### Introduction
- The family systems perspective theories that the quality of the marital relationship is connected to parenting experiences in meaningful ways.
- Actor-Partner Interdependence Models (Cook & Kenny, 2005) provide a unique perspective into relationships because they use dyads, such as married couples, as the unit of analysis. The model allows for examination of how an individual’s experiences and well-being affect both their own outcomes (actor effect) as well as their partners outcomes (partner effect).
- Expressed emotion in five minute speech samples provides a method for assessing warmth and criticism toward a child or spouse and has been shown to be associated with these qualities in actual interactions (Beck, Hastings, Daley, & Stevenson, 2004; Hastings et al., 2006).
- The current study aims to take a family systems perspective to investigate the cross-over between spouses expressed warmth and criticism towards their child and marital outcomes as well as their expressed warmth and criticism towards their spouse and parenting outcomes, as the family systems perspective suggests that all features and relationships in a family will affect the system as a whole, translating to an impact on other features and relationships in the family system.

### Study Aims
1) Examine how one’s own (i.e., actor) and one’s partner’s level of warmth and criticism in a five minute speech sample about their child with ASD relates to their level of marital quality.
2) Examine how one’s own (i.e. actor) and one’s partner’s level of warmth and criticism in a five minute speech sample about their spouse relates to their level of parenting stress.

### Methods
- **Participants**: 79 married couples aged 25-65 years (M = 43.34 years, SD = 8.08) that have a child with ASD aged 3-20 years (M = 11.84 years, SD = 4.9; 77% male; 38% ID)
  - 93.9% Caucasian, non-Hispanic
  - 65.2% Bachelor’s degree or higher
  - Relationship length: 2-33 years (M = 18.63 years, SD = 7.38)
  - Household income: $20K-$160K (M=$80K; SD = $30K)
- **Measures**
  - Warmth and Criticism: number of comments from five minute speech samples, one about one’s child and one about one’s spouse (Magaña et al., 1986)
  - Example comment indicating warmth: “He works hard and, in a very selfless way, to take care of us and make sure that everybody has what they need. I mean, he’s generous with his time and with his energy.”
  - Mother of child with ASD about her spouse
  - Example comment indicating criticism: “She is not affectionate, and sometimes insensitive to how I might feel about things in a way where there’s times where I just feel that she doesn’t care about my feelings in situations.”
- **Marital Satisfaction**:
  - Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959)
  - Example: “Do you confide in your mate?” (almost never, rarely, in most things, in everything)
- **Parenting Stress**:
  - Burden Interview (Piburd; Zarit, Reever, & Bach-Peterson, 1980)
  - Example: “Do you feel embarrassed about your child’s behavior?” (never, rarely, sometimes, quite frequently, nearly always)

### Results

#### Study Aim 1: FMSS about Child and Marital Satisfaction
- Mothers Warmth About Child
  - 4.16
  - Mothers Marital Satisfaction
  - 1.70
- Fathers Warmth About Child
  - 1.70
  - Fathers Marital Satisfaction
  - 1.70

#### Study Aim 2: FMSS about Spouse and Parenting Stress
- Mothers Warmth About Spouse
  - 1.38
  - Mothers Parenting Stress
  - 0.21
- Fathers Warmth About Spouse
  - 0.21
  - Fathers Parenting Stress
  - 0.21

### Discussion
- The current study is one of few to investigate the connections between the marital relationship and the parent-child relationship in families of children with ASD.
- **Focus on Actor Effects**: Results from this study give us a better sense of how the individual feelings and characteristics of parents effect family outcomes and functioning. Actor effects were found to be stronger predictors of well-being, as no significant partner effects were found in the association between warmth or criticism and marital satisfaction or parenting stress. Cognitive behavioral therapy or other forms of psychotherapy that focus on individual thoughts and behaviors may be beneficial to parents of children with ASD.
- **Focus on Warmth**: While warmth was significantly associated with higher marital satisfaction and lower parenting stress, no significant association was found between criticism and marital satisfaction or parenting stress. This finding suggests that supports for parents of children with ASD that aim to increase marital satisfaction and/or decrease parenting stress should focus on levels of warmth.

### Future Directions
- Future studies should examine potential differences between mothers and fathers levels of expressed warmth and criticism and the relationship to marital satisfaction and parenting stress. It may also be beneficial to include a comparison group of married couples of families of typically developing children or of children with other developmental disabilities.

### References

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**Actor-Partner Interdependence Model of Associations between Marital and Parent-Child Relationship Quality in Families of Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder**

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