Community stress exposure:
Youth externalizing behavior and parenting in cultural context

Ann T. Skinner

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Department of Psychology
University of Gothenburg
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With gratitude to my colleagues in the Parenting Across Cultures work group
Abstract


The aim of this thesis was to examine the process by which families respond to community-wide stressors in different cultural contexts. Each quantitative study within this thesis investigated the role of parenting behaviors and aspects of the co-parent relationship and/or the parent-child relationship that may attenuate negative effects of exposure to stressful events across cultures and time. Using a sample of 1,293 ten-year-olds and their parents in 9 countries, Study I examined how harsh parenting mediated and parental monitoring moderated parent and child perceptions of neighborhood danger and child aggression. Although perceptions of neighborhood danger and child aggression varied between countries, both parent and child reports revealed associations between danger perceptions and aggression. Using child reports, harsh parenting mediated the relation between danger and aggression across all sites, but parent reports yielded varied relations across countries. Parental monitoring did not moderate the association between perceived danger and aggression, but also did not account for child disclosure in measuring parental monitoring. Study II of 100 Kenyan mothers and their 8-10 year old children provided a more in-depth look at violence exposure and parenting behavior over 3 years. In an acute period of intense political violence following a disputed national election, mothers rated mother and child violence exposure directly attributable to the acute sectarian violence. At 3 annual time points, mothers also completed a measure of childrearing violence. At each time point, children reported their own externalizing behavior. Exposure to short-term post-election violence was related to child externalizing behavior more than 1 year after relative calm had been restored in the community. Transactional associations were also found between child externalizing behavior and childrearing violence across 3 years. Study III included two samples of Mexican immigrant families in the United States who were interviewed about parent-child interactions and parents’ psychological acculturation. In both samples, when fathers reported a more bicultural orientation, both mothers and fathers were warmer, less aversive, and less withdrawn with their children. Study IV examined the degree to which parents supported one another in coping with stressors (dyadic coping). In 4 countries, mothers, fathers, and adolescents from 472 families were interviewed across 3 years when adolescents were, on average, 13-, 14-, and 15-years old. Maternal dyadic coping indirectly predicted child externalizing behavior from age 13 to 15, through changes in maternal warmth. Together, these 4 studies show that across time, cultures, and developmental stages, children’s externalizing behavior is predicted by experiences with community-wide stressors and related changes in parenting; co-parent or parent-child relationships may buffer or exacerbate the relation between stress exposure and maladaptive behavior in children and adolescents.

Key words: parenting; community stress; externalizing behavior; dyadic coping; culture
Sammanfattning på svenska
(Swedish summary)


Avhandlingens övergripande syfte är att undersöka den process genom vilken familjer svarar på den stress som uppstår inom en vidare samhällelig eller kulturell kontext. Studierna som avhandlingen består av har haft som specifikt mål att bidra till förståelsen för vilken betydelse föräldrars beteenden, förhållandet mellan föräldernas och föräldrabarnrelationen, har för att motverka
aggressiva och externaliserande beteenden hos barn relaterade till exponering av stressande händelser, i olika kulturer och under olika tidsperioder.


Studie I baseras på ett urval av 1293 tioåriga barn samt deras mödrar och fäder, i nio länder, och har som syfte att undersöka sambandet mellan att bo och leva i en farlig stadsdel och barns uttryck för aggression. Ytterligare forskningsfrågor söker svar på huruvida ett eventuellt samband mellan fara och aggression modereras av tillsyn från föräldrarna och medieras av sträng
uppfostran. För att motverka en rapporteringsbias har både föräldrarnas och barnens upplevelse av stadsdelen och barns aggression beaktats.

När en familj bor i en stadsdel som uppfattas som farlig (till exempel ”många av barnen i min stadsdel hamnar i trubbel”, ”det finns massor av droger och gång i min stadsdel”) kan ett sätt att reagera för föräldrar vara att i högre utsträckning än annars försöka ta reda på hur barnen tillbringer sin tid samt sätta gränser för aktiviteter, så att barnen förblir säkra. Föräldrars ansträngningar för att skaffa sig kunskap och sätta gränser kan då ha en skyddande effekt på sambandet mellan uppfattad fara och barns aggression (Bendezú et al., 2018). Ett annat sätt för föräldrar att reagera på fara i sina bostadsområden är genom en sträng uppfostran, med exempelvis skrik och slag (Lansford & Dodge, 2008)

Även om resultaten visade på variation mellan länderna, vad gäller uppfattningen av fara i stadsdelen och barns aggression, fanns ett samband mellan fara och aggression i samtliga nio länder vid användning av uppgifter från mödrar och fäder, och i fem länder vid användning av uppgifter från barn. Tillsyn från föräldrarna modererade inte sambandet mellan fara och aggression, och en strängare uppfostran var inkonsistent med det indirekta sambandet, mellan fara i stadsdelen och barns aggression, för samtliga länder och uppgiftsämnen. Studien ger belägg för att det, oavsett kultur, finns ett samband mellan aggression hos barn och den upplevda faranivån i miljön utanför hemmet, samt att betydelsen av föräldrars beteende för att moderera eller mediera detta samband inte är entydig.

Genom en utvidgning av det tvärsektionella arbetet i studie I, ger studie II en mer djupgående bild av våldsexponering och föräldrabeteende över tid. Studien genomfördes efter en tid av intensivt politiskt våld i Kenya, i samband med ett omstritt presidentval, och omfattade data från 100 mödrar och deras barn i åldrarna 8–10 år under en treårsperiod. Till skillnad från många andra studier av sekteristiskt våld, där data samlats in i områden där konflikter har
pågått i åratal, var det sekteristiska våldet i Kenya vid denna tid mycket kortvarigare. Det mest intensiva våldet pågick under några veckors tid, tills en överenskommelse om maktdelning medförde att de påverkade samhällsgrupperna återgick till en relativt lugn period. Mödrar och barn i denna studie hade erfarenheter av våldshandlingar, både som offer och som vittnen till våld. Exempelvis hade 16 procent av mödrarna i studien blivit beskjutna, och nästan alla barn i undersökningen hade hört skottlossning under den våldsammaste perioden efter valet. Vid var och en av tre årliga tidpunkter fick mödrarna fylla i en skattning av våld i samband med barnuppofostran, och barnen rapporterade egna externaliserande beteenden under samma period. Även om resultaten inte ger stöd för hypotesen, att mödrarnas exponering för våld skulle vara förknippad med ökat våld inom barnuppofostran, kunde studien slå fast att våld inom barnuppofostran vid åtta års ålder predicerar externaliserade beteenden hos barnet vid nio års ålder, vilket i sin tur predicerade våld inom barnuppofostran vid tio års ålder. Vi fann också att barnets exponering för våld efter valet var förknippad med en ökning av externaliserade beteenden hos barnet, mer än ett år senare, efter det att våldet hade avtagit. Detta samband, mellan en akut situation av sekteristiskt våld och barns anpassning över tid, bidrar till förståelsen av att våldet inte behöver vara genomgripande eller pågående för att kunna störa utvecklingsprocesser och påverka barns anpassning.

Studie I och II ger exempel på hur barns och föräldrars känsla av trygghet och säkerhet i sitt samhälle kan påverka barns anpassning, i synnerhet vad gäller aggression och andra beteenden. Likväl kan känslor av otrygghet i samhället förekomma också i situationer som inte behöver inbegripa våld. Ackulturationsstres är ännu en stressor som påverkar familjer, både direkt och indirekt, genom andra familjemedlemmar. I studie III har två urval av mexikanska invandrarfamiljer i USA blivit intervjuade om föräldrabarn-interaktioner och psykologisk ackulturation (känslor av samhörighet och
trivsel i en viss kultur). Resultaten från ett urval av småbarn samt ett med barn i yngre skolålder, vilka båda innefattade barns egna uppgifter om föräldrarnas värme, var båda anmärkningsvärt lika. För båda urvalen gällde att, när fäderna uppgav en mer bikulturell orientering, var mödrar såväl som fäder varmare, och mindre tillbakadragna tillsammans med sina barn. En genomsnittspoäng för psykologisk ackulturation på 5 indikerade anmärkningsvärt nog likvärdiga trivselnivåer, både inom en spansk- och engelskspråkig samhällsgrupp, medan den genomsnittliga ackulturationspoängen var 2,76 hos småbarn respektive 3,30 hos barn i de tidiga skolåren. Även om dessa poäng är starkt orienterade mot fädernas ursprungskultur, antyder de ändå att bibehållna band till ursprungskulturen kan vara till nytta för en själv, för barnets andra förälder och för barnen, samtidigt som känslan av välbefinnande ökar när man interagerar med och lär känna en ny samhällsgrupp. Familjesystemteorin ger ett ramverk för förståelsen av hur en viss minskning av den psykologiska belastningen från stress på samhällsnivå – alltså belastningen av att interageras in i ett obekant samhälle – kan komma till nytta för flera familjemedlemmar.

Samhällsomfattande stress kan medföra ekonomiska chocker, förändringar i personlig säkerhet, känslor av välbefinnande, tillgång till medicinsk vård samt förändringar av rutiner, utbildning, roller på arbetsplatsen samt förväntningar inom familjen. En förståelse för föräldrarnas hantering av dylik stress är därför väsentlig för förståelsen av stressens påverkan på familjesystemet. Föräldrar har stort inflytande på barnens anpassning, särskilt i våldsamma eller stressande miljöer, eftersom barnen vänder sig till föräldrarna för emotionellt stöd i hur de ska reagera på skrämmande eller osäkra händelser. Studie IV undersöker hur föräldrar ger varandra stöd i att hantera stress, kanske redan innan föräldrabeteendet har påverkats. I fyra länder, Kenya, Kina, Sverige och Thailand, intervjuades mödrar, fäder och ungdomar från 472 familjer i tre års tid, då ungdomarna var i genomsnitt 13, 14 och 15 år gamla. Mödrar och fäder till trettonåriga barn tillfrågades om sitt
stöd till varandra och om sin uppfattning av gemensam problemlösning och stresshantering, vilket mynnade ut i en poäng avseende dyadisk coping. Moderlig och faderlig värme studerades vid 14 års ålder och ungdomars externaliserande beteende studerades vid 15 års ålder. I samtliga fyra länder, predicerade starkare dyadisk coping, enligt uppgift från mödrar och fäder, mer värme i föräldraskapet, med undantag för fäder i Kenya. Mer värme i mödrarnas föräldraskap predicerade dessutom lägre nivåer av externaliserande beteende hos barnet. Dyadisk coping hos modern, när barnet var 13 år, predicerade också indirekt, via moderns värme uppmätt när barnet var 14 år, det externaliserande beteendet hos barnet två år senare. Även om föräldrabarnförhållandet förändras hastigt under ungdomstiden antyder dessa resultat att ungdomars upplevelse av trygghet i förhållande till sina föräldrar, liksom trygghet i föräldrarnas inbördes förhållande, har betydelse för barnets anpassning.

Genom ett processorienterat angreppssätt, som omfattar vitt skilda kulturella grupper, undersöker denna avhandling de sätt på vilka föräldrar och barn reagerar på stressande faktorer som förekommer bortom individnivån under barndomen och ungdomstiden, särskilt med avseende på utveckling av aggression och andra externaliserande beteenden. Den undersöker i synnerhet föräldrars och barns reaktioner på bo och leva i farliga stadsdelar, intensivt, akut sekteristiskt våld samt ackulturationsstress. Vidare undersöks hur dyadisk coping hos föräldrar, som ett gensvar på stress, indirekt kan förutsäga externaliserande beteende hos barn.

Fyra teman är genomgående för avhandlingens fyra studier. För det första: I familjer som påverkas av samhällsomfattande stress finns interaktionseffekter föräldrarna emellan och mellan föräldrar och barn, mellan stressfaktorer och beteenden, för både föräldrar och barn. Följaktligen är det inte nog att endast undersöka barneffekter som respons på stress, för att förstå sambandet mellan exponering för våld eller ackulturationsstress och barns

Osäkerhet och oförutsägbarhet är förknippade med de familjer som lever under akuta eller kroniska riskförhållanden. Osäkerheten gör det ännu viktigare att offentliga myndigheter utövar ett ständigt inflytande, med beredskap att ge stöd till familjer i deras strävan att ordna säkra och vårdande miljöer för sina barn. När oförutsägbara situationer förekommer omkring dem, vänder sig barnen till sina föräldrar för stöd och vägledning. Först och främst måste föräldrarna emellertid vara kapabla att ge ett sådant stöd och ha den förmåga och kunskap som krävs för att ge näring åt föräldrabarnrelationen. Ett steg i denna process är att föräldrarna inte ska känna att de möter livets motgångar på egen hand, anningen i relation till den andre förälder eller i sin upplevelse av emotionell och fysisk säkerhet i samhället. Samhällets gensvar på stressfaktorer på samhällsnivå, genom traumainformerad vård och omfattande familjestöd, kan lindra föräldrarnas känsla av isolering och bygga upp barnens motståndskraft, vilket kan ha en positiv inverkan på samhällsgrupper under många år framöver.
List of publications

This thesis consists of a summary and the following four papers, referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:


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Ann Tysiak Skinner
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Introduction

Around the world, parents strive to keep their children safe from harm. Despite parents’ best efforts, however, and sometimes at the hands of their parents, children are exposed to events that exceed their abilities to cope effectively. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) such as suffering physical abuse, experiencing neglect, having an incarcerated parent, and being exposed to domestic violence are associated with numerous and cumulative negative biological, epigenetic, psychological, and psychosocial changes that may endure throughout childhood and adolescence, often into adulthood (Anda et al., 2006; Merrick et al., 2017).

Beyond individually experienced trauma, however, children also experience exposure effects from stressors that impact entire communities. The most common examples of such traumas are natural disasters—hurricanes/typhoons, floods, and the like. The disaster literature follows a somewhat predictable path: Because these events are rarely possible to predict, data collection either occurs serendipitously as part of an already in-process longitudinal study, or it is conducted as quickly as possible in the weeks following the disaster. Prior research efforts often emphasize documenting associations between the event and negative outcomes in children and families. When possible, further cross-sectional and longitudinal research examines mediators and moderators of such exposure, but comparatively little research is successful in documenting effective interventions for attenuating maladaptive behavior following exposure to disasters or other similar events.

Community-wide stressors can take many forms, however, and when faced with stressful events, parents must navigate many options for coping both in the inter-parent and parent-child relationship. Millions of children, for example, live in dangerous communities due to ongoing or acute episodes of both
sectarian and non-sectarian violence. Growing migration around the world means that increasing numbers of families in the last two decades are immigrants in new and unfamiliar cultures, often to escape such threats to personal safety and well-being. Childhood and adolescent exposure to community-wide stressors—and the way in which parents cope with stress—impact parent behavior, parent-child relationships, and child adjustment. Although stressful experiences of violence and immigration adjustment are similar in many ways to families’ experiences during natural disasters, they are not identical, necessitating the need for more stressor-specific research. The first three studies in this thesis examine three examples of community-wide stressors: perceptions of living in a dangerous neighborhood, exposure to acute sectarian violence, and acculturative stress. These stressful experiences can shape parent behavior and the parent-child relationship, ultimately impacting children across developmental time points. Thus, parenting is examined in Studies I and II as a mediator and moderator of the relation between stressful events and child adjustment. In Study III, aspects of the parent-child relationship (parental warmth and neglect, e.g.) are examined as a primary outcome because of the well-established link between parental warmth and neglect and child adjustment. Further, little is known cross-nationally about how pathways to resilience may be strengthened within a co-parenting relationship characterized by mutual support and joint problem-solving; Study IV leverages the lessons learned in the first three studies about the relations between exposure to community-level stressful events and parenting, and examines the indirect relation between inter-parental coping and child adjustment.

Absent in much of the literature on exposure to community-wide stressors is how the associations among stressors, parenting, and child adjustment may be similar or different across cultures. This thesis is an attempt to fill that gap.

Not all stress is bad for children or parents. Exposure to challenges can build resilience (Masten & Narayan, 2012) and self-efficacy for handling
future difficulties, but only if an individual is armed with the skills, resources, and support to overcome adversity (Rosanbalm et al., 2020). When the stressor exceeds the capacity of an individual, a family, or a community to cope, difficulties emerge across a wide range of functioning, often encompassing academic, physical, emotional, and interpersonal problems. Two related areas that may help children weather stress are investigated in this thesis: parenting (including both parenting behavior and parent-child interactions) and parental stress support (dyadic coping). Because the stressors discussed occur within the context of culture, and because parenting is also culturally determined (Bornstein & Bohr, 2011), the investigations in this thesis are all part of cross-national work in parenting, child development, and young adult competence. Two of the four studies include work from multiple countries; Study I includes families in nine countries, and Study IV includes families in four countries. Studies II (Luo families in Kenya) and III (Families with parents of Mexican origin living in the United States) include families from understudied and minoritized groups. Their inclusion in this thesis highlights the need to examine family functioning and stressful events in groups outside majority populations to understand multiple perspectives of family functioning and a broader representation of the world’s population.

In the following sections, the aim of the thesis is presented, followed by an overview of three related theoretical approaches, providing a foundation for the investigations to come. Next, I review the literature regarding community and sectarian violence, acculturative stress, and dyadic coping. I then review the empirical evidence for examining the impact of community stressors and coping in cultural context with a specific focus on parenting and child adjustment. Next, I summarize the study design of the two projects from which each of the four studies is based and a summary of each of the four studies. Finally, I discuss the findings across all four investigations, including methodological considerations, limitations, and policy implications.
This thesis pairs theoretical knowledge about families and how family members respond to stress with child development principles. For example, in Study I, in addition to parent reports, children 10 years old on average also provided their perspective of the danger present in their neighborhood, self-reports of their own aggressive behavior, and reports about parental monitoring. Bronfenbrenner’s Bioecological Systems Theory (1979; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998) suggests that children both interpret and react to their surroundings; such reactions may result in behaviors and interactions that either promote resilience or contribute to maladjustment. At age 10, children are developing a greater ability to navigate peer relationships, control their emotions, and interpret emotional cues from others, making them particularly vulnerable to feelings of insecurity in their environment. Study IV followed families from early to middle adolescence, a time when youth are gaining increasing autonomy from parents and relying more on peer groups for acceptance and belonging. Even so, Study IV found that adolescents are still vulnerable to subtle changes in the inter-parent and parent-child relationship during times of stress in ways that impact youth aggression and delinquency. A developmental framework within each study provides not only the background for developing hypotheses and explaining results, but also deepens our understanding of parent-child relationships during times of stress.

Although not intended to be an overview of the broad scope of knowledge around all individual, familial, and community stressors, the research reviewed and conducted as part of this thesis represents forms of conflict and stress experienced by many families in diverse contexts around the world, and highlights places where both the parent-child and co-parent relationship can strengthen families, particularly with regard to slowing the development of externalizing behavior in children and adolescents. The included investigations may also inform translational research in the development of programs and policies to enhance child, family, and community resilience in the face of such
stressors. Figure 1, below, illustrates the pathway followed by each study in the thesis.

**Figure 1  Research Pathway**

- **STUDY I**
  - Neighborhood danger perceptions and association with youth aggression
  - Parenting behaviors as mediators and moderators
  - Cross-sectional, across 9 countries

- **STUDY II**
  - Sectarian violence exposure and association with later externalizing behavior
  - Parenting behavior as moderator
  - Single cultural group, across 3 years

- **STUDY III**
  - Acculturative stress and association with parent-child relationship qualities
  - Two developmental time points, single cultural group within another cultural environment

- **STUDY IV**
  - Parental dyadic stress coping and its association with adolescent externalizing behavior, indirectly through parent-child relationship quality

Moving from the associations among stressful events, parenting, and child adjustment to associations among parental coping, parent-child relationship quality, and child adjustment.
General and specific aims

This thesis aims to examine the processes by which families respond to stressors occurring within the larger context of a community or culture. Specifically, each of the four studies contributes to understanding the role of parenting behaviors and aspects of the co-parent and the parent-child relationships that attenuate the negative effects of families’ exposure to stressful events.

Specific aims include the following:

1. Explore the relation between parents’ and children’s experiences with and perceptions of violence exposure and children’s aggression across multiple countries (Study I) and across time (Study II).
2. Examine the mediating (Study I) and moderating (Study II) role of harsh parenting (Study I) and childrearing violence (Study II) in the association between neighborhood danger or exposure to sectarian violence and child externalizing behavior.
3. Examine how psychological acculturation is related to aspects of the parent-child relationship in early and middle childhood, including examination of cross-parent effects (Study III).
4. Investigate how adolescent externalizing behavior is indirectly predicted by parental stress support (dyadic coping) and related changes in parental warmth across time in multiple countries (Study IV).
A summary of the studies is provided in Table 1.

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<th>Study I</th>
<th>Study II</th>
<th>Study III</th>
<th>Study IV</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Stressor: Perceptions of neighborhood danger</td>
<td>Stressor: Sectarian violence</td>
<td>Stressor: Acculturative stress</td>
<td>Stress reaction: Dyadic coping</td>
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<td>Sample Description</td>
<td>9 countries; mother, father, and child reports</td>
<td>Kenya; mother and child reports</td>
<td>Mexican immigrant families in the United States; parents of pre-school aged children (Sample 1); parents and children, child age 10 (Sample 2)</td>
<td>5 countries; mother, father, and child reports</td>
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<td>mother and youth self-report; mother reports about child</td>
<td>parent and youth self-report; parent reports about child; parent reports about other parent</td>
<td>parent and youth self-report; parent reports about child</td>
</tr>
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<td>Mean Child Age</td>
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<td>8–10</td>
<td>3–5 (Sample 1)</td>
<td>13–15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parenting Variables</td>
<td>parental monitoring; harsh parenting</td>
<td>childrearing violence</td>
<td>parental warmth; aversive parenting</td>
<td>dyadic coping; parental warmth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Outcome</td>
<td>child aggression</td>
<td>child externalizing behavior</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>child externalizing behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic Approach</td>
<td>multigroup path model examining mediation and moderation</td>
<td>structural path model examining longitudinal direct effects and moderation</td>
<td>linear regression</td>
<td>multigroup path model examining indirect effects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 1  Summary of Studies
Theoretical perspectives

Understanding process-oriented approaches is key to understanding how stressful events impact parents and children. To that end, three process-oriented and transactional approaches are presented here to better frame an understanding of how parent behavior and qualities of the parent-child relationship shape child behavior, how child behavior shapes parent behavior, how family members interact with each other and their environment over time, and how family members interact with their broader communities. Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988), and Emotional Security Theory (Davies & Cummings, 1994) are described in the following sections, with specific examples of how these models can be applied to families experiencing violence and other stressful life events occurring at the community level. Although individual studies within this thesis may draw on other theoretical frameworks or perspectives, the three theories presented below highlight the elements common across all four studies.

Bioecological Systems Theory

Bioecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) provides a framework to understand child development from a child-centered perspective. Bronfenbrenner’s original ecological model (1979) with its focus on child development within a child’s natural environment, contrasted with previous theoretical approaches that primarily focused on documenting pathology in individuals, events, or environments, often only at single points in time. Human development occurs as a series of events, interactions, and conditions across five levels: the microsystem (children, their family members, teachers, child care providers, and peers, e.g.); the mesosystem
(interactions between microsystems, like parents and teachers working together); the exosystem (contexts outside of those that the child would be likely to have immediate contact with, but still influence the child, such as parental job loss), the macrosystem (cultural influences, religion, economic policies, war); and the chronosystem (time). Each system is connected by pathways within and between other systems. Interactions between children’s parents such as marital conflict, or conditions in the exosystem, such as community violence may impact children in negative ways. Children are not passive reactors, but rather active agents in their own development. Thus, the relation between child, other agents, and the child’s environment is transactional; child development occurs as a bidirectional process of children interacting with others, their community, and their culture over time, with each influencing the other. Further, different children exposed to the same environment will respond differently, in part because of varying influences such as parents or peers (Darling, 2007). Bronfenbrenner documents patterns of responses by individuals in complex and unique environments with unique resources. In short, trying to understand the developmental process in an individual child isolated from other systems is an impossible task (Darling, 2007).

Bronfenbrenner’s early work and original model later evolved to encompass the impact of individual child characteristics in the developing child. The 1998 model revision (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), with its focus on development over time, gives prominence to proximal processes (parent-child interactions, e.g.). Individual child characteristics (child gender, age, or pubertal status, e.g.) during development are approached agnostically; changes are neither inherently positive or negative but simply must be considered in the pathways of interaction between child and environment, context, and time. Bioecological theory asks the question: In what ways do children respond differently to their environment (Darling, 2007)? The following sections provide two examples, tied to the studies in this thesis, of how the bioecological model
is a fitting framework for understanding the moderating and mediating role of parental behavior on child outcomes.

**Bioecological Model and Parental Monitoring.** Parental monitoring has a complicated relation with child adjustment, depending on which aspect and which developmental period of monitoring is measured (see Lionetti et al., 2019). For example, parental solicitation of information is often a protective factor, helping to reduce risk of maladjustment for children during middle childhood (Laird et al., 2010), but during adolescence, overly solicitous behavior by parents has a negative effect, and is related to more adjustment problems (Kapetanovic et al., 2019). Examining the behaviors of both children and parents is key to understanding the potential moderating influence of monitoring in the relation between risk and adjustment across different developmental periods. Stattin and Kerr (2000) introduced a reconceptualized model of parental monitoring that emphasizes not just the product of parental monitoring—knowledge of a child’s behavior—but also how parents gain that knowledge, whether by parental solicitation or child self-disclosure. The bioecological model provides a process-oriented framework to illustrate how parental monitoring evolves over different developmental periods, and accounts for Bronfenbrenner’s principles of process, person, context and time (see Tudge et al., 2009). In middle and late childhood, children’s parents are typically able to obtain information about their children – including friendships, interests, how they spend their time and money – without a tremendous amount of effort or conflict. As children age into adolescence, however, the parent-child relationship (microsystem) interacts with other microsystems (peers, e.g.) and exosystems (neighborhood, school environments) to create more barriers for parents aiming to acquire information about children’s behaviors. Thus, parents must rely more on a strong parent-child relationship that fosters an adolescent’s disclosure of information, which is associated with more positive adjustment in risky environments (Kapetanovic et al., 2019). Further, parental monitoring
does not impact all families equally and may depend on other contexts. For example, parental monitoring is a stronger predictor of academic achievement in high resourced families than in their economically challenged counterparts (Wang & Sheik-Khalil, 2014).

**Bioecological Model and Immigrant Families.** Another example of how the bioecological model applies to external, community stressors can be seen through the lens of acculturative stress. Immigrant families often face more barriers and parenting demands compared to non-immigrant peers. For example, if immigrant parents are not fluent in the receiving country’s language, enrolling children in and participating in school activities is challenging. Immigrant families also face workplace discrimination that threatens their health, safety, and ability to provide for basic needs, and discrimination in turn predicts parents’ perceptions of more negative child behavior (Gassman-Pines, 2015). Notably, immigrant families are also under more pressure to conform, so healthy functioning of surrounding microsystems (peers, family members) becomes an important support system for promoting positive family functioning (Portes & Zhou, 1993). Despite facing several risk factors and challenges, many immigrant families in the United States often fare better in earlier generations than in later (see Garcia Coll & Marks, 2012) when measured by a host of developmental outcomes, including substance use, academic achievement, teen pregnancy, and juvenile crime. This phenomenon, known as the immigrant paradox (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2012), may be due in part to families’ efforts to maintain cultural traditions and beliefs and may ultimately serve a protective role in buffering the effects of disruptions in the micro- and mesosystems (Paat, 2013).

In summary, recognizing that children are part of a complex web of bidirectional, influential interactions with family members, peers, their community, and their culture over time is a critical part of investigating the impact of community-wide stressors on children and parenting processes.
Family Systems Theory

Although Bioecological Systems Theory provides the framework for illustrating some transactional relations between systems (micro-, meso-, exo-, e.g.), a deeper understanding of how family members operate within the family system is needed to fully realize the impact of stressful events and conflict on parents and children. Family Systems Theory (FST; Bowen, 1978; Cox & Paley, 1997, 2003; Kerr & Bowen, 1988) is rooted in the idea that individuals within families function as connected, interdependent units. Even when the degree of interdependence varies in fact or by perception, interdependence among family members is always there to some degree. In such a connected system, changes in one family member’s behavior or circumstance reciprocally affects others and alters the family dynamic. Further, an individual’s own emotional system is still the impetus for clinical problem development. Eight interlocking concepts comprise Family Systems Theory: triangles, differentiation of self, nuclear family emotional process, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, emotional cutoff, sibling position, and societal emotional process, but two concepts are particularly relevant to the types of stress and conflict examined in this thesis: triangles and nuclear family emotional process.

Family Systems Theory posits that triangles are the most stable basis for the relationship system because, unlike a dyad, a system that includes three individuals can absorb stress and shock more efficiently by shifting tension from one member to another before the system becomes unstable. The entire system falls apart only when the stress becomes exceedingly high. Ironically, however, a three-person system necessarily creates an outsider; even though the outsider role can shift from person to person, the very existence of an outsider—and the potential to become one—creates tension in the family. In the case of immigrant families, for example, a couple’s relationship can be
influenced by one partner’s more rapid acculturation (Chun & Akutsu, 2003), subsequently leading to changes in the relationships between each parent and his/her children.

The second concept in FST that applies most directly to this thesis is the nuclear family emotional process. In illustrating this concept, Bowen (1978) asserts that clinical symptoms develop in families during periods of intense or prolonged stress, and each family member’s adjustment and adaptation is dependent upon several factors, including the nature of the stressor, extended family support, or social network support. During these high-tension times, families can respond in one or more of the following four ways: increased partner conflict, as each partner externalizes his/her anxiety; dysfunction in one marital partner, often preceded by intense pressure from one partner and a lesser role of the other; impairment in children, as one or both parents direct anxiety towards a child; or emotional distance, a result of an attempt to reduce an intense level of anxiety between two family members hastened by the stressor. Limited studies about the relation between parents’ stress management and child adjustment have yielded inconsistent results depending on how stress coping and adjustment are measured (parent vs. child report, e.g.), but suggest children are at lower risk for psychological problems when parents are mutually supportive of one another and actively demonstrate cooperative problem-solving (Zemp et al., 2016). Understanding the process by which stressors influence family functioning through parenting mechanisms is a key focus of this thesis.

**Emotional Security Theory**

A thorough understanding of Family Systems Theory and the Bioecological Systems Theory informs the ways in which we can examine how family members interact with and influence each other and their environment. The
goal of studying families during times of stress, however, is to better inform translational research with the development of prevention programs, interventions, and policies to mitigate potentially maladaptive behavior that follows stressful, traumatic, or negative events. Emotional Security Theory (EST; Davies & Cummings, 1994) provides a theoretical framework, rooted in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982), that helps explain part of the emotional processes by which stressful events within and outside the family can impact child adjustment. Both the inter-parent and parent-child relationship play a role in adaptation (or not) to the stressful event or circumstance. Like Family Systems Theory, EST maintains that emotion is at the heart of interpersonal relationships within a family, and disturbances in these emotional connections—both the emotional attachment and security between a parent and child, and between parents, which children are aware of—form the basis of maladaptive behavior and clinical symptomatology. Beyond interpersonal relationships, emotional security also plays a role in how safe individuals feel in their community during or following a community-wide trauma (Cummings et al., 2011). EST, however, emphasizes a specific focus on the emotional process by which emotional connections are forged and maintained, and allows us to look beyond a simple direct effect between a stressor and an outcome, taking mediating and moderating effects of perceived and observed threats to safety and security into account. EST is applicable across multiple ecological domains including family, school, and community settings (Cummings & Miller-Graff, 2015). Specific examples of cross-context interactions are provided in the sections below.

Within the family, EST provides a basis for understanding how conflict between parents is both directly and indirectly related to child outcomes. Key to understanding EST’s process-oriented model is acknowledging that the relation between parental conflict and child externalizing behavior, for example, goes beyond social learning theory (Bandura, 1978). When parents
disagree, argue, yell, or stonewall (by evading conflict, e.g.), children’s behavior is not fully explained by contending that children are imitating their parents. Rather, multiple cross-sectional and longitudinal studies show that children’s emotional security in the interparental relationship is vital for children to sustain the self-regulatory skills necessary for positive youth adjustment (see Cummings & Miller-Graff, 2015 for overview). For example, in a study of 181 11- and 12-year-old children in the UK, low levels of children’s emotional security about the interparental and parent-child relationship explained the relation between parental conflict and internalizing and externalizing problems even one year later (Harold et al., 2004). Children’s emotional security also plays a mediating role in the relation between exposure to parental conflict and sleep (El-Sheikh et al., 2007), and other physiological responses to stress, such as heart arrhythmias (El-Sheikh & Hinnant, 2011). One possible explanation for such responses as predicted by low emotional security is that children’s resources are over-taxed by insecurity, leaving little energy left for adaptive neuropsychological behavior such as response inhibition, problem solving, attention shifting, and task persistence (Davies, Winter, & Cicchetti, 2006; Posner et al., 2003).

Beyond the family, EST also helps inform our understanding of how community and political violence is related to children’s adjustment. In a study of 300 mothers and their 12-year-old children in Northern Ireland, for example, Cummings, Schermerhorn et al. (2010) applied a social-ecological model to explain the relation between sectarian violence, parental monitoring, child insecurity in the community and interparental relationship, and child adjustment. The authors found that internalizing problems were predicted by lower levels of emotional security about both the marital relationship between the children’s parents, and the external political violence in the community, with each pathway making a unique contribution.
Together, the Bioecological Model, Family Systems Theory, and Emotional Security Theory form a basis for understanding how family relationships are impacted by community-wide stressors, and also reveal the gaps in our understanding of the pathways from stressors to parenting behavior (actions from parents, such as harsh parenting, or parental solicitation), parent-child relationships (parental warmth, e.g.), and child adjustment in cultural context. Specifically, few studies examine possible cross-parent effects, the role of child’s emotional security in the inter-parent relationship and in the community, and examination of the impact of acute sectarian violence. Further, little work has been done in all of these areas in diverse, cross-national context. The four studies in this thesis draw on a sample of families from around the world to inform our understanding of the moderating and mediating pathways from stress exposure to child externalizing behavior while accounting for the influences of culture and dyadic coping.
Community stressors, youth externalizing behaviors, and coping

This thesis explores the individual and familial processes by which community-wide stressors and conflict, in various forms and contexts, are related to parent-child relationship quality, parent behavior, and child externalizing behavior across childhood and adolescence. Stress from just about any source can impact children directly through changes in individual adjustment or indirectly through changes in the inter-parent or parent-child relationship. Even when interpersonal and collective violence does not result in death, exposure to violence has negative outcomes across multiple domains, with effects lingering beyond childhood and adolescence. Because such community-wide stressors can activate economic shocks, changes in personal safety and feelings of well-being, access to medical care, and changes in routines, education, and work roles and expectations, understanding how parents cope with such stressors is also vital to understanding the impact of stress in family systems. The next two sections address two distinct forms of violence – community (non-sectarian) violence, and political violence. Note that throughout this thesis, the terms sectarian violence and political violence are used interchangeably to refer to the same concept. The section following the review of literature on both types of community violence summarizes another community-wide stressor that impacts families, acculturative stress. Although acculturation does not always share the same threat of physical violence as community and sectarian violence, these three stressors share common elements of fear, insecurity, and unpredictability as threats to positive well-being. Further, community violence and threats of interpersonal violence are common experiences in immigrant families (Holleran & Jung, 2005). Following a review of the literature on stressors, I define externalizing
behavior and provide an overview of why it is of concern in the global youth population. Finally, I review the literature on parental dyadic coping and its association with parenting and child adjustment.

Stressors

*Non-sectarian community violence exposure and risk perception.* Exposure to violence of any kind in childhood and adolescence is of international concern across multiple contexts including home, school, and community. Worldwide, nearly 25 percent of children live with a mother who is the victim of intimate partner violence, 75 percent of children between the ages of two and four experience violent discipline from a caregiver on a regular basis, such as shaking, hitting, slapping, and beating, and one-third of students between ages 13 and 15 report experiencing bullying at school (UNICEF, 2017). Although homicide rates have decreased slightly from 2000-2015, one-third of violent deaths among adolescents around the world are attributable to collective violence, most often characterized by war and civil insurrections (UNICEF, 2017). In some areas of the world, interpersonal violence is the leading cause of death among youth aged 15-19 (UNICEF, 2017). A large literature documents both the prevalence and effects of exposure to community violence in childhood and adolescence. Children who are exposed to neighborhood violence fare worse academically (Milam et al., 2010), experience more internalizing symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Butcher et al. 2016), have increased substance use (Bacchini et al., 2011; Fagan et al., 2014), and have higher rates of aggression and antisocial behavior (Bacchini et al., 2011; Butcher et al., 2016) than non-exposed peers. Witnessing violence, without directly experiencing physical harm, is also linked to higher rates of aggression in children (Fleckman et al., 2016), even when controlling for prior levels of child aggression (Gorman-Smith & Tolan,
The association between witnessing violence and adjustment is also moderated by the level of direct violence experienced, such as childrearing violence (Fleckman et al., 2016), such that multiple forms of violence exposure show stronger relations between exposure and adjustment problems. Age as a moderator between violence exposure (whether by victimization, witnessing, or vicarious experience) and child adjustment is not widely understood, with some studies reporting more internalizing behaviors in younger children compared to adolescents, and other studies finding no age effects (see Fowler et al., 2009 for meta-analyses).

Children and adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of violence exposure compared to adults because victimization or threat of harm may impair children’s ability to regulate their emotions or because they feel that the world around them is patently unsafe (Margolin & Gordis, 2004). The primary goal of research concerning the relations among violence exposure, parenting, and child adjustment, however, is ultimately to identify those factors linked to resilience, especially because not all children fare similarly following both acute and chronic exposure to violence. For example, Kaufman and Zigler’s (1987) review of prospective studies of childhood victims of abuse showed that although a history of abuse in childhood increased the subsequent rate of abuse toward children once the child became a parent, many victimized children did not become abusive adults, and the pathway from abuse to abuser is neither direct nor forgone. Similarly, Kitzmann’s et al. (2003) meta-analysis of 118 studies focusing on child witnesses of inter-partner violence found that 63 percent of child witnesses to violence were doing worse than non-witnesses on several outcomes including psychological, social, and academic effects. Conversely, however, 37 percent of children did not show significantly worse adjustment or impairment compared to non-witnesses. While the number of children negatively affected is significant and important, the possibility of resilience following violence exposure means there is work to do in investigating
the pathway from violence exposure to maladaptive behavior in order to better inform the development of effective prevention and intervention tools. One way to better understand who is most impacted by violence exposure, or fear of living in a dangerous community, and through which mechanisms such exposure or perception of violence is related to child adjustment is by examining mediators and moderators of the relation between violence exposure and child adjustment.

Although exposure to community violence has direct effects on children’s social, emotional, and physical development as described above, indirect pathways also account for some of the relation between violence exposure and child adjustment. When mothers are exposed to high levels of community violence, for example, they are more likely to engage in physically aggressive parenting compared to mothers with no such exposure to community violence (Chen & Lee, 2017; Zhang & Anderson, 2010). Chen and Lee’s work, with over 2800 mothers in the United States, showed that the relation between exposure to community violence as a witness—without being personally physically victimized—was related to higher levels of psychological and physical aggression towards children, even when controlling for mothers’ experiences of domestic violence, depression, and substance use. Using data from 186 cultural groups, Lansford and Dodge (2008) found that parents who were living among other forms of violence were also more likely to use corporal punishment on their children. In turn, childrearing violence is consistently related to more child aggression both in the United States (Gershoff, 2002), and in several other countries (Lanford et al., 2005; Mejia et al., 2006). In a study with 9705 Finnish and Danish children, more severe harsh parenting, characterized by childrearing violence behaviors such as hitting, hitting with an object, kicking, and using or threatening to use a knife or a gun, was related to both internalizing and externalizing symptoms in youth (Peltonen, Ellonen et al., 2010).
Taken together, these studies suggest that harsh parenting may also play an indirect role in the relation between exposure to neighborhood danger and child aggression. Social information processing (accuracy encoding social information, hostile attribution biases, aggressive response generation, and evaluations of aggressive responses) also mediates the relation between violence exposure and aggressive behavior, even at low levels of violence exposure (Bradshaw et al., 2009; Crick & Dodge, 1996). In addition to mediating pathways, the relation between violence exposure and aggression also depends on a number of other factors including perceived social support from peers, disengagement (through denial or substance use, e.g.) (Scarpa & Haden, 2006), working memory (Jakubovic & Drabick, 2020), impulsivity, parental monitoring (Low & Espelage, 2014), and harsh parenting (Krenichyn et al., 2001). Despite the long history and rich literature on the direct, indirect, and interactive relations among exposure to violence and child adjustment, longitudinal, cross-national studies of violence-exposed families are rare, and translational research is often limited in scope and applicability. **Study I** in this thesis utilizes mother, father, and child reports of perceived neighborhood danger, measures of parenting behavior (harsh parenting and parental monitoring, e.g.) and child adjustment in nine countries to explore the indirect and interactive pathways between perception of neighborhood danger and child aggression. While not a direct or objective measure of rates of community violence, perceptions of living in a dangerous community are salient markers of risk for physical and emotional insecurity.

*Political and sectarian violence exposure.* Long-standing political and sectarian violence permeates multiple aspects of a society. In 2016, nearly 250 million children were living in conflict-affected countries and areas (United Nations, 2016). In addition to witnessing interpersonal violence, families experience loss of life and destruction of property, their food and supply chains are interrupted, they become separated or displaced – often multiple times –
and their education, commerce, and medical care are disrupted and unpredictable. In the last few decades, researchers have established that exposure to political violence contributes uniquely to maladaptive behavior in children, even when accounting for exposure to other forms of violence in the home, school, and community. Dubow and colleagues (2012), for example, in a three-year study of Palestinian children living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip found that children exhibited post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) at time 3, even when controlling for prior PTSS. Exposure to multiple forms of violence had a cumulative effect, but exposure to sectarian violence made a unique contribution to PTSS.

Understanding what predicts child and adolescent adjustment problems during and following experiences of sectarian violence is important because such understanding informs both preparatory and recovery efforts (Masten, Narayan, et al., 2015). When faced with traumatic events, children respond differently from adults and draw upon different sources of support. Parents may have resources they can employ during recovery that children do not, including both prior exposure to and recovery from stressful events, healthy and successful individual coping mechanisms, and a wider circle of social support available to them compared to children. Exposure to any kind of conflict during childhood is vital to study because such exposure can have a cascading effect on long-term trajectories of child adjustment (Cummings, George, et al., 2012), and can impact multiple domains, including cognitive development, emotion regulation, and interpersonal relationships.

Historically, the literature on sectarian violence focused on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and symptoms (PTSS). Even when the cultural context, duration, and type of exposure varied, children who experienced higher levels of sectarian violence were more likely than low-exposed children to develop PTSD or PTSS, and the literature consistently demonstrated an association
between exposure and PTSD/PTSS in children (Abdeen et al., 2008; Allwood et al., 2002; Dyregrov et al., 2000; Klasen et al., 2010).

As the experiences of political violence around the world are heterogenous, rates of PTSD in sectarian violence-exposed children vary widely from 10-90 percent of exposed youth populations. The extant literature is mixed regarding the impact of duration and proximity to violent events during acute or prolonged episodes of political violence. On one hand, combined with the duration of the exposure, the number and intensity of traumatic events is the most salient predictor of psychological effects on children, particularly when individual exposures accumulate in number (see Shaw, 2003 for overview). However, a meta-analysis of published studies documenting the association between children’s and adolescents’ negative appraisals about the violence and aftermath of political violence and PTSD shows that negative appraisals are a key factor in predicting the development of PTSD (Mitchell et al., 2017), even after accounting for variation in the duration, dosage, and type of exposure. Thus, thoroughly documenting the associations between sectarian violence exposure and PTSD must include observation of direct effects between dosage and type of violence on PTSD, as well as an understanding of the theoretical pathways (i.e., cognitive appraisal) through which such associations function.

Even when children and adolescents do not experience clinically significant levels of PTSD associated with exposure to political violence, research clearly documents adjustment problems, including internalizing and externalizing behaviors, though somewhat less consistently than PTSD. Increases in internalizing behavior in youth, including symptoms of anxiety and depression, have been linked to sectarian violence exposure in Uganda (Klasen et al., 2010), Sierra Leone (Betancourt et al., 2013), and Northern Ireland (Cummings et al., 2010), among others. Gender and age have not been shown to consistently moderate the relation between violence exposure and internalizing behavior, but when levels of anxiety and depression are shown to depend on gender, girls
are more likely than boys to be at higher risk of internalizing problems (Cummins et al., 2017). The literature on child age as a moderator of the relation between exposure and internalizing behavior is also inconclusive, perhaps because younger children may not be exposed to the same violent experiences as older children, or because younger children’s cognitive appraisals of the violent act may differ widely depending on the child’s developmental period. Thus, child age could be a proxy for other factors more salient in the link between exposure and internalizing behavior (Cummins et al., 2017). Externalizing behavior, including child and adolescent aggression, is also widely linked to exposure to sectarian violence (Huesmann et al., 2017; Merrilees et al., 2013; Qouta et al., 2008; Schiff et al., 2012), with children who are exposed to more violence also perpetrating more violence and aggression towards peers. The mechanisms by which adjustment problems develop in conjunction with or in the months and years following exposure to sectarian violence are critical and are discussed in the following section.

Beyond only documenting effects in cross-sectional studies, a body of research about sectarian violence and its effects on children and adolescents has placed increasing focus on why and how such adjustment problems may occur. As one example, in a study of child adjustment in Northern Ireland, political violence predicted lower levels of prosocial behavior both directly and indirectly through family conflict and children’s emotional security in the community, children’s feelings about security in the parent-child relationship, and children’s feelings of security in the family (Cummings, Schermerhorn et al., 2010). These pathways were not observed consistently when children were exposed to non-sectarian antisocial behavior, documenting a unique effect of sectarian violence and the role of emotional security. Other mediators of the relation between sectarian violence exposure and children’s adjustment include the number of parental daily stressors like inadequate housing, insufficient food, or economic insecurity (Newnham et al., 2015); children’s perception of
parental support (Harel-Fisch et al., 2010); sibling and peer relationships (Peltonen, Qouta, et al., 2010); family connectedness (Betancourt et al., 2012); and negative perceptions of parenting behavior (Kerestes, 2006). In sum, children’s feelings about their safety and security in their filial relationship and in their community, parenting behavior, parents’ experiences with other life stressors, and interpersonal relationships within and outside the family all play a role in explaining the relation between sectarian violence exposure and children’s adjustment.

Parenting behavior is an especially important variable of interest because children’s response to trauma may, in part, depend on their parents’ own response to trauma. In examining parenting behaviors as moderators of the relation between violence exposure and children’s adjustment over time, several themes emerge. First, parenting styles and behaviors interact with other exposure variables in predicting outcomes. For example, in a small study (94 families) with 10- and 11-year-old children, the impact of parenting styles on child adjustment differed between Jewish and Arab children and between mothers and fathers (Slone et al., 2012). In this study, multiple moderators were involved: Mothers’ parenting styles were predictive of adjustment for both Jewish and Arab children at low and high levels of violence exposure, but fathers’ parenting style was only related to Arab children’s adjustment and only at high levels of violence exposure. Second, work with sectarian violence-exposed families showed that greater exposure is related to lower quality parent-child relationships as evidenced by parental hostility and low emotional availability (Cohen & Shulman, 2019), higher levels of maternal coercive parenting (Zamir et al., 2020), children’s perceptions of supportive parenting (Thabet et al., 2009), parental depression, and marital aggression (Dubow et al., 2020).

Collectively, the existing body of research about direct and indirect relations between sectarian violence exposure and child adjustment, as well as longitudinal research about the conditions under which these relations exist, and
the theoretical bases for why adjustment is impacted, reveal that parenting behavior and parent-child relationship quality play an important role in child adjustment, despite the heterogeneity of circumstances. Further, children are doubly impacted as victims of political violence: In addition to experiencing violent acts themselves, children are also impacted when potential buffering effects from parents are diminished due to parents’ exposure to the trauma.

**Study II** examines parents’ and children’s responses to an outbreak of acute, sectarian violence over a three-year period, with a particular focus on associated aggressive acts in both parents and children. Sometimes in response to chronic exposure to sectarian or non-sectarian violence, as well as for other reasons including economics, physical health, or education, many families around the world leave their community of origin and encounter a new stressor in their efforts to settle in a new community.

*Acculturative stress.* Although many immigrant families do experience threats to personal safety as part of the immigration process, not all community-involved stressors involve exposure to community violence. In 2018, nearly 26 percent of children under the age of 18 living in the United States were living with at least one immigrant parent, defined as a parent who was not living in the United States at the time of birth (Migration Policy Institute, 2020). Several locations in the United States are considered “new immigrant destinations” due to their rapidly increasing numbers of immigrant families. Between 2000 and 2009, the immigrant population in the United States grew by at least 49 percent in 14 states. Immigrants in these new destination states were more likely than immigrants in other locations to be of working age and less likely to be English proficient (MPI, 2020), making entry into as well as success and mobility in the workforce more difficult. Globally, similar new immigrant destinations exist in Europe, the Middle East, and South Africa (Winders, 2014).
Compared to established immigrant areas, new immigrant destinations present unique challenges to families because families must hasten to negotiate and reconcile their sense of community in their new location without any guiding structure in place to do so, and without the support of a community of established immigrants (Winders, 2014). Immigration also presents multiple contextual risks. In the United States, Latinx immigrant families are more likely than non-immigrant families to live below the poverty level (see White et al., 2009), and to live in more dangerous neighborhoods with scarcer access to community supports (Pong & Hao, 2007). Pong and Hao’s study of seven immigrant groups using data from the Add Health survey (see Harris et al., 2003 for detailed description of Add Health) shows that the effect of living in a neighborhood characterized by relative deprivation (among other neighborhood characteristics) was more predictive of poorer school functioning for immigrant groups than for non-immigrant groups. Complicating matters further, among some immigrant groups, families are also less likely than non-immigrant groups to move from a high-poverty neighborhood to a low-poverty area (South et al., 2005).

The term *acculturative stress* was introduced by John Berry (1970) to describe the process by which an individual experiences negative physiological, social, and/or psychological effects attributable to the accommodations that must be made in adapting to a new cultural environment (Berry et al., 1987). Three of these accommodations are of particular interest to family functioning: changes in culture, such as political, economic, or religious adaptations; changes in social relationships, like being an *insider* versus an *outsider*; and changes in behavioral or mental health, such as the development of anxiety or depression and the challenges that accompany identity formation (Berry, 2006). Immigrant parents face not only the typical challenges common to all parents but must do so while also negotiating the demands of adapting to their new community. Parents face the daunting task of trying to simultaneously
decide which values, goals, and behaviors from their own cultural history to preserve, which values and behaviors to adapt or modify, and which new practices to adopt (Jambunathan et al., 2000). The stress related to acculturation can also impact parent-child relationships. In a qualitative study with Latino-immigrant fathers, participants reported that they lived with a sense of deep conflict about childrearing. Although they reported the benefits of positive parenting and the moral imperative inherent in their dominant culture to raise children without abuse or neglect, they felt marginalized and less able to parent in a desired way due to acculturative parenting stress and reduced agency in their community (Kohli & Fineran, 2020).

Many aspects of maintaining a connection to one’s culture of heritage yield benefits for parents and children. In a two-sample study of 667 Latinx immigrant young adults, the authors found that familism pride (emphasizing the warmth and closeness of family over and above self) was associated with lower levels of depression and higher levels of self-esteem and responsive joy (Stein et al., 2019). Results from a meta-analysis using more than 80 studies of acculturation and adjustment reveal that biculturalism across a wide range of cultural backgrounds is linked with more positive psychological, sociocultural, and health-related outcomes (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013) for children, adolescents, and adults. Moreover, the bicultural orientation-to-adjustment link was significantly stronger than the link between adjustment and each cultural orientation (heritage vs. non-heritage) separately (Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2013). Youth from varied immigrant groups thus experience a “dual identity,” where they describe different versions of functioning in two worlds (Chen et al., 2008; Sirin & Gupta, 2012); this dual identity is itself a form of acculturative stress. Taken together, however, among a wide range of first- and second-generation immigrant groups, a bicultural identity is associated with many positive benefits, including better psychosocial adjustment (Chen et al., 2008). Although maintaining associations with a culture of origin is associated
with positive mental health benefits in families, even second generation immigrant youth (defined here as children born and living in one country to parents who were born and raised in another prior to emigration) experience acculturative stress.

For youth, although connection with family offers protective value especially during acute stages of stress due to immigration or conflict in the community, connection to family can itself also serve as a source of conflict. For example, language brokering, the practice of children serving as language translators for their parents, often during complex interactions involving major financial decisions, medical visits, school meetings, etc. (see Weisskirch, 2017) can create barriers to parent-child relationship development. Although language brokering may be related to the development of prosocial behaviors (Guan et al., 2014), it is also related to depression for both boys and girls (Love & Buriel, 2007). Another source of acculturative stress in families is related to the acculturation gap, a situation in which children adopt a more bicultural orientation than their parents. During seventh grade, for example, father-child acculturation gaps were related to parent-child conflict, but only when there were low levels of parent-child relationship quality two years earlier (Schofield et al., 2008). Father-child acculturation gaps were also related to children’s internalizing and externalizing behaviors, but similarly attenuated by higher levels of parent-child relationship quality.

Parenting is culturally informed (Bornstein & Bohr, 2011), and acculturative stress impacts not only the individual but also the quality of the parent-child relationship and parenting behavior in cultural context. In a study of Asian and Latinx families, families with parents who reported more acculturative conflict between parents and children also reported lower levels of parenting self-efficacy (Kiang et al., 2017). Among Latinx parents, all three cultural dimensions of parenting self-efficacy (i.e., parents’ beliefs in their ability to influence their children from a heritage, American, or bicultural perspective)
were associated with more perceived general parenting competence. Although parents’ confidence in their own ability to impart their values and beliefs to their children was predictive of their parenting self-efficacy, cultural self-efficacy did not buffer the negative relation between acculturation conflict and parenting self-efficacy (Kiang et al., 2017). Paradoxically, among Mexican heritage adolescents, higher levels of parents’ self-reported acculturation were associated with higher rates of marijuana use among adolescents (Marsiglia et al., 2014; see “Immigrant Paradox in Bioecological Model and Immigrant Families”). In other research with Mexican American mothers and fathers from first through fourth generations, several aspects of acculturative stress (financial hardship, perception of neighborhood danger, and English language pressures, e.g.) were related to parental warmth and mediated by parental depression (White et al., 2009), such that higher levels of stress were related to greater depression, which in turn predicted lower levels of parental warmth. In other work with Mexican immigrant families, the authors found that mothers who reported higher levels of acculturative stress (in social and familial contexts, e.g.) were more likely to also report depression and suicidal ideation. Higher levels of family emotional closeness and social support served a protective role, and were negatively related to maternal depression (Hovey, 2000). In summary, across a range of immigrant groups, acculturative stress impacts child adjustment both directly and indirectly through parent mental health, the parent-child relationship, and parenting behavior.

Understanding the processes and conditions that enable immigrant families to maintain values and behaviors from their original culture while building connections to their new culture is key to informing our conceptualization of the impact of acculturative stress within families. To this end, investigating variation in psychological acculturation (Tropp et al., 1999) serves as a useful tool for measuring the way in which an individual adapts to changes in culture, society, and individual health and well-being. Psychological acculturation is
defined as “changes in individuals’ psychocultural orientations that develop through involvement and interaction within new cultural systems” (Tropp et al., 1999, p. 351). Rather than measuring acculturation as a function of time since emigration, language of preference, or ethnic self-identity, psychological acculturation allows for a fluid and bicultural orientation that accounts for a person-centered perspective on “attachment to and understanding of each culture” (Tropp et al., 1999 p. 353). Measuring psychological acculturation also provides a mechanism for understanding how the acculturation process may be related to the parent-child relationship and parenting behaviors. For example, if a mother feels as though she is not at all connected with the social, cultural, or religious institutions in her new destination, but also simultaneously feels alienated from her culture of origin due to physical and emotional separation, it may be more difficult for her to remain warm and connected with her children. Difficulties with language, access to health care and education, and economic uncertainty may further complicate the acculturation process. Immigrant parents can be overwhelmed by acculturative stress, which may impair their ability to act as positive role models for their children and reduces their capacity to navigate important financial, educational, and social institutions (Bornstein & Cote, 2010). High levels of such acculturative stress are linked to poor mental health outcomes for parents (Berry et al., 1987). In this thesis, an exploration of the relation between mothers’ and fathers’ psychological acculturation and the parent-child relationship can be found in Study III.

**Stress response: Youth externalizing behaviors**

The above section summarized the literature about three community-wide stressors and their impact on children and families: Perceptions of living in a dangerous neighborhood, exposure to acute sectarian violence, and acculturative stress. Evidence from other community-wide stressors shows a negative
association between the event and child adjustment, often in the form of externalizing behaviors during childhood and adolescence. Such maladjustment is a major concern for families and communities around the world. Externalizing behaviors are generally defined as those behaviors that fit into three broad categories: aggression, delinquency or disruption, and hyperactivity (Hinshaw, 1987). In the last two decades, externalizing behaviors in youth have come to be viewed as a public health problem, as they are often linked to juvenile crime, later adult crime, and violence (Farrington, 1989; Moffitt, 1993; Vaughn et al., 2014). In contrast to internalizing problems (e.g., depression, anxiety), externalizing behaviors such as lying, fighting, destroying property, and disobeying teachers and parents are labeled “externalizing” because they refer to outward expressions of behavior to things in the child’s external—rather than internal—environment.

Although internalizing and externalizing behaviors often co-develop during and following exposure to stressful events, externalizing behaviors are of particular interest for several reasons. First, externalizing behaviors often have a bidirectional influence on parenting (Burke et al., 2008), with oppositional behaviors from children eliciting poorer communication from parents and decreased parental involvement, parenting behaviors which in turn elicit more child externalizing behavior. Externalizing behaviors are also of note in this thesis because they may likely develop in children after witnessing acts of violence, political or otherwise (Lambert et al., 2012). Externalizing behaviors may also exacerbate a cycle of exposure to violence with victims of neighborhood or political violence becoming themselves perpetrators of violence (Schiff et al., 2012). In the case of immigrant youth in a new environment, externalizing behaviors may be more likely to ostracize youth from positive peers. Other factors, however, like maternal warmth, student-teacher relationship quality, and academic achievement are negatively related to externalizing behaviors (Pereyra et al., 2019), so identifying parent behaviors and parent-
child relationship quality constructs that may help guard against the development of youth aggressive and antisocial behavior during a period of acculturative adjustment is also of interest. Recent work with a nine country sample revealed that in most cultural groups where trajectories could be estimated, internalizing problems decreased from ages 8-10, but externalizing symptoms increased during early adolescence, approximately ages 10-14 (Rothenberg et al., 2020). Taken together, when examining child adjustment following community-wide stressors across a wide range of cultures, externalizing behavior is of international concern because of its links with public health, parenting practices, academic performance, and psychosocial relationship quality between adolescents and their peers, parents, and teachers.

**Dyadic coping**

Notwithstanding the source of community-wide stressors that impact families, parents are a natural conduit for shaping child adjustment in violent or stressful environments. The preceding sections detail the direct, indirect, and interactive pathways by which exposure to violence and acculturative stress predict changes in the parent-child relationship, parenting behavior, and youth adjustment. Missing from these pathways, however, is a discussion of how parents first interact with one another to cope with stressors even before parenting behavior is impacted. How parents cope with stressors in the coparenting relationship is an early step in understanding changes in parenting and the parent-child relationship as a reaction to a community-wide stressor.

For the purposes of this thesis, and in the broad scope of literature on marital and partner conflict, parental conflict is defined generally as negative emotions and/or disagreements about a range of topics, including both parenting responsibilities like child discipline, and non-parenting topics like household chores and finances. High levels of destructive marital conflict, characterized
by verbal or physical aggression or refusal to participate in conversations meant to solve the problem (i.e., stonewalling) are associated with internalizing (Cummings et al., 2006) and to a somewhat lesser extent, externalizing problems for children (Coln et al., 2013), including poorer academic performance (Harold, Aitken, & Shelton, 2007) and maladaptive peer relations and other social difficulties (Buehler et al., 2009). Effect sizes in many studies of child adjustment are quite high; one meta-analysis of marital conflict and youth problem behaviors found the effect size to be between .32 (moderate, when including studies with null results) to .67 (strong) (Buehler et al., 1997). Marital conflict and child adjustment problems are also related bidirectionally. Autoregressive cross-lagged models show that across time, marital conflict elicited higher levels of internalizing and externalizing behavior in adolescents, and in turn, adolescent maladaptive behavior aggravated marital conflict (Cui et al., 2007).

Although parental conflict is a nearly universal experience in families, not all conflict is bad for children. Children are remarkably accurate in their assessment of whether conflict between parents has been resolved constructively or left unresolved. Conflict that is resolved constructively, as evidenced by compromise – even when out of sight of the child – is linked with better emotional responses from children (see McKoy et al., 2009). To understand how this occurs requires us to examine the processes by which children experience marital conflict. Children who interpret the resolution of their parents’ conflict as constructive will more often feel more secure both in their parents’ relationship with each other, and in the parent-child relationship (see Emotional Security Theory, above; Davies & Cummings, 1994).

One way in which parents cope with stressors is by using each other as a source of mutual support. The term dyadic coping refers to the degree to which both parents in the dyad manage stressors, and how stress felt by one partner is communicated to and received by the other partner (Bodenmann et al.,
The nascent literature on dyadic coping establishes that higher levels of dyadic coping are related to more relationship satisfaction within a couple and are a predictor of positive well-being for children (Bodenmann, 1997). In response to a stressor, positive dyadic coping can take one of three forms. Supportive dyadic coping occurs when one partner verbalizes or demonstrates mutual understanding and support for the other partner. Delegated dyadic coping is characterized by one partner assuming some of the other partner’s responsibilities in the household, usually upon request. In contrast to the singularity of supportive and delegated dyadic coping, common dyadic coping happens when both partners make efforts to solve problems together (Bodenmann, 1995; Donato et al., 2009). Three negative forms of dyadic coping are also possible, and those are characterized by hostility, ambivalence, or superficiality (Bodenmann, 1997, 2005).

In the last decade, more research has emerged on the relation between dyadic coping and child adjustment, rather than the previous focus on what dyadic coping meant for the marital relationship. Poor dyadic coping is linked to increases in children’s internalizing and externalizing symptoms, and lower rates of prosocial behaviors, though the strength of these relations varied by reporter (parents vs. children reporting about child adjustment) (Zemp et al., 2016). Although dyadic coping is often studied in the context of parents with children with health challenges (García-López et al., 2016), following the death of a child (Bergstraesser et al., 2015), or becoming first-time parents (Molgora et al., 2019), there is a gap in the literature examining the role of dyadic coping in cross-national samples, particularly as it relates to the quality of the parent-child relationship. Longitudinal research with a randomized controlled trial of parents suggests that dyadic coping is a skill that can be taught and enhanced through intervention, resulting in increased partner support and decreased marital conflict over time (Zemp et al., 2017). Taken together, the promise of improving dyadic coping through intervention and the
scarcity of cross-national research about dyadic coping as it relates to parent-child relationship quality means that more research is needed with international samples.

Dyadic coping is a distinct, specific, and powerful source of social support that requires examination separate from other forms of social support (Donato et al., 2009). Thus, in examining pathways from exposure to community-wide stressors such as those that might be present during exposure to violence or an acculturative process, we must also examine perceptions of interparental coping mechanisms in order to better understand the basis by which youth adjustment may be associated with characteristics of the parent-child relationship and parenting behavior. Study IV explores adolescent adjustment (specifically, externalizing behavior) as predicted by mothers’ and fathers’ reports of dyadic coping and parental warmth across four cultural groups.
A cultural perspective of stressors and parenting

Notwithstanding a large literature on the relations among stressors, coping, parenting, and child adjustment, examining patterns of cultural variation in parenting behavior and parent-child relationship quality is also critical for understanding the role of culture in the parent-child stress response, particularly in relation to stressors with a community-wide impact. Differences in the form and function of parenting behavior can impact not just how parenting beliefs are communicated, but also what they mean (Bornstein, 1995), such that the same parenting behavior can have the same or different meaning across cultures, and the same meaning can be conveyed by different parenting behaviors. Around the world, belonging to a culture affords its individuals the opportunity to feel belonging, security, and comfort. According to Bronfenbrenner’s model, both parents (the microsystem) and cultures (the macrosystem) hold common expectations for what is considered “good” and “bad” for children as they develop (Masten, 2015). These expectations influence norms for child behavior, which can, in turn moderate the relation between parent behavior and child outcomes. In a group of countries diverse in their norms regarding various disciplinary techniques, for example, the cultural normativeness of discipline used to correct misbehavior moderated the relation between parent discipline and child internalizing and externalizing behavior across cultures (Lansford et al., 2005).

Despite differences in the form and function of parent behavior, large scale cross-national and mixed methods studies show that it is possible to assess common psychological constructs across diverse cultures during times of stress and trauma (Masten, 2015; Ungar, 2008). These studies also demonstrate, however, how difficult it can be to sort out cultural influences from buffering effects. For example, if child disclosure of their own behavior—an aspect of parental monitoring linked to positive adjustment—is high and protects a child
from the negative effects of living in a dangerous neighborhood, this may be because the family is part of a culture that values open parent-child communication and monitoring, or because parents and children have adopted this behavior in response to repeated exposure to the negative effects of living in a dangerous area, or both.

Entering parenthood changes the way adults view risk (Whiteford et al., 2013), often exacerbating fears and worries that accompany life stressors like economic concerns, interpersonal conflict, and threats to safety and well-being. Changes in adults’ psychological adjustment during parenthood, however, also impact children, especially during times of trauma and stress. Children, who are quite skilled at social referencing, can “read” their parents during stressful events, and this ability to sense a change in parents’ well-being or behavior contributes to their own sense of safety and well-being across cultures and trauma types (Walden & Ogan, 1988). As discussed earlier, Emotional Security Theory helps explain how these threats to feelings of safety and security in the family are associated with adjustment difficulties in children across cultures. Conversely, children’s behavior problems even outside of traumatic events are also associated with psychological difficulties for parents. For example, children who rate themselves or are rated by their parents as having more internalizing, externalizing, and attention difficulties also have parents who report higher levels of parenting stress (Wiener et al., 2016; Stone et al., 2016).

Although “culture” per se can be difficult to measure, the influence of culture on parenting and child development must be considered as a moderator in interpreting findings across groups. Thus, analyses are typically conducted within the context of a multigroup model to assess the influence of “site,” which can be loosely interpreted as proxy for cultural group. Other constructs such as individualism vs. collectivism, perceptions of family roles, and normative beliefs about various constructs like aggression or parenting roles can act
as a proxy for culture, and interpreting results in cross-national studies should acknowledge the influence of such measures of culture. For example, despite two sites having similar experiences with exposure to violence, differences in resilience are noted when societal “safety nets” (norms regarding extended family support, preferential care for the poor, public economic support, e.g.) are present within some groups but not others. These safety nets may be a stand-in for culture, though not always clearly predicting adaptive versus maladaptive behavior. In communities affected by pervasive violence or war, for example, cultural expectations for boys may encourage more aggression and other externalizing behavior (Belsky, 2012; Dimitry, 2012). This aggression, however, can also serve a protective effect in heightening children’s vigilance to physical threats to their safety that can be adaptive in the short term (Dodge, 1993). Variance in parenting behavior within a group may also be due to political, economic, and historical events experienced in the community (Nicolas, 2015). Parent and child emotional security (see EST, above) about their community is tied to available economic resources, communication systems, access to education, safe places for recreation, and social capital (Masten, 2015) and varies by culture. Further, varying faith practices and traditions within a culture can provide not only a sense of emotional security to members, but also very practical assistance during stressful times that foster resilience, such as access to guidance and advice, social support, and promotion of avoidance of high-risk activities like substance use and truancy (Sinha et al., 2007).

Across cultures, there are differences in the association between stressors and adjustment for both adults and children. In a clinical sample of families with children aged 6-18 from Korea and the United States, for example, Korean mothers reported fewer child problem behaviors than US mothers, and more child problem behaviors were related to parenting stress in the US sample only (Chung et al., 2013). Despite cultural variation in direct effects of stressors on parent and child adjustment, however, two noteworthy themes emerge.
First, the effect of dosage and proximity to the stressor, while important, often plays a surprisingly diminished role in child adjustment compared to the influence of both parenting behavior and parent-child relationship quality across a variety of stressors, including war, political violence, and natural disasters. For example, following a massive Australian bushfire, 800 children were followed for 20 years. Researchers found that child well-being was better predicted by maternal symptoms and child separation from mother than by dosage and proximity to the fire (McFarlane & VanHooff, 2009). In systematic reviews of more than 70 studies of armed conflict and 96 studies of disasters, researchers found that children’s emotional connection to the incident (i.e., the closeness of relationship to someone harmed) predicted child adjustment over time, in some case more so than physical connection to the area of conflict or disaster (Dimitry, 2012; Furr et al., 2010). In the case of the meta-analysis of disaster work, the authors found that the source of the disaster (man-made vs. natural) mattered less than the nature of the trauma (i.e., risk to self or harm to others), and closeness of those affected (Furr et al., 2010). In another example, children with a parent who reported maladaptive parenting following a disaster in Australia were more likely to experience psychopathology but only when the parent also reported significantly greater disaster-related cognitions (i.e., intrusive thoughts and behavioral avoidance) (Cobham & McDermott, 2014), even over and above the associations between child age, gender, disaster exposure, and child’s threat perception.

The second theme that emerges in the review of literature on the relations among stressors, parenting, and child adjustment is that—across a wide range of cultures—within-group/culture and between group/culture differences are important, yet in some cases, within-group differences are often more pronounced than those between groups. In examining a nine-country sample at three age points – ages 8, 10, and 12 – Deater-Deckard et al. (2018) found that overall, most of the variance in parenting and child adjustment variables
including parental warmth and child externalizing behavior (variables included in this thesis) was due not to between-group/culture differences, but within-individual differences over time, and within-group(site) differences.

Exposure to violence and acculturative stress—the foci of this thesis—may co-occur with other stressors, like economic disadvantage, poor access to healthcare, and reduced ability to provide good nutrition, all risk factors associated with poorer outcomes for children (Reed et al., 2012). To gain a more complete understanding about the predictors of parenting and child externalizing behavior related to violence and acculturative stress than a single-site study might provide, cross-cultural investigations are vital. Although we do not use nationally representative samples, our participants are locally representative of the communities in which they were recruited, and supply some cultural context to aid the interpretation of within-group and between-group differences, highlighting the role parent behavior, the co-parenting relationship, and parent-child relationship quality play in the pathway from community-wide stressor to child adjustment. The following two sections provide an overview of the projects and investigations included in this thesis. The general aim of the thesis is to examine the processes by which families respond to stressors occurring within the larger context of a community or culture. The first three studies provide new information about three community wide stressors: Perceptions of neighborhood danger, exposure to sectarian violence, and acculturative stress. Across these three studies, parenting behavior and the parent-child relationship are investigated as possible mediators, moderators, and outcomes. The fourth study moves into an examination of how parents’ mutual response to stress is associated with parent-child relationship quality and youth outcomes.
Summaries of studies

In the following section, I first provide a broad overview of the two research projects from which all investigations in this thesis are drawn. Following a description of the projects, I summarize each of the four studies in the thesis, including an overview of the study, study aims, participants, measures, and main findings.

Overview of projects

Participants from all four studies are drawn from the Parenting Across Cultures Project (PAC, www.parentingacrosscultures.org). Study III also included an additional sample of participants from a second project, the Mexican Diary Study of young children and parents. Both samples are described in detail below and the four studies drawn from them are summarized earlier in Table 1.

Parenting Across Cultures. As of 2021, PAC is now in its 12th annual wave of collecting data from mothers, fathers, and youth from 13 cultural groups in 11 sites and nine countries around the world. These countries were chosen to represent diversity in several areas important to the study of parenting and child development. First, they vary widely with respect to gender equality and gender norms, with a range in ranking from 2 to 134 of 162 countries with data on the United Nations Gender Inequality Index. This Index includes data on reproductive health, empowerment (proportion of parliamentary seats filled by women; proportion of adult women with at least some secondary education), and labor force participation (Human Development Report, 2019). In addition, rankings on the United Nations Human Development Index ranged from 8 to 147, encompassing indicators of health, education, and income. In comparative terms, the infant mortality rate in Kenya, for example, is 40 times higher than
the infant mortality rate in Sweden. In the Philippines, 23 percent of the population falls below the international poverty line of less than US $1.25 per day, whereas none of the population falls below this poverty line in Italy, Sweden, or the United States. In contrast with most psychology research published from predominately WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) countries (Henrich et al., 2010), the heterogeneity among the countries in key areas provided us with an opportunity to examine our research questions with families more representative of a wider range of the world’s population than is typical in most research to date.

In the first year of the study, participants included 1,417 children ($M_{age} = 8.29, SD = .66, 51\%$ girls) and their mothers and fathers. Families were drawn from Jinan and Shanghai, China ($n = 240$), Medellín, Colombia ($n = 108$), Naples and Rome, Italy ($n = 206$), Zarqa, Jordan ($n = 114$), Kisumu, Kenya ($n = 100$), Manila, Philippines ($n = 120$), Trollhättan/Vänersborg, Sweden ($n = 103$), Chiang Mai, Thailand ($n = 119$), and Durham, North Carolina, United States ($n = 311$). Recruitment was conducted through local public and private schools in each location. Letters describing the study were sent home with children, and parents were asked to return a signed form with contact information if they were willing to be contacted about the study (in some countries) and contacted by phone to follow up on the letter (in other countries). Families were then enrolled in the study until the target sample size (approximate $n = 100$) was reached in each group. Children were sampled from schools serving high-, middle-, and low-income families in the relative proportion to which these income groups were represented in the local population in each site. As a result, an economically diverse sample that ranged from low income to high income was obtained within sites.

The PAC study administered over 70 measures to parents and youth during the project’s first decade. Some measures were utilized in multiple years, while others were administered during limited time spans to capture important
developmental stages. Consideration was always given to cultural relevance, translated meaning, research questions, and length of interview. To ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence, all measures were forward- and back-translated, with any item inconsistencies discussed and resolved (Erkut, 2010; Maxwell et al., 1996; Peña, 2007). In addition, a work group with representation from each of the sites met annually to discuss cultural relevance, consistency, and applicability of all items used in the survey. Interviews were conducted in participants’ homes, schools, or at another location chosen by the participants, utilizing oral, written, or web-based methods. Mothers, fathers, and children were interviewed separately to avoid consultation about one another’s responses. Compensation varied by site, but young children were given small gifts or small cash payments in appreciation for their participation; parents and older youth and young adults were given modest financial compensation for their participation. In some sites, families were entered into drawings for prizes, or modest financial contributions were made to children’s schools.

**Mexican Diary Study.** Participants in Study III were recruited as part of a larger study of work–family balance in Mexican-immigrant families. This study collected daily reports from Mexican immigrant working families in a city in the Southeastern United States. At the time of study enrollment, participants needed to be parents of at least one pre-school aged child. The study’s larger aim was to investigate perceived workplace discrimination and how it related to children’s behavior, parents’ mood, and parent-child interactions. Recruitment utilized formal institutions (e.g., churches), Latinx-serving businesses (e.g., bodegas), and public spaces (e.g., parks). Families were required to meet the following eligibility criteria: (a) at least one parent working for pay outside the home, (b) at least one parent born in Mexico, and (c) at least one child between the ages of three and five years. At enrollment, both parents completed a background survey with a trained bilingual interviewer, and the study then consisted of a short daily survey each day for 14 days. Detailed
information about the larger study is available elsewhere (Gassman-Pines, 2015). A total of 186 mothers and 156 fathers initially agreed to participate; 185 mothers and 155 fathers completed at least one of the daily surveys and were included in the analyses for Study III. Sample sizes thus reflect participants from 186 families.

The following section summarizes each study included in this thesis, including an overview, the chief aims of the study, methodology, and main findings. The format follows a similar overview to the section Community Stressors and Coping, with each study taking another step to better understand the impact of exposure to a community-wide stressor on parenting, the parent-child relationship, and child externalizing behavior, and applies both theoretical and cultural context to the results. More details are provided in Appendix, which includes a copy of each published study. Study I uses a cross-sectional, multi-site design to explore how child aggression is predicted by perceptions of neighborhood danger and parent behavior. The second study focuses on one site experiencing intense political violence and investigates parenting behavior moderators and effects across time. The third study examines how the parent-child relationship is impacted by psychological acculturation and looks at cross-parent effects, while the fourth and final study employs a longitudinal, multi-site design to consider how child externalizing behavior is indirectly predicted by parental stress support (dyadic coping) and associated changes in parental warmth.

Study I

Overview. To study the impact of exposure to one stressor on parent behavior and child adjustment, Study I examined whether mothers’, fathers’, and children’s perceptions of neighborhood danger were related to child aggression, whether parental monitoring moderated this relation, and whether harsh parenting mediated this relation in a sample of 1293 10-year-old children and
their mothers and fathers in nine countries. This was a cross-sectional, multi-site study that included both parents’ and children’s reports of danger and adjustment.

Aim. The aim of this study was to examine the relation between family members’ perceptions of neighborhood danger and parent and child behaviors. Three research questions were addressed: 1) Is the perception of living in a dangerous neighborhood associated with more child aggression in a diverse group of countries? 2) If found, does the link between perceived neighborhood danger and child aggression depend on the level of parental monitoring, and if so, is that moderating role consistent across countries? 3) Is there an indirect link between neighborhood danger and child aggression explained by increases in harsh parenting, and if so, is the link consistent across countries? The link between exposure to neighborhood danger and child aggression may depend on parents’ behavior, namely, the extent to which parents attempt to gain knowledge about their children’s whereabouts and activities. Because parental monitoring has been shown to moderate the relation between low levels of community violence and antisocial behavior (Bacchini et al., 2011, e.g.), we examined parental monitoring as a moderator of the relation between danger perception and aggression. Harsh parenting, however, was examined as a mediator because it may explain the mechanism through which danger perception is associated with child aggression. This hypothesis was formed based on two concepts strongly represented in the literature: First, across a wide range of cultures, parents who are exposed to other forms of violence are more likely to use physical punishment with their children (Lansford & Dodge, 2008). Second, use of physical punishment is consistently associated with more child aggression (see Gershoff, 2002). Although our study’s measure of harsh parenting was not limited to only physical punishment, we were interested to learn whether these same associations held using a broader definition of harsh
parenting. The moderation and mediation conceptual models are provided in Figures 2 and 3, below.

**Figure 2** Conceptual model of moderation by parental monitoring

![Diagram of moderation model]

**Figure 3** Conceptual model of mediation by harsh parenting

![Diagram of mediation model]

**Participants.** Participants included 1,293 children (Mage = 10.68, SD = .66; 51% girls) and their mothers (n =1282) and fathers (n =1075). Families were drawn from Jinan and Shanghai, China (n =218), Medellin, Colombia (n =100), Naples and Rome, Italy (n =194), Zarqa, Jordan (n =112), Kisumu, Kenya (n =95), Manila, Philippines (n =103), Trollhättan/Vänersborg, Sweden (n =98),
Chiang Mai, Thailand (n =101), and Durham, North Carolina, United States (n =272).

Measures. Harsh parenting was measured using seven items from UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS; UNICEF, 2006), capturing verbal and physical aggression such as spanking, slapping, hitting and name-calling. Both mothers and fathers responded at focal child age 10. To measure child aggression, mothers and fathers reported about their child’s aggressive behavior using the 20-item aggression subscale of the Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach, 1991), and youth responded about their own aggressive behavior using the 19 aggressive items from the Youth Self-Report at age 10. Items were standardized and averaged to create a mean aggression scale. Mothers and fathers also completed a 10-item parental monitoring measure derived from Conger et al. (1994) and Steinberg et al. (1992), when the children were, on average 10 years old. The first five items captured how much each parent tried to gain knowledge about different activities in which the child participated (i.e., with whom the child spent time, how the child spent his/her free time, how the child spent his/her money, where the child went right after school, and the type of homework the child received). The last five items captured the frequency with which the parent imposed limits on those same five child activities. Neighborhood danger was assessed with four items reported separately by mothers, fathers, and children. The scale was derived from measures developed by Griffin et al. (1999) and O’Neil et al. (2001). The items captured whether the respondent felt scared in the neighborhood, believed that many neighborhood children got into trouble, reported a lot of drugs and gangs in the neighborhood, and felt the neighborhood was a dangerous place to live. Rather than include reports of victimization or witnessing of violence, this method for assessing perception of neighborhood danger based on levels of gang activity or the level of general danger has been used in other studies that linked perceptions of neighborhood danger to poorer
social skills of children (O’Neil et al., 2001) and child aggression (Griffin et al., 1999).

Main findings. Even when many countries reported significantly different levels of both neighborhood danger and aggression, perceptions of greater neighborhood danger were associated with more child aggression in all nine countries according to mothers’ and fathers’ reports and in five of the nine countries according to children’s reports. Parental monitoring did not moderate the relation between perception of neighborhood danger and child aggression, but the measure of parental monitoring did not include assessment of child disclosure, parental knowledge gained – only attempts to gain knowledge – or child secrecy; this is a measurement limitation which should be addressed in future research. The mediating role of harsh parenting was inconsistent. Across countries, using child reports, we found that harsh parenting consistently mediated the link between neighborhood danger and child aggression. Conversely, the mediating role of harsh parenting varied across countries when using parent reports. Pairwise tests revealed significant indirect effects between Sweden and Colombia for mothers, and between China and three other countries for fathers. Between-country differences found in the mother-reported models should be treated with caution, however, because of extremely low rates of harsh parenting in Sweden, which may have driven the between-country comparisons.

Study II

Overview. This study explores the relation between exposure to short-term, intense political violence, parental child-rearing violence, and child adjustment in a sample of families in Kisumu, Kenya over a three-year period. Data from three time points were gathered from quantitative interviews with mothers and their 8-10-year-old children. Time 1 data collection occurred approximately four months after a disputed presidential election, which was followed by a
period of intense violence that resulted in more than 1200 deaths, the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, and the destruction of tens of thousands of homes and businesses over a two-week period.

**Aims.** Even in the growing body of research focusing on political violence as a separate area of study (Cummings, Merrilees et al., 2010; Haj-Yahia, 2008; Kerestes, 2006), the violence in the geographical areas studied tended to be months or years in duration, as in Northern Ireland or Palestine. Few studies have been conducted in areas where the political violence was relatively short in duration. This study aimed to answer three research questions: 1) Was children's exposure to political violence following the disputed 2007 Kenyan election associated with more child externalizing problems? 2) Was mothers' exposure to post-election violence associated with more violence directed from the mother to the child? 3) Was mothers' or children's exposure to post-election violence associated with more child externalizing problems after considering childrearing violence and with more childrearing violence after considering child externalizing problems?

**Participants.** A sample of 100 Luo families was recruited from schools in Kisumu, Kenya, an area hard-hit by the post-election violence. At Time 1, children were aged 7-10, and mothers and children completed orally administered questionnaires in their homes by trained interviewers. At times 2 and 3 (approximately 12 and 24 months later), 95 percent of the sample was still participating. During the outbreak of violence, 80 percent of mothers and 97 percent of children reported some exposure to at least one act of violence. For example, 54 percent of mothers saw a dead body in the aftermath of the election, 95 percent of children heard gunshots, and 16% of mothers came under fire due to the post-election violence.

**Measures.** At all three time points, mothers completed a measure of childrearing violence developed for UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2006). Mothers were asked if anyone in their household had engaged in any
of six behaviors with the focal child in the last 30 days including shaking him/her; spanking, hitting, or slapping him/her on the bottom with a bare hand; or hitting him/her on the bottom or elsewhere on the body with an object. At time 2, mothers also responded to questions about their experience with post-election violence (PEV; Schwartz & Proctor, 2000). This measure included two parts: mothers’ reports about their own experiences and mothers’ reports about their child’s experiences. In the mother self-report, mothers were first asked to identify which of 14 violent acts they personally experienced and to indicate the time frame during which they experienced that act. Next, the measure was adapted to capture experiences specific to the post-election violence. Mothers were asked to read through the list of violent acts once more and indicate which of those 14 acts occurred specifically during the period of post-election violence from December of 2007 through February of 2008. Thus, only those items that were interpreted by mothers to be directly related to the violence that followed the disputed election—and were perpetrated by people outside their home—were included in the analyses. The 14 statements that followed included items such as the following: “How many times has somebody threatened to hurt you really badly?” “How many times has somebody hit, punched, or slapped you?” and “How many times has somebody thrown a bottle, rock, or other hard object at you?” Mothers reported about both their direct experience with an action (e.g., having guns fired at them), and about whether their children had seen this happen to anyone in the community. Despite some overlap in children's and mothers' experiences, each scale also represented two distinct possible pathways from violence exposure to child adjustment: one through the mother's direct experiences and one through the child's witnessing of violent events. Additionally, measures of mother and child exposure were used to answer different research questions, including whether children’s exposure to increased PEV was associated with more child externalizing problems, and if mothers’ exposure to increased PEV was associated with increases
in childrearing violence. Both types of exposure were considered when examining the relation between PEV exposure and child externalizing problems in predicting childrearing violence, and in examining childrearing violence while accounting for child externalizing problems.

At times 1, 2, and 3, children completed 30 items from the externalizing scale of the Youth Self Report (Achenbach, 1991). Youth responded about their own externalizing behavior at three time points, at mean ages 8, 9 and 10. Items were summed to create an externalizing behavior scale.

**Main findings.** Three main hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling. We predicted that greater exposure to post-election violence would be related to greater child externalizing problems, and that mothers’ exposure to PEV would be related to more childrearing violence. We also predicted that PEV would independently contribute to both outcomes. Our hypotheses were partially supported even though we found no evidence that maternal exposure to PEV was linked with childrearing violence. We did find that child exposure to PEV was linked with increases in child externalizing behavior more than a year after the violence subsided, even after taking into account childrearing violence. We additionally found that child externalizing problems in one year predicted childrearing violence in the next year, and that childrearing violence in one year was associated with externalizing problems in the following year. In short, we discovered that even relatively short-term exposure to violent, sectarian events was related to maladaptive behavior in middle childhood more than one year after the intense period of violence subsided. We further found transactional associations over time between child externalizing behavior at age 8, childrearing violence at age 9, and child externalizing behavior at age 10.
Study III

Overview. In a community in the United States with a growing immigrant population, this study explored both within-parent and cross-parent relations between Mexican immigrant parents’ psychological acculturation and parenting behaviors. Youth reports of parental warmth in middle childhood added to the richness of the data. Because data were collected from two samples, including parents of pre-school aged children, consistency in results across two different developmental time periods informed our understanding of how parents’ adaptation to new cultural surroundings is related to both their own parenting attitudes and behaviors and to the attitudes and behaviors of their child’s other parent.

Aims. Study III utilized two samples of Mexican immigrant families in the United States to examine the relation between parental psychological acculturation and parenting behaviors towards children, including parental warmth. Grounded in Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988), we examined two related research questions: 1) What is the relation between each parent’s psychological acculturation and their own warm, aversive, and withdrawn parenting behaviors? and 2) What is the relation between each parent’s psychological acculturation and their partner’s warm, aversive, and withdrawn parenting behaviors?

Participants. Participants in the study were drawn from two separate samples. Forty-seven mothers, 38 fathers, and 46 youth from the US participants in the PAC study during the third wave of data collection were of Mexican origin and comprised the middle childhood sample. On average, children in this sample were 10.5 years old and 51 percent were female. Another group of participants were enrolled in the Mexican Diary Study (MDS, see Overview of Studies for full description). Children in the MDS were between three and five years old, so only parents were interviewed. The mean age of children in the
early childhood sample was 3.9 years. In both samples, the number of adults and children living in the household was similar, parents in both samples attained similar years of education, and the percentage of families with household incomes below 30,000 USD annually was comparable.

Measures. Youth participants in the PAC study completed the Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire – Short Form (Rohner, 2005) at age 10, to capture youth perceptions of parents’ warm, aversive, or withdrawn behaviors. Examples of warm and affectionate items included, “I say nice things to my child,” and “I make my child feel wanted and needed.” Aversive interactions were measured using the PARQ hostility-aggression subscale (six items, e.g., “My dad punishes me severely when he is angry.”). Withdrawn interactions were measured using the PARQ neglect-indifference subscale (seven items, e.g., “My mom pays no attention to me when I ask for help.”). The eight items in the warmth-affection scale were averaged to create separate scales for mothers’ and fathers’ warmth. To assess these same constructs in the MDS study, parents were asked about their own and about the other parent’s interactions with the focal child each day during the daily diary study period. For each item, parents answered where applicable: mother only, father only, both mother and father, neither mother nor father. Three subscales were then created for each parent. Aversive and warm interactions were each measured with six items (e.g., “Took his/her frustration out on your child.” and “Child and parent laughed often.”). Withdrawn interactions were measured with four items (e.g., “Were together but not really interacting.”).

In both the PAC and MDS projects, mothers and fathers completed the same Psychological Acculturation Scale (Tropp et al., 1999). This measure is a ten-item scale that focuses explicitly on psychological aspects of acculturation, including English and Spanish versions provided by the scale’s creators. Items included, “With which group(s) of people do you feel you share most of your beliefs and values?” and “With which group(s) of people do you feel you have
the most in common?” With a score of 5 indicating equal levels of comfort in both cultures, parents in both the PAC and MDS studies still fell well within the range of feeling most comfortable in their culture of origin with mean acculturation scores of 2.22 and 3.37 for the early and middle childhood samples, respectively, for mothers, and 2.76 and 3.30 for fathers.

**Main Findings.** The growing number of immigrant families in many destinations in the United States and other parts of the world implores researchers to better understand stress associated with moving to a new country, the acculturation process, and how family members both interact with and are affected by other family members and acculturative stress. When fathers in this study approached a more bicultural orientation, they displayed more warm, less aversive, and less harsh parenting practices, as reported by themselves, mothers, and children. The same relation between positive parenting behaviors was also true of mothers when fathers were reporting a more bicultural orientation. Caution should be taken not to interpret these results as evidence that becoming more “American” equates with warmer, less aversive parenting. Although we do not have pre-immigration measures of parenting attitudes and behaviors, prior research has shown that immigrant parents who maintain a connection to their culture of origin fare better than those who do not (see Garcia Coll & Marks, 2012). Instead of intimating value judgments on cultural orientation, our results indicate that when parents facing a stressful family event – relocating their family to a new destination, e.g. – find ways to reduce the psychological stress of adapting to a new culture, multiple family relationships may be impacted in a positive way.

**Study IV**

*Overview.* Parental conflict and its relation to parenting behaviors and child adjustment has a rich literature. Far less studied, however, are the parenting processes that precede overt conflict within a co-parenting relationship.
Moreover, most of the literature on marital conflict focuses on children in early and middle childhood. Using parent and adolescent reports over three time points in four countries, this prospective study examined the ways in which parents’ displays of mutual support and joint problem-solving predicted subsequent parental warmth and child externalizing behavior.

**Aims.** When parents undergo stress of any kind, dyadic coping describes the way in which parenting partners manage the stress. Dyadic coping can be constructive, characterized by support, affection, or problem solving, or destructive, characterized by stonewalling, avoidance, arguing, or more serious conflict. The aim of **Study IV** was to examine the direct and indirect ways in which adolescent externalizing behavior might be predicted by dyadic coping and parental warmth in four countries over a two-year period. We first examined whether maternal and paternal reports of dyadic coping independently predicted maternal and paternal warmth one year later. Second, we examined the predictive role of parental warmth on child externalizing behavior. Last, we investigated whether dyadic coping indirectly predicted adolescent externalizing behaviors two years later, via changes in parental warmth.

**Participants.** Mothers, fathers, and youth from 472 families in China, Kenya, Sweden and Thailand participated in this study during the fifth, sixth, and seventh waves of data collection, corresponding to when youth (52% female) were approximately 13, 14, and 15 years old. These four countries varied widely with respect to gender equality and gender norms according to data on the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (Human Development Report, 2019), making these sites of particular interest in examining how conflict and stress are managed in two-parent households. When this study concluded, 84 percent of the original PAC sample recruited initially at age 8 provided data.

**Measures.** Mothers and fathers completed separate reports of dyadic coping at Time 1 to capture how each parent perceived the way in which stressful events were faced together as a couple. Eight items drawn from the Dyadic
Coping Inventory (Bodenmann, 2008; Ledermann et al., 2010) were included in this scale. Sample items included, “When one of us is stressed, we consider it as our stress.” and “My partner shows empathy and understanding when I need it.”

Maternal and paternal warmth was captured at Time 2 using the same eight-item warmth scale described in Study III (Rohner, 2005).

Adolescent externalizing behavior was measured at Time 3 using mother, father, and youth reports from Achenbach’s (1991) Child Behavior Checklist (33 items for parents) or Youth Self-Report (30 items for adolescents). We standardized each reporter and created a composite scale of externalizing behavior accounting for mother, father, and youth perceptions of aggressive and delinquent behavior. Further information about the CBCL is described in more detail in Study I, and youth items are identical in both studies.

**Main Findings.** In all four sites, both maternal and paternal reports of stronger dyadic coping predicted higher levels of parental warmth with the exception of Kenyan fathers, where the relation between dyadic coping and paternal warmth was not significant. However, child externalizing behavior was only predicted by maternal – but not paternal – warmth in all four sites. Further, maternal dyadic coping at youth age 13 indirectly predicted adolescent externalizing behavior via maternal warmth at age 14 (see Figure 4).
Emotional Security Theory accounts for the processes in this indirect pathway from how parents cope with stress to adolescent behavior that includes anger and aggression. Even during adolescence, when the parent-child relationship is changing rapidly towards more adolescent independence from parents, insecurity perceived by youth or parents in the co-parent relationship may negatively impact adolescents at a time of significant developmental transition. Although marital conflict peaks between early childhood and pre-adolescence (Anderson et al., 1983), these findings suggest that adolescents are also impacted by marital discord or poor dyadic coping.
General discussion

Using a process-oriented approach, the general aim of this thesis was to explore the ways in which parents and children respond to stressors that occur beyond the individual or microsystem level, particularly regarding the development of aggression and other externalizing behaviors during childhood and adolescence across diverse cultural groups. Specifically, I investigated parent and child responses to neighborhood danger, intense, acute sectarian violence, and acculturative stress. I then examined how parental dyadic coping as a response to stress indirectly predicted child externalizing behavior.

**Study I** was a nine-country cross-sectional study with reports from parents and youth whose main finding was that parent and child perceptions of living in a dangerous neighborhood were associated with child aggression. In some cases, harsh parenting mediated this relation, though the relation was not consistent across countries or reporters. The hypothesis about a moderating effect of parental monitoring in the relation between perceived neighborhood danger and aggression was unsupported.

**Study II**, a three-year study of mothers and children in Kenya following a period of intense sectarian violence, showed that political violence was related to child externalizing behavior more than one year after the violence had subsided. This study also confirmed prior work about the transactional nature of childrearing violence and child externalizing behavior. **Study III** included two samples of Mexican immigrant families in the United States with data from mothers and fathers of children in early childhood, and both parents and children in middle childhood. This study demonstrated that, in families where fathers reported being more bicultural on a measure of psychological acculturation, both mothers and fathers were warmer, less neglectful, and less aversive with their children. In **Study IV**, mothers, fathers, and adolescents from four countries were surveyed across three years about dyadic coping, parental
warmth, and child externalizing behavior. Results showed that lower levels of mothers’ and fathers’ reports about dyadic coping were related to lower levels of parental warmth nearly consistently across both parents and all sites. Maternal reports of dyadic coping were indirectly related to child externalizing behavior two years later through lower levels of maternal warmth.

Four themes span all four studies in this thesis and are discussed in more detail in the following sections. First, in families experiencing community-wide stressors, there are cross-parent and parent-child interactive effects between stressors and behavior for both parents and children. Accordingly, examining only child effects in response to stressors is not sufficient for understanding the relation between violence exposure or acculturative stress and child adjustment. Second, children’s emotional security about their environment—both at proximal (microsystem) and community levels—plays a key role in child adjustment associated with stressors. Third, both short-term and long-term exposure to threatening events may have long-lasting associations with child development and family functioning. Fourth, although there are both consistent and differential main effects of exposure to violence and acculturative stress on children, there are more similarities than differences across countries when examining exposure-associated parenting behavior and aspects of the parent-child relationship. Following a discussion of each of these themes I present some methodological considerations, including strengths and limitations of the research. Finally, I offer some directions for future work and suggest related policy implications.

Applying the Bioecological Model and Family Systems Theory as a foundation, stressors that threaten the physical and psychological well-being of individuals and communities in the context of culture do so through a series of interactive and bidirectional influences among family members. Across a three-year period in the Kenyan sample, for example, the use of childrearing violence during a period of exposure to acute sectarian violence was related to
higher levels of child externalizing in the following year, which in turn predicted higher levels of childrearing violence the year after that. This transactional finding between childrearing violence and child maladjustment is not unusual in the parenting and child development literature across gender, race, and ethnicity (MacKenzie et al., 2015) and across age and time (Yan et al., 2020) as problematic child behavior does elicit harsher discipline from parents. However, the cumulative effects of exposure to both parenting violence and sectarian community violence can exacerbate children’s externalizing problems (Fleckman et al., 2016). Similarly, when families experience acculturative stress, the psychological acculturation process in one parent does not occur in isolation. In our study with Mexican-immigrant families (Study III), we found that when fathers had a more bicultural orientation, this acculturation was related not only to their own parent-child relationship through warmer and less-aversive parenting, but also to lower levels of mothers’ aversive parenting and increases in maternal warmth. We can hypothesize that cross-parent associations between biculturalism and parenting behavior might be explained by other aspects of the marital or parent-child relationship, as higher levels of biculturalism are generally related to positive psychosocial and psychological functioning in adults (Ferguson et al., 2012; LaFromboise et al., 1993), which in turn are related to more positive outcomes for children. Although exploration of a mediating pathway is beyond the scope of Study III, the cross-parent regression effects are striking, as they are evident in both the early and middle childhood samples. The dyadic coping study (Study IV) is another example of this cross-parent effect of stress coping, but in a more nuanced way. The items used in the study from the dyadic coping inventory ask each parent to reflect on how much support they feel they get from their partner in solving problems together versus being “in it alone.” In this way, asking mothers to complete the dyadic coping inventory, for example, can been seen not only as a measure of mothers’ perceptions of joint, constructive problem solving, but also as
mothers reporting about fathers’ behavior and attitudes. Thus, each person’s report of dyadic coping is itself measuring a cross-parent effect to some degree. Parents’ coping perceptions are important; during their children’s middle adolescence, parents experience lower levels of parenting self-efficacy (Glatz & Buchanan, 2015), and conflict of any kind (interparental or parent-child) reduces parents’ sense of competence even more. While Study IV did not account for mothers’ dyadic coping predicting fathers’ parental warmth (and vice-versa), Study IV does, by analytical design, account for the influence of mothers, fathers, and adolescents together in the same model.

The model suggested by these cross-parent and interactive effects is illustrated in Figure 5. In this model, exposure to community-wide stressors such as violence and acculturative stress can impact parents and children directly, or indirectly through the parent-child relationship or through dyadic coping. Each of these pathways is additionally influenced by other social supports (either individual or societal), cultural norms regarding coping behaviors and acceptance of aggression, and parent and gender roles. The model shares some conceptual pathways regarding parenting and the parent-child relationship with Darling and Steinberg’s (1993) contextual model of parenting styles and Belsky’s (1984) process model of parenting, but extends this work by considering cultural norms, emotional security, and dyadic coping. Parenting behavior and the parent-child relationship remain at the core in explaining the pathway from community-wide stressor to child adjustment, but children’s emotional security in the inter-parent and parent-child relationship, as well as in their neighborhood and community, aids in understanding the mediating and moderating pathways between stressors and child externalizing behavior.
A second theme that cuts across all four investigations in this thesis is the importance of emotional security. A strong parent-child relationship and parenting behavior characterized by warmth and affection can attenuate the negative effects from a range of life stressors during adolescence (Ge et al., 1994; Ge et al., 2009). However, as mentioned in the introduction, to build resilience during difficult situations, parents and children must have adequate skills, resources, and support to overcome challenges (Rosanbalm, 2020). Fear associated with living in a dangerous community, witnessing interpersonal and group violence, relocating to a new and unfamiliar country or culture, and living in a family with low levels of partner support between parents can all erode children’s feelings of safety and security in their home, school, or neighborhood, and thus interfere with the buffering effect that might otherwise be provided by stable, supportive parents and communities. Under high levels of fear and
insecurity, individuals may have neither adequate support nor resources to surmount threats to their physical and emotional well-being. At a microsystem level, emotional insecurity is a mediator between marital conflict and child adjustment, even when accounting for other parenting behaviors (Davies, Harold, et al., 2002).

At a broader, community level, sectarian influences at the macrosystem level are also influential in the relation between exposure to violence and child adjustment. Using newspaper articles in Northern Ireland across a five-year period as a measure of sectarian tension in the macrosystem, for example, the authors found that children exposed to sectarian violence responded differently depending on the events occurring at a societal level, with higher levels of intergroup tension linked to higher levels of emotional insecurity and more problematic child adjustment (Townsend et al., 2020). At its core, emotional security is about fear (Davies, Harold et al., 2002) and unpredictability. Across cultures and domains, unpredictability in childhood is consistently linked with psychological maladaptation (Doom et al., 2016; Dwairy, 2010, Ellis et al., 2009). Recent work in early life adversity now includes a focus on quantifying unpredictability in childhood (Glynn et al., 2019) and its association with later mental illness. All four studies in this thesis include stressors characterized by some degree of fear or unpredictability which contribute to children’s feelings of insecurity in their home or community: living in a dangerous neighborhood, being exposed to sudden, widespread, sectarian violence between neighbors, parents’ migration to a new and unfamiliar community where they are challenged to navigate social, educational, employment and safety systems, and children living in households where parents report a sense of isolation from their partner when facing difficult situations. Each of the studies illustrated how insecurity may have played a role in the pathway between the stressor and parenting behavior or the parent-child relationship and was further predictive
of more aggressive behavior in children in both middle childhood and adolescence.

That fear and violence exposure are associated with externalizing behavior in children is not a new concept. This relation has a biological basis (McLaughlin et al., 2016), but the research in this thesis provides a new direction in synthesizing our understanding of how emotional security and dyadic coping together elucidate the pathways between community-wide stressors and child adjustment. Although existing mechanisms that explain the relation between witnessed or experienced violence and aggressive behavior (social learning theory, e.g.) have merit, they do not consistently account for the role of parents’ mutual experience during a stressful event. Further, emotional security theory accounts for – from the child’s perspective – the impact that insecurity in both the parent-child relationship and safety in the community have on maladaptive outcomes. During or following acute or chronic community-wide stressors, parents’ emotional insecurity may also explain the pathway from stress to child adjustment. When confronted with threats to personal well-being and acculturative stress, parents may experience lack of emotional activation or lower levels of engagement with children (lower levels of parental warmth, less parental monitoring, e.g.) that may stem from lack of partner support, or parents’ own fears about the safety of the community. Thus, emotional insecurity can counteract otherwise stabilizing systems during stressful times by disrupting parent feelings of safety, children’s feelings of safety in their parents, and children’s and parents’ feelings about their community.

A third theme that permeates this thesis is that both short- and long-term exposure to violent and stressful ecological contexts is associated with changes in parenting behavior, parent-child relationships, and child externalizing behavior during both childhood and adolescence. As we saw in the case of exposure to violence in the Kenyan sample, increases in maladaptive behavior associated with exposure to even short-term violence remain far longer than we
might first expect. Long-term effects of exposure to acute violence are increas-
ingly important to understand, even in areas not typically home to violent acts, because they affect some of the most vulnerable members of a community (children) beyond the point where intensive, emergency help is readily availa-
ble. For example, following the widely publicized 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Florida, where 15 people were killed and 17 wounded by a gunman, the community reported two students suicides within one week. However, these suicides did not occur immediately following the event, but more than one year later, when much of the intense additional, supportive help to the vic-
tims and families had abated. A review of the literature on the mental health of individuals following mass shootings documents increases in PTSS and de-
pression in both surviving victims and members of affected communities (Lowe & Galea, 2017). Among the risk factors identified as concurrent with worse mental health outcomes following violent and other traumatic events are two factors included in this thesis: prior exposure to traumatic events, and lack of social support. Regarding support, Study IV in this thesis examines the re-
lation between mutual partner support – dyadic coping – and the indirect path-
way from coping to child externalizing behavior via changes in parental warmth, over a three-year period. When mothers reported lower levels of pa-
rental dyadic coping with stressful events when youth were, on average, 13 years old, this was associated with lower levels of maternal warmth one year later, which in turn predicted higher levels of adolescent aggression in the follow-
ning year, at youth age 15. Thus, even during adolescence, characteristics of parents’ stress response are predictive of adolescent adjustment two years later. Prior research has shown that adolescents may be particularly vulnerable to instability in the co-parent relationship, with stronger associations between marital conflict and emotional insecurity noted for older children compared to younger ones (Cummings et al., 2006).
The final theme that emerged from these four studies is that across cultures, families are surprisingly similar in how stressful community-wide events are related to parenting and child externalizing behavior. In both Study I and Study IV, the two studies in this thesis that included participants from multiple countries, multigroup path analyses yielded different coefficients in only a small number of groups and pathways. For example, in Study IV, the parameter estimates differed in only one site out of four (Kenya), and only on the pathway from paternal dyadic coping to paternal warmth. More variation was found across sites in Study I, but in the main effect pathway that was significant across sites (i.e., from perception of neighborhood danger to child aggression), the strength of the relation between danger and aggression did not vary across countries for either mother or father perceptions of neighborhood danger. This is important since there were statistically significant differences in between-country means on both aggression and neighborhood danger. Similarly, children’s perceptions of neighborhood danger were associated with small increases in harsh parenting, and model fit did not improve when this relation was free to vary by country.

Taken together, the results of the four investigations included in this study broaden the understanding of how macro level stressors interrupt the safety and security of children, adolescents, parents, and communities, with negative effects for both parents and children, including notable increases in aggressive behavior in youth. The relations among stress exposure, parenting, and child externalizing behavior are similar across varied cultural contexts—even when mean levels of the variables of interest differ greatly between countries—and are visible over time. The work in this thesis provides new understanding of how parents’ mutual stress coping responses suggest an earlier temporal predictor of youth externalizing behavior, indirectly through changes in parenting and the parent-child relationship.
Methodological considerations

When conducting cross-national studies about parent-child interactions, family members’ behaviors and experiences following stressful events, and related coping between parents, several methodology issues must be considered. The following section provides an overview of both general (i.e., commonalities across all four studies) and study-specific methodological considerations of the investigations conducted as part of this thesis, including both limitations and strengths.

Well-constructed cross-national studies use both the planning and implementation phases to address the possibility of construct, method, and item bias (Van de Vijver & Tanzer, 1997). To guard against construct and item bias, our research group met annually face-to-face to discuss all aspects of data collection including measures, procedures, analyses, and publication. Before each wave of data collection, the group determined the relevance of items and scales. In discussing constructs to include in the research, we also included research published in local-language journals to capture country-specific methods, concepts, and approaches, thus ensuring both emic and etic perspectives (Berry, 1989). We also used a procedure of forward and back-translations to develop survey instruments in the local language (Erkut, 2010; Peña, 2007). When reviewing possible measures and items that had not been previously validated across countries, we addressed two questions: First, does the item have meaning in all cultures studied? Second, does the item have the same meaning across cultures? On some occasions, we determined that some measures did not meet face validity concerns at this early point and sought out other ways to measure desired constructs. In the case of many of the primary measures of interest in this thesis, particularly the outcome measures of child externalizing behavior and aggression, and parental warmth, these measures have been widely used and validated in more than 60 countries. Some of the other
measures, particularly the dyadic coping inventory and parental monitoring measure, which have received some, but comparatively little cross-cultural validation, would have benefited from measurement invariance testing across groups, and this failure to directly measure measurement invariance across groups stands out as a limitation in this work. Nevertheless, the items demonstrated reliability, as indicated by adequate alphas across sites, and validity, as indicated by meaningful relations among constructs in expected directions.

The studies in this thesis did not use nationally representative samples of the residents of each country. Consequently, generalizing results to entire country-wide populations, while alluring, is flawed. Instead, as mentioned in the general discussion, one conclusion that can be drawn is that families look remarkably similar across countries with respect to the strength of the relations between several aspects of parenting and child adjustment and community-wide stressors, and with respect to the mediating and moderating roles of parenting behavior and parent-child relationship factors in ameliorating negative associations between stressors and youth externalizing behavior, even when within-site variability is high. Within each site, the research subjects were selected in a way that represented the approximate proportion of families at different levels of education and socioeconomic status within each community from which the initial sample was drawn and are balanced for child gender.

Another potential pitfall in studies involving primarily self-reported data is the possibility of reporter bias. To guard against this, all four studies included in this thesis included mother, father, and child reports. Family Systems Theory (see FST) contends that families are interconnected systems; studies using reports from only one parent, as are often understandably dictated by feasibility or finances, may result in missed relations among parent and child variables, or worse, over-emphasis on one parent’s influence on an outcome. Use of only parent reports to capture child behavior is also insufficient, especially regarding responses to stressful events. In a meta-analysis of disaster research by Furr
et al. (2010) the authors found that children reported more adjustment difficulties than parents reported about children. In the case of community-wide stressors, this could be because children withhold information from parents, or because parents underestimate the impact of the traumatic effect, but the result is the same; could we be underestimating children’s needs when we fail to take their own reports into account? Further, in the initial years of the Parenting Across Cultures project, which preceded the time points included in the studies in this thesis, a social desirability bias measure (Reynolds, 1982) was administered to mothers and fathers when children were 8 and 9 years old. When socially desirable responding was analyzed in the context of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection/Control Questionnaire-Short Form (PARQ/Control-SF; Rohner, 2005), only two countries of the nine in our study were notable for higher than the group mean of socially desirable responding (China) and lower than the group mean of socially desirable responding (Sweden) (Bornstein et al., 2015). In general, across gender and across most cultures, when parents responded in socially desirable ways, they did so similarly across cultures. Hence, although we may be under- or over-estimating rates of specific parenting behaviors due to reliance predominantly on self-report data, we are confident that between-group differences are still meaningful and relevant.

Aside from broad methodological considerations and limitations that span all four studies in this thesis, each study also has its own limitations, a few of which are covered here. Regarding Study II, studying political violence presents many methodological challenges. Most obvious, such massive upheaval is difficult to predict, particularly when the violence is relatively short-term; in this case, the majority of sectarian violence and displacement in Kenya related to the disputed election occurred over a period lasting weeks, not months or years. Second, longitudinal research is needed to move beyond cross-sectional “symptom-counting” (Dawes & Cairns, 1998) into translational research, but when families are displaced frequently, locating and interviewing parents and
children over time is difficult, intervention work even more so (Porterfield et al., 2010). Researchers must also consider the ethics around conducting interviews and proceed with sensitivity when interviewing families amid major psychological trauma (Fraga, 2016). One way to better ensure a stronger interviewer-participant relationship is to gather data within the context of existing mechanisms where trusting relationships have already been established. In the Kenya post-election violence study, for example, we were already collecting data with a team of local researchers and interviewers in the community before the questions about post-election violence were administered, so families already had familiarity with both personal questions about sensitive topics and with members of the data collection team. When existing studies are not feasible, it may be possible to partner with local agencies such as schools, health clinics, pediatric offices, relief agencies, or mental health providers during the recruitment and data collection phase. This has the added benefit of providing bidirectional general knowledge and expertise to and from support systems operating locally.

Another specific example of a methodological consideration is evident in Study III. Mothers and fathers reported their own psychological acculturation (personal comfort with various aspects of each culture such as sharing ideas, shared values, e.g.) using a 9-point scale from “only Hispanics/Latinos” to “only Anglos/Americans”; the midpoint of the scale indicated equal comfort with Hispanics/Latinos and Anglos/Americans. Regarding the midpoint, the scale’s authors state that the Likert-type scale has “a bicultural orientation defining its midpoint” (Tropp et al., 1999, p. 356). Since the time of this measure’s development, separate response items referencing Anglo/American and Hispanic/Latinx as two distinct response scales—rather than one unidirectional scale with orientations at opposite poles—have proven to be more suitable for capturing acculturation, and this author acknowledges such a deficit in the current measurement of psychological acculturation as a construct, which should
be corrected in future studies. However, the research questions in **Study III** focused on measuring whether immigrant families’ parenting behaviors were related to the degree to which parents retained their culture of origin while also feeling some comfort in their culture of current residence. When the PAC and MDS studies adopted this psychological acculturation measure in 2009, the measure was superior to other measures of acculturation that did not measure psychological constructs, and thus was assessed to be the best available choice for assessing this aspect of acculturative stress.
Implications

Future research
The four investigations in this thesis covered a range of community-wide stressors that shaped the lives of parents and the development of children in diverse cultural contexts and show that many families are impacted long beyond the onset of stress exposure. Although the studies included several aspects of parenting behavior, the parent-child relationship, the co-parenting relationship, and child adjustment, there is room to expand on the lessons learned here to better inform policies and interventions for mitigating the negative impact on families, particularly in the developing child. This section briefly covers three areas suggested for future work that can build on the work from these four investigations. The goal of this research is ultimately to help families build resilience despite stressful and sometimes traumatic experiences. The three areas covered are both methodological and analytical, and include focusing on data collection timing, examining non-linear effects and probing interactions for regions of significance, and studying biological effects of community-level stress exposure on children and parents.

All four studies in this thesis included data collected by self-report. Studies I, II and IV included parent reports about themselves and their children, and child reports about parents. Study III did not include parent reports about child behavior, but included child reports about the parent-child relationship. In two of the studies (Studies II and IV), the data were analyzed over a three-year period, in some cases relying on retrospective reports of behavior, experiences, and mental health. In contrast, in Study III, data from the early childhood sample were collected using a daily diary study over a 14-day period. Although collecting data annually over a period of years is essential for discerning developmental effects and patterns, it reduces the possibility of providing
evidence of important within-subject change to practitioners who may have the ability to intervene “in the moment” when youth enter a moment of crisis. Further, self-report studies that ask participants to summarize experiences can be clouded by memory, with responses capturing only general ranges of emotion, behavior, and functioning over a given period (over the last 30 days, e.g.) as provided in the measure instructions. Alternately, ecological momentary assessment (EMA) has been shown to be a useful tool to capture within-person variability in a wide range of constructs including depression, anxiety, substance use, and suicidal ideation over even a short period of time, with generally high participation rates (Forkman et al., 2018; Shiffman, 2009). EMA capitalizes on pervasive use of technology, such as smart phones, to conduct brief, moment-by-moment assessments of experiences, affect, and behavior, often multiple times a day over a relatively short time, typically from several days up to a few weeks. Participants, for example, might be expected to respond to a text survey or notification from an app on their smart phone for a few minutes upon waking, in the late afternoon, and before bedtime. Variability can be observed both within- and between-persons. In applying EMA to studies of community-wide stressors, researchers could gain valuable information about moment-to-moment variability in how feelings or experiences may lead to aggressive behavior and more efficiently target interventions to help youth avoid those situations or develop the self-regulatory skills to counteract them.

As reviewed earlier in this thesis (see Community Stressors and Coping), research about stress response and resilience in the context of violence and acculturative stress shows clear associations between stress exposure and problematic youth adjustment. However, many of the studies examining direct effects describe primarily linear relations, and moderation testing often assumes that interaction effects hold at all levels of the predictor within the range of those measured. Further research and emerging statistical techniques allow testing not only for curvilinear relations, but also for regions of significance.
For example, it is possible that individuals (both parents and children) can withstand dosages of stress exposure up to a point before parenting or adjustment is affected (Masten, 2015; Masten & Narayan, 2012), which may lead to flat or gently sloping relations between stressor and adjustment at low levels of exposure, followed by a steep slope in higher levels of exposure. A response ceiling, or exhaustion effect, is another possible explanation for curvilinear relations between exposure and adjustment (Masten, 2015). That is, beyond a certain level of stress exposure, no significantly greater negative effects are evident than those already seen. Future research involving the exploration of moderating effects between exposure and adjustment would also benefit from the inclusion of region of significance testing regarding the moderator (Preacher et al., 2003). The region of significance “defines the specific values of the moderator at which the slope of the regression of [the outcome] on the focal predictor transitions from non-significance to significance” (Preacher et al., 2003, p. 5). The region of significance may fall between an upper and lower bound—and be non-significant below the lower bound and beyond the upper bound—or the significant 2-way interactions may occur only below the lower bound and beyond the upper bound. Both possibilities are theoretically possible in studies of stress exposure and adjustment. For example, it is possible that children exposed to sudden and acute sectarian violence show strong associations between dosage and adjustment at low levels of exposure, and very high levels of exposure, particularly if such exposure is unusual during their lifetime, but relatively flat levels of response at the points in between, if such exposure becomes normalized among peers in their community.

The last area for consideration encourages researchers to study biological effects of stress on individuals across time, context, and culture. These biological effects can be seen in research involving measurement of cortisol levels, epigenetic research, emotion regulation, and immune function. Exposure to violence, for example, even for children with no history of child maltreatment or
documented mental health problems, was linked to decreased cortisol reactivity in boys one year later (Peckins et al., 2012). Both attenuated and elevated cortisol reactivity can be maladaptive for children, as each indicates poor emotional regulation. Beginning with Hans Selye in 1936, medical and social science research has long documented “stress response” effects evident in the body. As Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model suggests (see *Theoretical Perspectives*), children are continually engaged in transactional interactions with both individuals in their lives (parents, peers, e.g.) and their broader cultural context. Each of these levels of influence could impact epigenetic changes in biological functioning as a reaction to stress. Using salivary DNA as an age predictor, for example, researchers found that children exposed to neighborhood violence were predicted to be older than their chronological age, and had lower heart rates, similar to those usually found in adults (Jovanovic et al., 2017), documenting an epigenetic association between violence exposure at the community level and child maladaptation.

While outside the scope of this thesis, the above three suggestions for methodological and statistical enhancements to future research would also benefit research about community-wide stressors beyond exposure to violence and acculturative stress. The unfolding of the SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19) pandemic in 2020 has instigated a worldwide effort to understand the impact of the pandemic on children and families. Research about the pandemic shares many common characteristics with the subject matter of this thesis, including its primary aim, to understand the associations between exposure to community-wide stressors, parenting, and child adjustment across cultural contexts. In a study using data from five countries in the Parenting Across Cultures project, we found that higher levels of self-reported pandemic-related disruption were related to reported increases in internalizing and externalizing behavior in young adults and their mothers across nearly all reporters and sites. Further, positive parenting, youth disclosure, and lower levels of destructive parent-
adolescent conflict measured three years prior to the pandemic onset buffered associations between disruption and changes in adjustment in young adults and mothers (Skinner et al., 2021). Integrating the above three analytical and methodological recommendations with self-report data would also enhance work being done to identify risk factors for maladjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic and other community-wide stressors.

**Policy Implications**

Living in an acute or chronic risk condition – as described in the first three studies in this thesis – is associated with uncertainty and unpredictability. Such uncertainty makes it even more important for public agencies to be a steady influence, ready to support families. In high-risk areas, open communication about planning and services, like access to physical and mental health services, education, food, and supportive economic resources, is conducive to better recovery following natural disasters (Whiteford et al., 2013), and these same supportive efforts apply to other community-wide stressors. Support during recovery, even in the face of long, horrific, traumatic exposure to and forced participation in violence is also predictive of resilience (Klasen et al., 2010). The first three studies in this thesis reveal a path forward in developing a community response: Supportive and healthy parenting is important to attenuate the negative effects of stressors because effects may be long term, and the parent-child relationship can be a stable one over time. As unpredictable situations fluctuate around them, children look to parents for guidance and support. First, however, parents must be able to provide that support and possess the skills and knowledge to nurture the parent-child relationship. One step in that process is for parents not to feel they are facing life’s stressors alone, either in their coparenting relationship or in their feelings of emotional and physical security in their community. It is not hard to imagine how living in a dangerous
responders, workplace support services (human resources, e.g.) and medical community, or being exposed to a new culture, language, and unfamiliar social, employment, and economic systems can quickly lead to feelings of insecurity. Community level support through public agencies can help reduce the need for clinical services later and impact communities positively over time due to less strain on acute-care resources.

Trauma informed care. One way communities can assist in attenuating the relation between community-level stressors and parent and child maladaptation is by taking a preventative approach. Trauma informed care systems have been shown to buffer the negative impact of stressors on children and families. Further, trauma informed practices recognize that individuals who choose to work in helping professions are at high risk for experiencing compassion fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and stress (Rosanbalm et al., 2020). Training those who are most likely to interact with children and families on a day-to-day basis for long periods of time, rather than only during moments of crisis, means that compassionate and supportive interpersonal relationships can be the starting point for noticing when a child or family is in the early stages of adjustment difficulties. School personnel, law enforcement, first personnel are all in a position to benefit from trauma informed training. When responding to a community-wide stressor like a natural disaster, recovery efforts tend to be widely accepted. In these cases, because people in the community are primed to receive such support and because an entire, collective community is experiencing acute hardship, interventions may more often be viewed as wanted and needed. Yet, acculturative stress and violence exposure do not share that benefit, especially as time extends from the stressor. At worst, those experiencing the stressor are sometimes blamed for its existence, as is the case when immigrant groups experience discrimination. Trauma informed care means that agencies such as schools are first trained in understanding the impact of trauma on behavior and are then trained in how to develop and maintain a warm and
nurturing environment, enhance positive relationships with children, and teach self-regulation and co-regulation skills (Murray et al., 2019).

Sharing empirical evidence across studies. At first look, diving deeply into siloed studies of seemingly unique events such as post-election violence in Kenya, or immigrant psychological acculturation may not seem to be generalizable much beyond one community, but there is much to be gained in examining stressors that impact families at both an individual and community level. When we carefully examine events like the Kenyan post-election violence, for example, we can better contextualize results beyond a single, discrete event or study. Examining single-country or single-group events and effects gives us a lens by which to view potential “outliers” in other research. In a study examining parents’ perceived acceptance-rejection and child adjustment across the nine countries, measurement invariance testing found the Kenyan sample to be less stable over a two-year period (Putnick et al., 2015), which coincided with the period of intense sectarian violence described in Study II. Thus, the work conducted in Study II provided some explanation for later findings in acceptance-rejection work that seemed unique compared to the other countries studied, particularly in parent-child relationship quality. We can also apply what we have learned about parenting during traumatic events to other situations, like the COVID-19 pandemic, but need to be careful not to assume that trajectories of parenting, coping, and child adjustment will follow paths identical to those traced in this thesis.

A family approach to mental health services. Finally, while critical to study, we cannot be myopically focused only on child mental health outcomes in response to stressors. Because families and communities are interconnected systems, we must continue to support and assess parent mental health and positive parenting during stressful circumstances because parenting can both explain and moderate the relation between stress exposure, emotional security, and child adjustment. More inclusive approaches such as multisystemic therapy
(see Henggeler, 1999 for overview) and family preservation services (Jordan et al., 2001) are examples of empirically-based interventions that reduce the compartmentalization of intervention services.
Conclusion

Being part of a cultural group or community provides physical and emotional protective effects, like safety, security, and belonging. Yet clashes over culture and ethnic identity are also far too often the sparks that ignite wars, perpetuate pervasive individual and institutionalized discrimination, and foment violence, with children often paying the highest price (Masten, 2015). Across time, developmental ages, and cultures, children’s aggression and other externalizing behaviors can be predicted in part by their exposure to community-wide stressful life events like exposure to violence or acculturative stress. The ability to predict child adjustment from such stressors, however, includes not only an examination of the stressor itself (dosage, intensity, e.g.), but also of parenting and parental coping. Child effects are also dependent upon or are explained by changes in parenting behavior and the parent-child relationship, which are also predicted by exposure to the stressor. The interconnectedness of parents, children, communities, and culture is seen around the world and is grounded in parents’ and children’s emotional security in the co-parenting relationship, the parent-child relationship, and feelings of safety and security in the community. Community responses to community stressors, in the form of trauma informed care and more comprehensive—rather than siloed—services to families can help build resilience in children and families.
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Appendices


