingently responsive manner. Furthermore, because individuals who were engaged in destructive parentification in their family of origin likely had mothers who did not model contingent responsive parenting, these individuals may have increased difficulty interacting with their own children in a contingently responsive manner.

Research has demonstrated that intrusiveness and lack of sensitivity in one's family of origin predicts poor maternal investment in and acceptance of one's own child, and lack of sensitivity to the child's individual needs (Cox et al., 1985). In addition, first time mothers who report satisfying relationships with their own mothers are more sensitive in responding to their infant's cues than first time mothers who report poor relationships with their mothers (Minde, 1980). It is hypothesized that adults with a childhood history of parentification may be unavailable to their children because they are still struggling to meet their own parents' needs (Barnett & Parker, 1998; Cotroneo, 1986), thus likely interfering with a mother's ability to respond to her child in a warm, sensitive manner. It has also been hypothesized that adults with a history of parentification may be unable to meet their children's needs because they expect to be cared for by their children (Barnett & Parker, 1998; Cotroneo, 1986), which may also thwart the development of a parenting style consistent with maternal warm responsiveness. In studies of adolescents, pregnant adolescents reported higher levels of parenting attitudes consistent with acceptance of engaging children in parentification than adolescents who were not pregnant (Hanson, 1990), thus suggesting that, among adolescents, the decision to become a mother may be associated with expectations that their children will fulfill their needs rather than the expectation of meeting their children's needs. Despite these theoretical links, the impact of a maternal history of parentification on an individual's warm responsive parenting during the transition to parenthood has yet to be examined. Moreover, based on these theoretical links, the association between maternal history of parentification and early maternal warm responsive parenting may be best studied in high risk samples of first time mothers who are likely to have been engaged in parentification in childhood.

Maternal warm responsiveness in infancy has an important influence on children's socioemotional development (Landry et al., 1997; Steelman et al., 2002). Contingent responsiveness is particularly important because parenting must adapt to meet children's changing needs for increased exploration during early development (Landry, Smith, Swank, & Miller-Loncar, 2000). Prior research has demonstrated that mothers who are responsive to their children's cues have children who show more cooperation and acceptance of parental suggestions (Schaffer & Crook, 1980); on the other hand, poor maternal warm responsive parenting in late infancy predicts later child externalizing behaviors (Wakschlag & Hans, 1999). Therefore, mothers who do not display warm responsiveness in their interactions with their children during infancy likely have children who will exhibit more externalizing behaviors in the future. However, it remains unclear whether poor maternal warm responsiveness is an antecedent of child adjustment outcomes such as externalizing, or rather, if the child influences the mother's warm responsiveness, though likely these interactions are bidirectional between mother and child (Wakschlag & Hans, 1999); therefore, research should seek to better isolate maternal warm responsiveness by controlling for child regulation in order to understand the association between maternal warm responsiveness and the development of child behaviors.

The Present Study

The present study sought to contribute to the literature on parentification by examining the role of maternal parentification history in family of origin as a risk factor for poor parenting during the transition to parenthood and subsequent child adjustment problems in the second generation. First, we hypothesized that a maternal history of destructive parentification in family of origin would be associated with child externalizing behavior at 36 months of age. Second, we hypothesized that there would be an indirect effect between maternal history of destructive parentification in family of origin and children's externalizing behavior through maternal warm responsiveness at 18 months of age, such that a maternal history of destructive parentification in family of origin would be associated with less maternal warm responsiveness and, in turn, increased child externalizing symptoms. Third, considering the findings of Macfie, McElwain et al. (2005) and Sroufe and Ward (1980) on the differential influence of parentification by child gender in the intergenerational transmission of parentification, we hypothesized that the proposed mediational process would be moderated by child gender, such that maternal history of parentification would interact with parenting quality, with the hypothesized indirect effect having more adverse consequences for daughters than sons. Fourth, given the links between a maternal history of parentification and adult relational deficits (West & Keller, 1991; Valteau et al., 1995; Fullinwider-Bush & Jacobvitz, 2004), the role of father involvement is likely particularly salient when examining processes of maternal history of parentification, parenting behaviors, and child outcomes. Therefore, we hypothesized that the relationships and processes described in hypotheses one through three would be stronger when there was no father involvement when the child was 36 months of age than when the father was involved in the child's life. In all analyses, maternal history of physical and/or sexual abuse, maternal age, and child regulation were covaried.

Method

Data for the present study were drawn from a longitudinal, prospective study designed to understand poor parenting behaviors. Because the association between maternal history of parentification and early maternal warm responsive parenting may be best first studied in high risk samples of first time mothers who are likely to have been parentified in childhood, data were drawn from a high-risk community sample of first time adolescent and adult mothers. Parturient women were recruited through primary care facilities in South Bend, Indiana; Kansas City, Kansas and Kansas City, Missouri; Washington, D.C.; and Birmingham, Alabama. Initial data were collected from mothers during the third trimester of pregnancy, and follow-up data were collected when the infant was six months old, 12 months old, 18 months old, 24 months old, and 36 months old. The study was approved by the appropriate institutional review boards, and participant consent was collected at each time point. The three-year attrition rate for the study was 44.87%, which is comparable to attrition rates in other studies with high-risk community families (e.g. Cicchetti, Rogosch, & Toth, 2006). Maternal history of parentification and child externalizing symptoms were collected through mother's self-reports, and maternal warm responsiveness was coded from observations of mother-child interactions.

The subsample utilized in the present study consisted of 374 mother-child dyads who participated in the study through the 36 month assessment. 49% (N=184) of the sample consisted of mother-daughter dyads, and 51% (N=190) of the sample consisted of mother-son dyads. At the prenatal assessment, parturient women ranged in age from 14.72–36.02 years ($M=21.47$, $SD=5.32$). 56% of the women had completed high school. 59.3% of the women were single; however, 84% of the women were in contact with the baby's father. 62.3% of the sample was African American, 19.8% Caucasian, and 16.1% Hispanic. Annual

incomes were estimated from mother's endorsements of a range of possible monthly income when the child was 12 months old. The mean annual income was \$18,969.98.

Measures

Filial Responsibility Scale, Adult Version (FRS; Jurkovic, Thirkield, & Morrell, 2001)—The FRS is a retrospective report measure of parentification in the adult's relationship with their mother during the individual's childhood. The FRS has scales that assess instrumental and emotional caregiving roles. Furthermore, an "unfairness" scale assesses the degree to which the individual felt that caregiving roles were unsupported in order to measure parentification consistent with theory (Jurkovic, 1997). Therefore, a total score of parentification was calculated by summing these three subscales, with high scores indicative of destructive parentification. Parentification data were collected at 36 months. The FRS demonstrated good internal consistency in the present sample ($\alpha = .92$).

Maternal Observed Parenting Behavior (Landry et al., 1997)—Naturalistic, in-home observations of mother-child interactions were conducted during home visits when the child was 18 months old. Mothers were instructed to interact normally with their child for 20 minutes and to ignore the researcher. After a 2-minute warm-up period, the mother-child dyad was observed for four 5-minute periods. Between observation intervals, interviewers recorded ratings of maternal behavior with a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating more positive behavior. Observational ratings of maternal contingent responsiveness (e.g. sensitivity to affective cues, sensitivity and contingency to child's cues, acceptance of and prompt response to child's need and interests, appropriate pace for the infant's abilities, and support of child's need for exploration and independence) and warm sensitivity (e.g. positive affect and tone of voice, display of physical affection, praise and encouragement, and avoidance of negative comments about the child) were based on a coding schema developed by Landry and colleagues (Landry et al., 1997; Landry et al., 2006; Guttentag et al., 2006). Ratings are an effective mean of assessing dispositional parenting that permeates mother-child interactions (Bakeman & Brown, 1980). Prior to conducting observations, interviewers at all sites were trained to 80% reliability with a master coder during videotaped and in vivo observations with another sample. Reliability checks were performed at each site on an annual basis to ensure that reliability remained above 80%. Previous studies of the original coding scheme found an internal consistency coefficient of .81 for maternal variables (Hammond, Landry, Swank, & Smith, 2000). Similarly, in the current sample, ratings from the four observation intervals were highly inter-correlated for each dimension (contingent responsiveness $\alpha = .89$ and warm sensitivity $\alpha = .88$) and, therefore, were averaged to obtain single scores of maternal contingent responsiveness and warm sensitivity consistent with the method outlined by Landry and colleagues (1997). Scores for these two dimensions of parenting were then averaged to create the broad dimension of parenting, maternal warm responsiveness (Landry et al., 1997; Landry et al., 2001; Steelman et al., 2002).

The child's ability to regulate their behavior (e.g. ability to sustain attention, adjust to change, tolerance of frustration, not easily overwhelmed by negative affect) was also coded during the observations of mother-child interactions. Again, regulation ratings from the four observation intervals were highly inter-correlated for each dimension in this sample ($\alpha = .72$) and, therefore, averaged to create a single score. Child regulation was covaried in the present study.

Infant-Toddler Social and Emotional Assessment (ITSEA; Carter & Briggs-Gowan, 1993)—The ITSEA is a parent-report measure of child social-emotional problem behaviors and competencies that includes a scale measuring externalizing behavior, which is

conceptualized as aggression, defiance, negative emotional reactivity, and high activity. The ITSEA has demonstrated good validity and good test-retest reliability (Briggs-Gowan & Carter, 1998). Furthermore, maternal reports of child social-emotional problem behaviors and competencies on the ITSEA have demonstrated good validity when compared with laboratory observational ratings, thus demonstrating that scores on the ITSEA do not simply represent maternal biases associated with maternal perceptions (Carter, Little, Briggs-Gowan, & Kogan, 1999). Child externalizing data were collected with the ITSEA when the child was 36 months of age.

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ; Bernstein & Fink, 1998)—The CTQ is a 28-item retrospective self-report questionnaire that assesses childhood maltreatment. The subscales computed from CTQ are appropriate for both nonclinical and clinical populations and have been shown to have good reliability and strong construct and external validity (Bernstein & Fink, 1998). For example, scores on the CTQ have been found to be significantly correlated with trauma ratings from child welfare records, reports of family members, and clinician ratings (Bernstein, Ahluvalia, Pogge, & Handelsman, 1997; Bernstein et al., 2003). At the 6-month assessment, mothers completed the CTQ about their own child abuse history. Maternal history of childhood abuse was determined by summing the severity classifications scores for physical abuse and sexual abuse. Maternal abuse history was covaried in the present study.

Results

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of all relevant variables are presented in Table 1. Given the large range of maternal age in this sample and that maternal age under 21 years has been demonstrated to be a risk factor for poor quality parenting (Dixon, Browne, & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2005), maternal age was covaried in all analyses. As stated above, observed child regulation coded during the observations of mother-child interaction at 18 months was covaried in all analyses to ensure that maternal warm responsiveness was not an artifact of the child's behavior during the mother-child interaction observations and to autoregressively control for externalizing behaviors at 36 months; maternal history of childhood sexual and physical abuse was covaried in all analyses to determine the effects of maternal history of parentification in family of origin above and beyond the expected effects of a history of child abuse. In the present sample, 56% of mothers did not have a history of physical or sexual abuse, 18.2% of mothers had a history of childhood physical abuse but not childhood sexual abuse, 8.6% of mothers had a history of childhood sexual abuse but not childhood physical abuse, and 8.3% of mothers had a history of both childhood physical abuse and childhood sexual abuse.

Substantive analyses were conducted in Mplus (Mplus version 5.21; Muthen & Muthen, 1998–2009) using full information maximum likelihood estimation to handle missing data in cases in which data were missing due to lack of participation at a wave data collection or failure to complete a relevant measure. We hypothesized that maternal history of destructive parentification is associated with child externalizing behaviors at 36 months of age and that this relationship exists as an indirect effect through maternal warm responsiveness when the child was 18 months of age. To examine these hypotheses, we implemented the nonparametric, bias-corrected bootstrap method recommended by Fritz and MacKinnon (2007) and MacKinnon, Lockwood, and Williams (2004) with 1,000 re-samples to construct bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence intervals around the product coefficient of the indirect effect of maternal history of parentification via the hypothesized mediator of maternal warm responsiveness on child externalizing behavior. Tests of model fit indicated that the model was saturated. Maternal history of destructive parentification was related to decreased maternal contingent responsiveness at 18 months, $B = -.01$, $p < .01$, which was, in

turn, related to higher levels of child externalizing problems at 36 months, $B = -2.15$, $p < .05$. The direct effect was not significant ($B = .03$, $p = .52$); however, the indirect effect was estimated to lie between .003 and .06 with 95% confidence, suggesting an indirect effect that was significantly different from zero at $p < .05$.

Next, we tested our hypothesis that the indirect effect of maternal history of parentification on child externalizing behavior through maternal contingent responsiveness would be moderated by child gender, again implementing a nonparametric, bias-corrected bootstrap method with 1,000 re-samples to construct bias-corrected bootstrap 95% confidence intervals. We examined whether child gender moderated the pathway between maternal history of parentification and maternal contingent responsiveness to result in a conditional indirect effect between maternal history of parentification and child externalizing behavior. Tests of model fit indicated that the model was saturated. However, the interaction between parentification and child gender was not statistically significant ($B = .007$, $p = .24$), indicating that maternal contingent responsiveness did not differentially mediate the effect of maternal history of parentification on child externalizing behavior depending on child gender (See Table 2 and Table 3 for variable means, standard deviations, and correlations of all relevant variables by child gender).

Although 83% of fathers were involved during the prenatal period, by the time the child reached 36 months of age only 67% of mothers reported that the father was still involved in the child's life. A t-test revealed that, in families in which the child's father was not involved in the child's life at 36 months, mothers reported significantly higher levels of parentification in childhood ($M = 80.64$, $SD = 21.63$; $t(292) = 2.27$, $p < .05$) than mothers who reported that their child's father was still involved in the child's life ($M = 74.51$, $SD = 20.56$). To determine whether the mediation results presented above were different in the context of no father involvement when the child was age 36 months than when the father was involved in the child's life, analyses described above were re-run using father involvement as a grouping variable and testing the significance of the difference between the indirect effects in each group. Tests of model fit indicated that the model was saturated. Results indicated that the difference in the indirect effects between groups was not statistically significant ($B = .035$, $p = .33$), meaning that the process of mediation in the families in which the fathers were not involved was not significantly different from the process of mediation in the families in which fathers were involved. Gender moderated mediation was also re-examined using father involvement as a grouping variable and conducting a group comparison test. Multi-group modeling was conducted by comparing a model in which the pathway of the conditional indirect effect was constrained to be equal across groups to a model in which the same pathway was freely estimated across groups. However, a χ^2 difference test indicated that the conditional indirect effect did not differ across groups of father involvement ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 1.466$, $p = .226$).

Discussion

This study sought to understand the relationship between a maternal history of destructive parentification in family of origin and subsequent risk to child development in the next generation and the mediating role of parenting quality. Bias-corrected bootstrap confidence intervals supported the hypothesized indirect effect of maternal history of parentification on child externalizing behavior at 36 months of age, thus providing the first empirical support that maternal history of parentification in family of origin may pose a risk to child development in the next generation. Although parentification theorists have argued that a history of destructive parentification poses a risk to child development in the next generation, the present study is the first to examine the role of maternal history of destructive parentification on parenting quality and child outcomes in the next generation.

Therefore, the present study makes a substantial contribution to the literature on parentification by providing empirical support that maternal history of destructive parentification is associated with risk to child development in the next generation as displayed by increased child externalizing behavior at 36 months.

In addition, the current study provides critical information about this process by identifying one specific mechanism through which maternal history of destructive parentification is associated with child externalizing symptoms. As hypothesized, mothers with a history of destructive parentification in childhood were less likely to respond to their children with warmth, sensitivity and acceptance of their child's affective cues, thus demonstrating less acceptance of the child as a unique individual and offering less support for the child's need for exploration and autonomy development. Although these associations were small, this finding is consistent with theory and research that has demonstrated dysfunctional relational patterns in adult egalitarian relationships following parentification in childhood (Valleau et al., 1995; West & Keller, 1991) and adds to the literature by providing the first support for a similar dysfunctional relational pattern in the mother-child relationship that is characterized by a decreased ability to wait for cues before responding to the child and a lack of warmth and praise. Future research should build upon the present finding by seeking to further understand the parenting behaviors of mothers with a history of destructive parentification in childhood by specifically measuring maternal control and support for children's autonomy development.

Moreover, future research should seek to elucidate the mechanisms through which a maternal history of parentification in family of origin may be associated with decreased maternal warm responsiveness. For example, it will be important to examine whether maternal history of parentification leads to decreased maternal warm responsiveness due to a focus on meeting the needs of the mother's parents in her family of origin instead of a focus on meeting the needs of her child as hypothesized by Barnett and Parker (1998), or whether decreased maternal warm responsiveness is due to an expectation that the child will fulfill the mother's unmet needs to be nurtured as theorized by Cotroneo (1986) and Barnett and Parker (1998). This important question regarding developmental pathways between maternal history of destructive parentification and decreased maternal warm responsive parenting behavior with one's own child warrants exploration. Similarly, the mechanisms through which poor maternal responsiveness are associated with child externalizing should be examined in future work. For example, prior research has identified discipline as a mediator of the relationship between maternal warm responsiveness and child social skills (Steelman et al., 2002). In addition, poor maternal warm responsiveness has other negative consequences for children, including poor social skills (Steelman et al., 2002); future research on the impact of maternal parentification history and poor maternal responsiveness should explore other potential consequences to child development.

Results surrounding our third hypothesis indicated that the indirect effect of maternal history of destructive parentification in family of origin on child externalizing behavior at 36 months of age through poor maternal contingent responsiveness when the child is 18 months of age does not differ for mother-daughter dyads compared to mother-son dyads. Although this finding was unexpected considering the findings of Macfie, McElwain, et al. (2005) and Sroufe and Ward (1980) on the differential impact of parentification by child gender in the intergenerational transmission of boundary dissolution, we offer three possible explanations and suggestions for future work. First, Sroufe and Ward (1980) examined seductive behavior, a key aspect of the spousification dimension of boundary dissolution but not parentification. It is possible that some dimensions of boundary dissolution are differentially impacted by parent-child gender pairing whereas other dimensions, such as parentification, are not. More work examining destructive parentification and parentification's associated

behaviors and broader dimensions of dysfunctional familial boundaries (Kerig, 2005) must be conducted in order to address this issue. Second, it is important to note that when Sroufe and Ward (1980) reported that seductive behavior was more common among mother-son than mother-daughter dyads, it was also noted that mothers who engaged in this behavior were more likely to have been parentified in their relationships with their fathers, specifically. In the current study, mothers' parentification in the family of origin was broad, applying to her childhood role with either or both parents. Future research should ask mothers to report separately on their relationship with their fathers and on their relationship with their mothers as gender differences may exist based on parent gender in the mother's family of origin, rather than on her child's gender.

Third, the extant literature demonstrating a differential impact of boundary dissolution by child gender has focused on the process of engaging children in inappropriate caregiving roles and not on the consequences of having been engaged in a parentified role in one's family of origin. It is possible that the conditions under which children become engaged in parentified roles are differentially influenced by parent-child gender pairing but that the consequences associated with having been engaged in a parentified role in family of origin are pervasive and not dependent upon gender pairing. Future research should address these explanations by examining the processes of parenting quality and child outcomes in the context of maternal history of destructive parentification with different sex siblings of the same mother. Examination of father-daughter and father-son dyads in addition to mother-daughter and mother-son dyads would also be useful in addressing these questions.

Our examination of father involvement demonstrated that mothers who reported that their child's father was not involved in their child's life at 36 months of age also reported significantly higher levels of parentification in their families of origin compared to mothers who reported that the child's father was involved when the child was 36 months of age. This lends support to the idea that a history of destructive parentification is associated with short-lived romantic relationships (Fullinwider-Bush & Jacobvitz, 2004); however, given that maternal parentification history was measured at 36 months in this sample, the direction of effects remains unclear. Furthermore, we did not examine the mother's relationship history and doing so in more depth would be necessary to draw conclusions about the associations between maternal parentification history and an individual's romantic relationships in adulthood. Interestingly, Cox and colleagues (1985) found that marital competence did not explain variance in the relationship between first-time mother's histories of maternal intrusive behavior in their family of origin and their subsequent early parenting. Clearly, more research is warranted specific to maternal history of parentification.

We hypothesized that the relationships between maternal history of parentification, maternal warm responsiveness, and child externalizing behavior would be stronger when there was no father involvement when the child was 36 months of age than when the father was involved in the child's life; however, our analyses failed to detect differences between the two groups. However, the current study did not examine the course or quality of father involvement in the child's life and how these factors might impact child development; these are both important directions for future research. In the broader parenting literature, an absent father has been associated with negative child outcomes (e.g., McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). A more thorough examination of father involvement may demonstrate that father involvement may provide an important buffer in the negative sequelae associated with maternal history of destructive parentification. Additionally, the father's own history of parentification may also influence the father's quality of parenting and influence child development. This also remains an important avenue for consideration in future work.

Although advancing the literature, the present study is not without limitations. First, although we controlled for the effects of maternal history of childhood physical and sexual abuse, there are likely other variables that confound the intergenerational transmission of poor parenting behaviors. Other variables relating to maternal family history, such as exposure to domestic violence, or other coercive family interaction patterns, may be important for consideration in future research. Research also suggests that there is a genetic component to parenting (Plomin, Reiss, Hetherington, & Howe, 1994), and intergenerational studies of negative experiences in the parent's childhood that impact one's parenting and child outcomes in subsequent generations typically fail to account for the genetic and physiological similarities between generations (Serbin & Karp, 2003); the present study is also limited in this way.

Second, the FRS was administered during the 36 month data collection and not during the prenatal assessment. Belsky (1980) suggested that the experience of parenting may influence the way one interprets the parenting they received in childhood. However, given the retrospective nature of this measure it is unlikely that reports of parentification in childhood would change over the course of adulthood. Furthermore, parentification theory argues that parentification is a stable relationship disturbance in the family system (Macfie, Houts, et al., 2005), and empirical work examining parentification during multiple points in childhood has demonstrated stability of this parent-child dynamic (Peris, Goeke-Morey, Cummings, & Emery, 2008; Shaffer & Egeland, 2011). Nevertheless, future prospective studies should measure parentification during the prenatal period in order to ensure that the experience of parenthood does not change adults' reflections on their own childhood. Third, the present study did not control for socioeconomic status because income data were rough estimates. Future studies should seek to consider the influence of socioeconomic status by obtaining more precise measurements of income and other variables related to socioeconomic status. Fourth, although research on parentification has been conducted with comparable samples (e.g., Macfie et al., 2008), the conclusions drawn in the present study are somewhat limited in their generalizability given the very high-risk nature of this sample. Thus, now that these associations have been found in a high-risk sample, future research should consider a broader sample. Finally, as with any correlational study, there may be other important variables to consider in subsequent work. For example, maternal history of parentification and subsequent child externalizing behaviors may be mediated not only by warm responsiveness, but also by other variables such as the amount of time spent in direct interaction with the child.

Future work would also benefit from continued analysis of child development beyond 36 months of age in order to better understand the risk associated with maternal history of destructive parentification in family of origin. There is some evidence that child externalizing is associated with a lack of maternal warm responsiveness in infancy extends into early childhood (Wakschlag & Hans, 1999); however, this has not been examined in the context of parentification. In addition, other dimensions of child outcomes have yet to be examined. Furthermore, future research should seek to identify risk factors that moderate the relationship between maternal history of destructive parentification in family of origin and child adjustment problems. For example, the mother's perception of unfairness of her parentified role during childhood may moderate the influence of parentification history to subsequent behavior (Kuperminc, Jurkovic, & Casey, 2009). Although both theory and empirical work assert that there is transmission of parenting behaviors across generations, there is a paucity of research identifying variables that moderate this transmission (Belsky et al., 2009), particularly regarding the intergenerational transmission of parentification. In the broader maltreatment literature, empirical work has established that parental history of maltreatment is one of the most salient risk factors for subsequent child maltreatment (Dixon et al., 2005; Kaufman & Zigler, 1987; Pears & Capaldi, 2001) and recent work has identified

variables that moderate the transmission or continuity of child maltreatment across generations (Dixon et al., 2005; Valentino, Nuttall, Comas, Borkowski, & Akai, 2012). Similar work is needed specific to maternal history of parentification and subsequent parenting behaviors, because identification of mother-child dyads most susceptible to the risk of a maternal history of destructive parentification would likely have important implications in terms of early intervention. Additionally, these intervention efforts would best be informed through the identification of protective factors in hopes of buffering those at risk.

The findings of the present study identifying maternal warm responsiveness as a mechanism in the risk process associated with maternal history of destructive parentification in family of origin has significant clinical implications. Identification of modifiable mechanisms through which risk occurs is critical for informing preventative intervention efforts (Cicchetti & Toth, 2006). By understanding the process through which a history of destructive parentification in family of origin may pose risk to poor quality parenting and subsequent child development, interventions can be aimed at improving quality of maternal warm responsiveness in mothers with a history of destructive parentification during the transition to parenthood in order to promote adaptive child development. In fact, past intervention research has documented that maternal contingent responsiveness can be improved through intervention and that doing so indeed facilitates a wide range of positive child outcomes (Landry et al., 2006; Landry, Smith, Swank, & Guttentag, 2008). Therefore, considering these findings, prevention programs should consider targeting parturient women with a history of destructive parentification in family of origin to facilitate the development of maternal warm responsive parenting behavior during the transition to parenthood in order to promote positive child development in the next generation.

Acknowledgments

This research was supported by NICHD grant HD-39456; cosponsor groups include the CDC, NIDA, and the Department of Education, as well as the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (037224).

This work was also made possible by the Centers for the Prevention of Child Neglect; senior members of the Centers for the Prevention of Child Neglect include John Borkowski, Judy Carta, Bette Keltner, Lorraine Klerman, Craig Ramey, Sharon Ramey, and Steve Warren. The authors also wish to acknowledge Jennifer Burke Lefever for her assistance with the dataset.

The authors wish to thank the families who generously participated in this research.

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Maternal Parentification	—					
2. Maternal Warm Responsiveness	-.198**	—				
3. Child Externalizing	.189*	-.279**	—			
4. Maternal Age	-.293**	.304**	-.170*	—		
5. Child Regulation	.009	.245**	-.156*	.130*	—	
6. Maternal Abuse History	.283**	-.110	.193**	.002	.066	—
Mean	76.26	3.57	54.61	21.47	4.50	0.88
<i>SD</i>	21.00	1.11	12.49	5.32	0.61	1.41

*
p<.05,**
p<.01

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study Variables in Mother-Daughter Sample

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Maternal Parentification	—					
2. Maternal Warm Responsiveness	-.139	—				
3. Child Externalizing	.154	-.311**	—			
4. Maternal Age	-.203*	.276**	-.205*	—		
5. Child Regulation	-.014	.268**	-.081	.107	—	
6. Maternal Abuse History	.247**	-.018	.156	.052	-.020	—
Mean	77.10	3.76	53.18	21.95	4.62	0.96
<i>SD</i>	20.55	1.02	9.90	5.44	0.57	1.42

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Among Study Variables in Mother-Son Sample

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Maternal Parentification	—					
2. Maternal Warm Responsiveness	-.257**	—				
3. Child Externalizing	.224	-.256*	—			
4. Maternal Age	-.390**	.309**	-.142	—		
5. Child Regulation	.030	.024	.121	.136	—	
6. Maternal Abuse History	.318**	-.219*	.231*	-.058	.123	—
Mean	75.38	3.39	55.88	21.01	4.40	0.81
SD	21.50	1.17	14.33	5.18	0.63	1.40

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$