

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY STUDIES

DISSERTATION DEFENSE FOR

MOLLY COUNTERMINE

**TITLE: CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND DETERMINANTS OF MATERNAL ADAPTATION TO INFANT SLEEP:
BIRTH TO SIX MONTHS**

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Area of Specialization: Development of Infant and parent sleep habits

ABSTRACT

Of the many decisions that parents make regarding child-rearing practices during the first six months of their infant's life, some of the most important involve the choices that surround infant sleep, including parent and infant sleep arrangements, bedtime routines, nighttime sleep practices, and the like. The present study investigated how these choices influence maternal adaptation, maternal emotional availability, maternal and infant sleep quality, co-parenting, spousal support, and maternal distress over the first six months of life. Mothers were asked to complete questionnaires regarding their infant's sleep behaviors and patterns, as well as their attitudes and feelings surrounding those behaviors. Additional measures included maternal and infant sleep quality via actigraphy and maternal emotional availability at bedtime. Data was collected on 120 mothers and infants at one month, 104 mothers and infants at three months, and 97 mothers and infants at six months. Maternal adaptation to infant sleep and maternal emotional availability at bedtime were both stable across the first six months. Maternal adaptation scores improved significantly across the first six months, but maternal emotional availability at bedtime did not. Maternal adaptation and maternal emotional availability at six months were both predicted by negative co-parenting at one and three months, such that mothers who reported more

conflict, competition, and undermining in their relationship with their partners were less well-adapted and less emotionally available to their infant at bedtime. Mothers of infants who woke up more frequently across the first three months were also less well-adapted at six months. Regarding sleep arrangements, mothers who slept in a separate room from their infant were more likely to be well-adapted to their infant's sleep patterns and more emotionally available at bedtime than mothers who slept in the same room as their infant, although this result was partially mediated by maternal reports of negative co-parenting. In a culture in which solitary infant sleep is mainstream, those parents who choose to share sleep with their infant may be faced with challenges above and beyond the many that already exist when adapting to life with an infant. Results emphasize the importance of taking into account both individual and contextual differences in the quality of mothers' adaptation to infant sleep behavior, a construct largely ignored in the child sleep literature to date, in understanding linkages between infant sleep patterns and maternal adaptation.