Changing the Odds:
Understanding and Changing the Effects of Material Hardship on Parenting

Define Poverty

- Poverty:
  - defined as a chronic and debilitating condition that results from multiple adverse synergistic risk factors
  - affects the mind, body, and soul
- Poverty is complex
  - it does not mean the same thing for all people

Types of Poverty

- Situational poverty
  - generally caused by a sudden crisis or loss
  - often temporary
  - Events causing situational poverty include environmental disasters, divorce, or severe health problems.
- Generational poverty
  - occurs in families where at least two generations have been born into poverty
  - not equipped with the tools to move out of their situations
  - *** the longer the exposure to hardship, the more negative the outcome for children
- Absolute poverty
  - rare in the United States
  - involves a scarcity of such necessities as shelter, running water, and food
  - tend to focus on day-to-day Survival.

Types of Poverty

- Relative poverty
  - refers to the economic status of a family whose income is insufficient to meet its society's average standard of living
- Urban poverty
  - occurs in metropolitan areas with populations of at least 50,000 people
  - complex aggregate of chronic and acute stressors
    - crowding, violence, and noise
    - dependent on often inadequate large-city services.
- Rural poverty
  - occurs in nonmetropolitan areas with populations below 50,000.
  - more Single-guardian households
  - less access to services, support for disabilities, and quality education opportunities

What is Material Hardship?

- An additional layer to poverty and economic hardship
- How well individuals meet basic needs
- Includes households that do not consume minimal levels of very basic goods and services
  - Food
  - Housing
  - Medical care

Material Hardship and Culture

Table 1.2. The Culture of Material Hardship

- Families reside in poor neighborhoods
- Few material resources or stimulating activities for children
- Limited access to high-quality child care
- Poor schools where achievement is chronically low
- Parents speak a dialect of English differing substantially from that used in schools
- Extensive health problems
- Limited social capital
- Threats/violence

What does Material Hardship Mean for Families?

- Focus on the *process* by which material hardship effects families
- Family Stress Model
  - Effects of family income on children are mediated through its effects on parents
  - Stress of raising a family on low income and limited resources negatively affects parent's mental health and behavior, and in turn negatively effects children
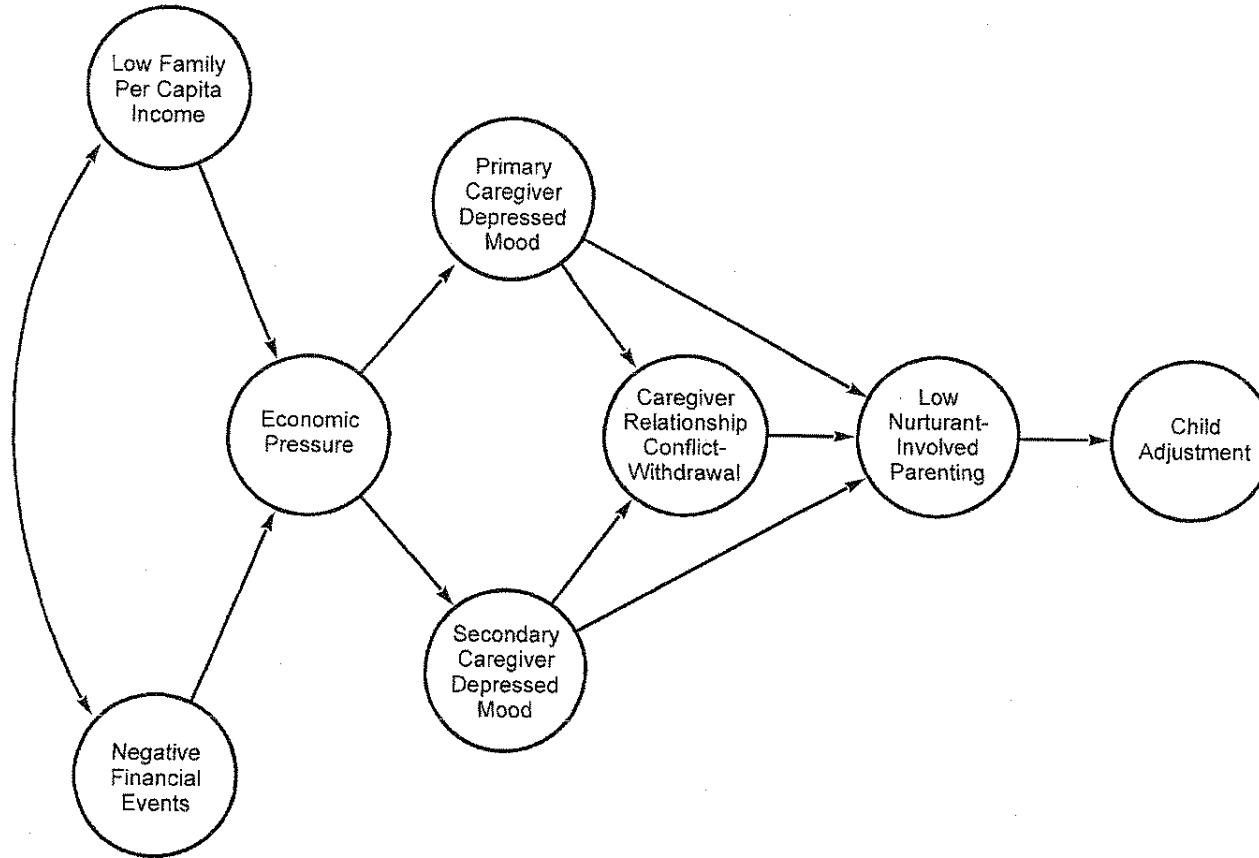
Family Stress Model

Figure 1. The family stress model.

Material Hardship and its Effects

- Economic stress restricts parents ability to invest money/time in children (parent investment model)
  - Parents have to decide how to allocate a range of resources, including money, time, energy…
  - Exposed to fewer enriching materials and experiences

- Parental stress leads to:
  - Marital conflict
  - Depression in the parent
    - withdrawal of the parent from the child
    - Hostility toward the child by the parent

Material Hardship Culture

- Children living in poverty
  - tend to spend less time finding out about the world around them and more time struggling to survive within it
  - have fewer and less-supportive networks than their more affluent counterparts do
  - live in neighborhoods that are lower in social capital
  - as adolescents are more likely to rely on peers than on adults for social and emotional support.
  - have fewer cognitive-enrichment opportunities
    - fewer books at home
    - visit the library less often
    - spend considerably more time watching TV
    - Less time playing outdoors

Material Hardship Culture

- chaotic, unstable households
- more single-guardian homes
  - strained resources
  - correlates directly with
    - poor school attendance
    - lower grades
    - lower chances of attending college
- parents or caregivers tend to be less emotionally responsive
  - disengaged
  - difficulty focusing on the needs of the children

Material Hardship Culture

- Authoritarian parenting style
- Harsh demands
- Less verbal give and take
- Inflict physical punishment
  - spanking
  - One study found that blue collar parents were twice as likely to use physical punishment with their 7-year-olds as white-collar parents
- In another study, poor children were more likely to report incidences of abuse
  - (1.52) times more likely to report physical neglect
  - (1.83) times more likely to report sexual abuse
  - Abuse occurs with much higher frequency
    - when the parents use alcohol or drugs
    - experience an array of stressful life events
    - live in decrepit, crime-ridden neighborhoods
    - limited social support networks

Material Hardship and Attachment

- Stress of material hardship culture affects attunement between parent and child
- Stress leads to ineffective parenting strategies
  - Overworked, stressed, authoritarian
  - Education is substandard
  - Time is short
  - Warm emotions are at a premium
  - All put relationships at risk, fail to form healthy attachments

Material Hardship and Mental Health

- Children from impoverished homes develop psychiatric disturbances and maladaptive social functioning at a greater rate than their affluent counterparts
  - are more likely to have social conduct problems
  - research shows that poverty is a major predictor or teenage depression
  - Parents are not equipped to handle these challenges
    - a study of negative emotionality and maternal support found that low-income parents were less able than were well-off parents to adjust their parenting to the demands of higher-needs children

Material Hardship and Mental Health

- Low-income parents are often
  - overwhelmed by diminished self-esteem
  - depressed
  - feeling powerless
  - unable to cope with feelings that may get passed along to their children in the form of insufficient nurturing, negativity, and a general failure to focus on children's needs
    - stress of poverty ↑ depression rates among mothers which results in ↑ use of physical punishment.
    - As income ↓ disciplinary actions grow harsher

Hardship and Parenting

- A number of studies suggest family processes are often what mediate the relationship between hardship and child outcomes
    - Processes such as parents' psychological distress; spousal conflict; and parenting behaviors
    - For example, adverse child outcomes produced indirectly through the effects on father's psychological functioning and parenting behaviors
    - Distress associated with hardship undermines the capacity for effective parenting

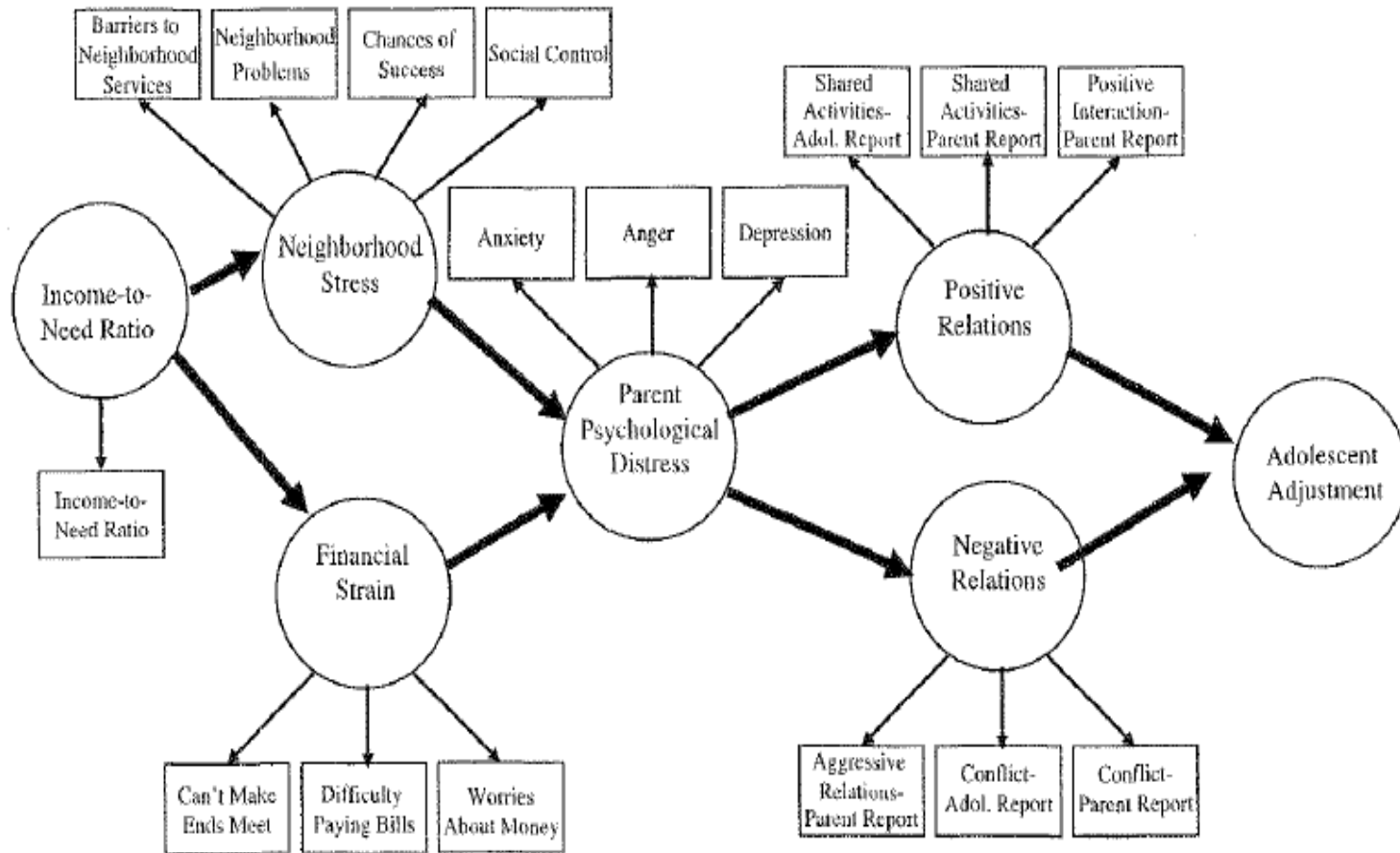# Hardship, Parenting Stress, Child Outcome

FIGURE 1   Theoretical model linking financial strain, neighborhood stress, parenting behavior, and adolescent adjustment.
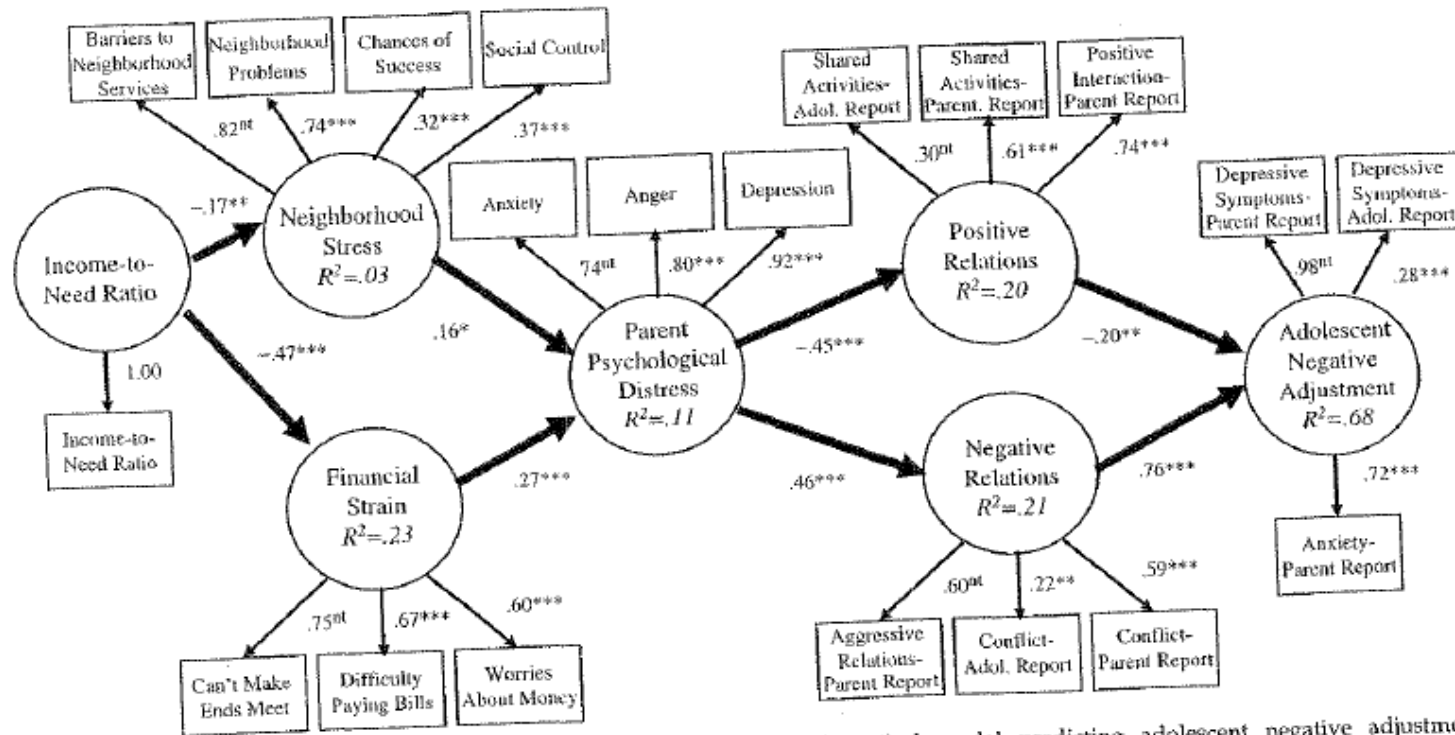
Hardship, Parenting Stress, Child Outcome

FIGURE 3   Full-information maximum-likelihood estimation of the theoretical model predicting adolescent negative adjustment. $\chi^2(163) = 252.70$; comparative fit index = .99; root mean square error of approximation = .04. $*p < .05$. $**p < .01$. $***p < .001$.

Hardship and Parental Perception

FIGURE 3. RESULTS OF STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL RELATING ECONOMIC RESOURCES AND PERCEIVED ECONOMIC STRESS IN THE FAMILY OF ORIGIN TO OFFSPRING'S PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN ADULTHOOD
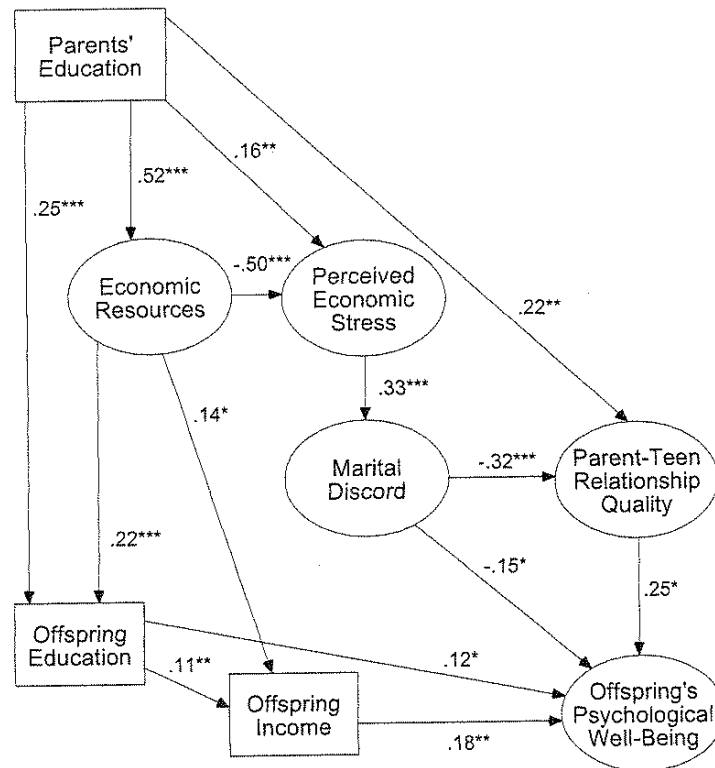
Chi-square = 253.24, df = 129, GFI = .96, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .04.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Hardship and Parental Perception

- A low level of economic resources can trigger a cascade of events and processes in family of origin with problematic consequences for children

- Lack of economic resources = risk factors for children

- Degree of risk depends on whether parents view their situation as stressful and whether economic stress spills over and interferes with general family relationships

Hardship and Fathering

- Adverse child outcomes produced indirectly through negative effects on father's psychological functioning and parenting behaviors
  - Irritability, tense, rejecting, and inconsistent in discipline
  - Men's identities more strongly affected by financial strain
  - Men more likely to become hostile and withdrawn
  - Only stressor that had greater impact on mood for men was economic hardship

What happens to kids?

- Compared with their more affluent peers, children in material hardship culture
  - form more stress-ridden attachments with parents, teachers, and adult caregivers
  - have difficulty establishing rewarding friendships with children their own age
  - more likely to believe that their parents are uninterested in their activities
  - receive less positive reinforcement from teachers
  - less homework help from babysitters
  - and to experience more turbulent or unhealthy friendships

What happens to kids?

- Poverty and its attendant risk factors are damaging to children
  - Physically
  - Socio-emotionally
  - Cognitively
  - Overall well-being
    - 40 percent of children living in chronic poverty had deficiencies in at least two areas of functioning at age 3

What Happens to Kids?

Chronic stress associated with material hardship:

- is linked to over 50 percent of all absences at school
- impairs attention and concentration
- reduces cognition, creativity, and memory
- diminishes social skills and social judgment
- reduces motivation, determination, and effort
- increases the likelihood of depression
- reduces neurogenesis (growth of new brain cells)

How do the brains of Children from Poverty Differ?

Assessment of Neurocognitive Systems

- *Left perisylvian language system*

  associated with language processes, such as lexical-semantic knowledge, grammar reception, and phonological awareness;

- *Parietal-spatial cognition system*

  associated with spatial cognition processing;

How do the brains of Children from Poverty Differ?

Assessment of Neurocognitive Systems

- *Medial temporal declarative memory system*

    related to the ability to form new memories without any strategic effort to learn;

- *Lateral-orbital-medial prefrontal systems*

    associated with attention, spatial working memory, inhibitory control, theory of mind, set-shifting, and reward processing; and

- *Occipitotemporal-pattern vision system*

    involved in pattern perception and visualization from memory

How do the brains of Children from Poverty Differ?

Findings

- SES background differences were associated with performance disparities
  - Language systems (SD=1)
  - executive function systems (SD=.05)
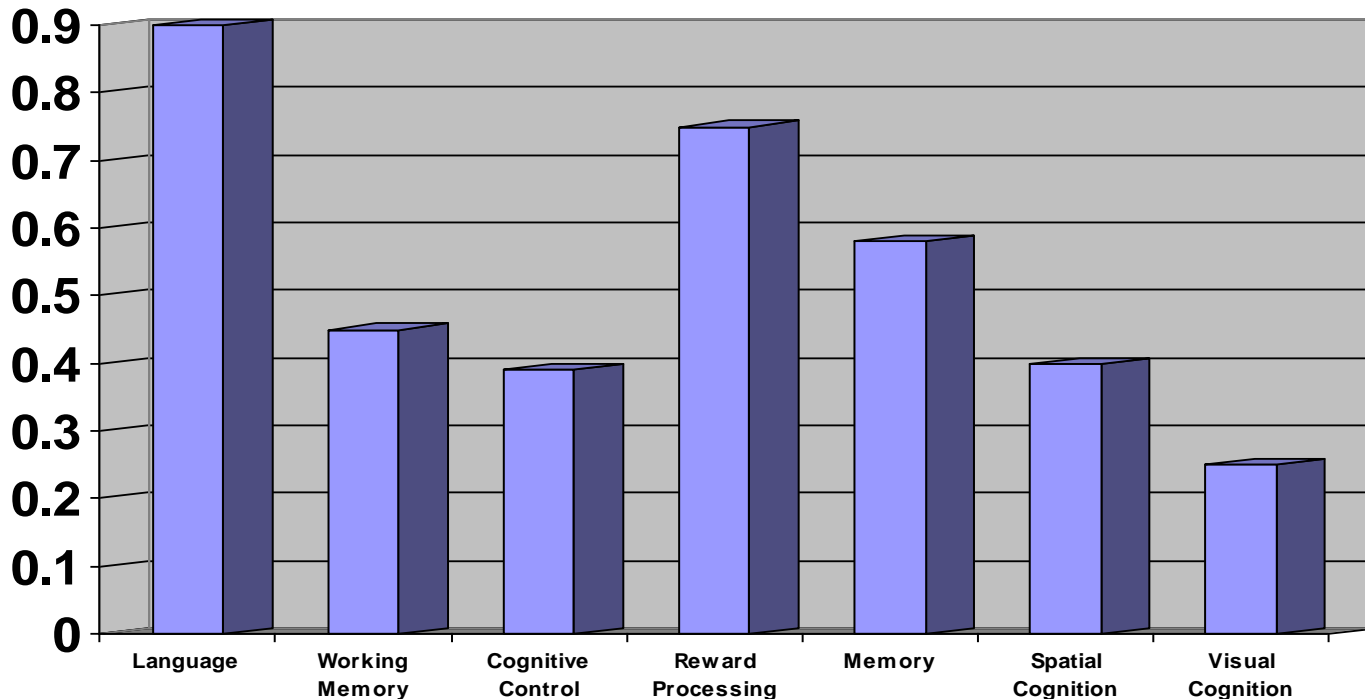 - Working memory
  - Cognitive control

How do the brains of Children from Poverty Differ?

Findings

- Hypothesis:
  - Language and executive systems showed the greatest performance gaps across SES because both cognitive mechanisms are involved in processes that have been shown to undergo a more protracted course of maturation than has been observed in other neural areas

How do the brains of Children from Poverty Differ?

Effect size differences in cognitive functions

Measured in Standard Deviations (SD)

of separation between low and middle income 5-year-olds

How do the brains of Children from Poverty Differ?

- ***Noble, McCandliss, & Farah, 2007***
  - language skills, visual spatial skills memory, working memory, cognitive control, and reward processing
  - SES accounted for more than 30% of variance in language systems, more than other systems
  - Longer developmental period leaves brain susceptible to influences (in vivo vs. in utero)

- **Weizman & Snow, 2001:**
  - Lower income families have different language patterns
  - Less back and forth, more directive, shorter, simpler sentences
  - Fewer questions asked and answered
  - More limited range of language abilities in children from lower SES homes

Hardship and Executive Skills

- Executive tasks: working memory, inhibitory control, flexibility, and planning processes
  - Children from homes with material and economic hardship had:
    - fewer correct trials
    - More preservative in tasks tapping working memory, Inhibitory control and Set-shifting processing
    - Lower scores in visuospatial and planning tasks

Hardship and Language Development

- 36% of low SES parents read to their Kindergarten children daily compared to 62% of upper income parents
- 45 million words vs. 15 million words
- Difference in school readiness scores (National Household Survey):
  - Lower income children:
    - Twice as likely to have poor attention span
    - 3 x as many will speak with difficulty (stammering, stuttering)
    - 5 x as many will be in poor health
    - Only a small fraction show signs of emerging literacy and small motor skills for writing
    - Grammatical development and arithmetic word problems were negatively affected by low SES

Hardship and Language Development

Table 1.3. Beginning Kindergarten Students' School Readiness Skills by Socioeconomic Status (SES)

	Lowest SES	Highest SES
• Recognizes letters of the alphabet	39%	85%
• Identifies initial sounds of words	10%	51%
• Identifies primary colors	69%	90%
• Counts to 20	48%	68%
• Writes own name	54%	76%
• Hours read to before kindergarten	25	1,000
• Accumulated experience with words	13 million	45 million

Source: S. B. Neuman, "From rhetoric to reality: The case for high-quality compensatory prekindergarten programs," *Kappan* 85 (2003): 286–291.

Hardship and School Readiness

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development/Early Child Care Research Network

- Impact of poverty on timing of child development
  - Children who lived in chronically poor homes had worst effects
    - Language
    - School readiness
    - Standardized tests (e.g. CBCL, Woodcock-Johnson)
    - More externalizing and internalizing behaviors as rated by teachers and parents
    - Children between ages 4-9 had less favorable outcomes than children whose families had been poor only during the first three years

Hardship and Language Development

- Children use words to develop important conceptual understandings

- language actually drives cognition, with words standing for increasingly sophisticated ideas

- Children use the natural medium of language to do their thinking

Hardship and Language Development

- Children use language to learn about the world around them
- Parents play a direct role in language development
- However, it's not only what parents say that matters ~it's also what they do.
- Middle-class parents build routines in their children's worlds
  - grocery shopping, visiting the library, eating out at restaurants
  - Within each of these settings, a set of oral language scripts develops-predictable language sequences conditioning children to anticipate what comes next and to know how to act, becoming almost second nature to children.

Hardship and Language Development

- Even at these very early ages, parents are exposing children through everyday routines to a repertoire of behaviors and accompanying social conventions associated with learning
  - Examples: library, school, grocery

Hardship and Language Development

- logic of "concerted cultivation" in middle class parents
  - deliberate and sustained efforts by parents to stimulate their children's development and to cultivate their cognitive and social skills
  - Includes reading activities or the use of language to expose a child to the subtleties of a routine

Hardship and Language Development

- Together, these routines and activities begin to build a set of mental models, or structures that children use to anticipate events, reason, and gain new information ~ part of a foundation for moral reasoning and empathy
  - Think of children who know how to start a story or end it – mental model of a story
  - Parents encourage verbal give-and-take, sharing their reasoning behind decisions and soliciting their child's objections when he or she refuses to conform
  - While setting demanding standards of contact, they'll offer freedom with responsibility, always careful never to hem children in with too many restrictions

Relationtionships and Moral Development

Ben Kearney, Ph.D.

Kolberg and Moral Development

- focused on how children and adolescents make judgment, about conflicts, in hypothetical situations, around issues of life, interpersonal obligations, trust, law, authority, and retribution

- six stages, depicting a progression of judgments

- Stages 1 and 2, grouped into a "preconventional" level, were primarily based on obedience, punishment avoidance, and instrumental need and exchange

Kolberg and Moral Development

- Stages 3 and 4, grouped into a "conventional" level, were based on role obligations, stereotypical conceptions of good persons, and respect for the rules and authority legitimated in the social system.
- Stages 5 and 6, grouped into a "postconventional" level, were based on contractual agreements, established procedural arrangements for adjudicating conflicts, mutual respect, and differentiated concepts of justice and rights.

Empathy Development-- Hoffman

- Empathy--determined by changing cognitive capabilities.
- stage 1: "global" distress
  - felt by infants (during the first year) entailing a confusion of the infant's own feelings with those of another.
- stage 2: "egocentric" empathy (age of 1 year)
  - the onset of object permanence allows for an awareness that other people arc physically distinct from the self and a concern ("sympathetic distress") with another person who is in distress.

Empathy Development--Hoffman

- role taking emerges at about 2 or 3 years of age

  – a differentiation of the child's own feelings from those of others.

- Stage 3: empathy for another's feelings,"

  – children are responsive to cues about the other person's feelings and empathize with a range of emotions other than distress (e.g., disappointment, feelings of betrayal)

Empathy Development-- Hoffman

- Stage 4: "empathy for another's life conditions"
  - emerging in late childhood
  - The relevant social cognitions are children's awareness of self and others with separate identities.
  - allow for awareness that others feel pleasure and pain in their general life experiences.
  - empathy is felt in particular situations, as well as for more general life circumstances of others or of groups of people (e.g., the poor or the oppressed).

Anxiety and empathy-- Kochanska

- Reactions of sympathy and empathy contribute to the process of development, but they do so through the anxiety and distress they can arouse in a child.

- Kochanska --the bidirectional conceptualizations of relationships remain within the context of a conception of conscience or morality as the internalization of values, norms, and behaviors established by parents.

- Anxiety, fearfulness, and arousal underlie the affective component of conscience, and impulsivity and inhibition are related to behavioral control..

Anxiety and Conscience-- Kochanska

- conscience as regulation due to internalization marking successful socialization

- "the gradual developmental shift from external to internal regulation that results in the child's ability to conform to societal standards of conduct and to restrain antisocial or destructive impulses, even in the absence of surveillance"

- Moreover, the formation of conscience is functional from the societal perspective: "Without reliance on internalized consciences, societies would have to instill ever-present surveillance in all aspects of social life" (

Emotions and Morality-- Weissbourd

- The emotions are at the root of our moral beliefs and behavior.

- positive emotions such as empathy, admiration, and affection propel our caring and generosity, certain painful emotions are vital to our morality

- Emotions such as shame, guilt, and fear protect us as a society -to avoid shame and guilt, we follow moral standards and rules, refrain from aggression, cruelty, arrogance, greed. These emotions are also the engines of moral learning: they can generate more refined and complex moral beliefs.

Emotions and Morality-- Weissbourd

- two painful emotions that are especially troubling:

- shame, an acute feeling of unworthiness and embarrassment,

- the fear of disapproval and isolation
  - parents are obsessed with their children's happiness and are working hard to protect their children's positive emotional states, they are unknowingly fueling precisely these two negative emotions.

Emotions and Morality-- Weissbourd

- narcissism -a troubling brew of arrogance, a sense of entitlement, and an inability to empathize
- narcissism is rooted in early experiences of humiliation—a defense against overwhelming shame

Emotions and Morality-- Weissbourd

- Guilt vs. Shame
  - Guilt is the self-reproach we experience when we violate an inner standard
    - Drives a the need to atone
    - insists on and often reveals solutions.
  - Shame being ashamed about who one is, and especially by the perception that our defects have been exposed and are seen by a real or imagined audience
    - corroding appreciation and moral motivation and expressing itself destructively

Emotions and Morality—Robert Karen

- Infuse Shame
  - if we don't teach children manners
  - if we inflate children's importance
  - If we fail to see or curb obnoxious traits
  - when we give children's impulses too much rein
  - when we give children too much power to make choices they are not prepared to make
  - When we criticize not just a behavior, but some core, self-defining, immutable trait-
    - that their child is not pretty enough, or smart enough, or as nice as another child down the block.

Emotions and Morality—Robert Karen (cont.)

- Infuse Shame
  - When parents define happiness narrowly and rigidly and satiate children's every need in terms of it
  - when parents define happiness in terms of material satisfaction
  - then make a big show of gratifying these needs

Emotions and Morality—Robert Karen (cont.)

- Infuse Shame
  - when parents are threatened by their children's feelings and weaknesses.
  - Some parents are swamped with guilt over neglecting their children
  - Often children's negative feelings resonate with parents' own unresolved, troubling feelings or are dissonant with what parents expect their child to be or of how they expect their family to function

building Morality--Weissbourd

- 1. The self becomes stronger and more mature less by being praised than by being known. That means that it's important that our interactions with our children generally reflect our knowledge of them.
  - not a steady stream of description
  - Key, deep empathic knowledge

building Morality--Weissbourd

- 2. Children come to be reflective and self-critical

  - By encouraging their self-observations and modeling for them honest self-reflection

  - by dealing insightfully and candidly with our own flaws

building Morality--Weissbourd

- 3. When we demonstrate a capacity to change a troubling behavior as a result of our self-reflections or as a result feedback, we model a vital aspect of maturity

building Morality--Weissbourd

- 4. Among the many ways that children learn to deal with difficult feelings such as frustration and anger is when we model the appropriate expression of these emotions and don't let our own frustration and anger corrode our relationships with our children.

building Morality--Weissbourd

- 5. children learn to control hostile feelings toward others, as well as coordinate their needs with others is by developing the ability to take a third-person perspective, stepping outside a relationship and looking back at it.

Keys

- Attunement—empathy—skill development
- Confront insensitivity sensitively
- Self awareness—gentility is the key!
- Goodness is more important than happiness!
- Know your own morals and values!! You are teaching morals and values no matter what!

Moral Relationships

- better police siblings or other adults who are bent on humiliation
- Whenever possible, we should reprimand or discipline children privately-punishing or embarrassing children in front of others can easily overwhelm them with shame
- we can pick up warning signs that our children feel too much shame, such as high sensitivity to slights or insults of any kind.

Moral Relationships

- This sensitivity should inform our discipline strategies-sometimes simply raising our voice~ for instance, can induce significant shame.

- We can, too, work to pause and take a reflective stance when our children are struggling with difficult feelings. Rather than seeking to solve the problem immediately, we can start by being curious and collecting information.

Praise

- Children also tend to know when they have really accomplished something and when they have not
- too much unconditional praise or frequent praise that is connected to tiny achievements can create self-doubts and cynicism about adults

Praise

- When children are praised all the time, they can also feel judged all the time-they may feel that their competence is always on the line, making them vulnerable to shame and other negative self-assessments

- too much praise can hook children on praise -children can start to require higher and higher doses of compliments

Skills of Emotional Competence

- 1. Awareness of one's emotional state, including the possibility that one is experiencing multiple emotions, and at even more mature levels, awareness that one might also not be consciously aware of one's emotions due to unconscience dynamics or selective inattention.

- 2. Skill in discerning others' emotions, based on situational and expressive cues that have some degree of cultural consensus as to their emotional meaning.

Skills of Emotional Competence

- 3. Skill in using the vocabulary of emotion and expression terms commonly available in one's subculture and at more mature levels, skill in acquiring cultural scripts that link emotion with social roles.

- 4. Capacity for empathic and sympathetic involvement in others' emotional experiences.

Skills of Emotional Competence

- 5. Skill in understanding that inner emotional state need not correspond to outer expression, both in oneself and in others, and at more mature levels, understanding that one's emotional-expressive behavior may impact on another and to take this into account in one s self-presentation strategies.

- 6. Skill in adaptive coping with aversive emotions and distressing circumstances by using self-regulatory strategies that ameliorate the intensity or temporal duration of such emotional states (e.g., stress hardiness) and by employing effective problem-solving strategies for dealing with problematic situations.

Skills of Emotional Competence

- 7. Awareness that the structure or nature of relationships is largely defined by how emotions are communicated in the relationship such as by the degree of emotional immediacy or genuineness of expressive display and by the degree of emotional reciprocity or symmetry in the relationship (e.g., mature intimacy is in part defined by mutual or reciprocal sharing of genuine emotions, but a parent-child relationship may have asymmetric sharing of genuine emotions).

Skills of Emotional Competence

- 8. Capacity for emotional self-efficacy: The individual views her-or himself as feeling, overall, the way he or she wants to feel. Emotional self-efficacy means that one accepts one's emotional experience, whether unique and eccentric or culturally conventional, and this acceptance is in alignment with the individual's beliefs about what constitutes desirable emotional balance.