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Parenting Style Discrepancies: A Comparison of Inter-ethnic and Intra-ethnic Couples

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PARENTING STYLE DISCREPANCIES:

A COMPARISON OF INTER-ETHNIC AND INTRA-ETHNIC COUPLES

A Thesis Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

PARENTING STYLE DISCREPANCIES: A COMPARISON OF INTER-ETHNIC

AND INTRA-ETHNIC COUPLES

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Parenting and family interactions are thought to play a critical role in children's development and are often key targets in clinical interventions for children with behavioral problems. Multiple factors are thought to determine patterns of parenting behavior including child and parent characteristics as well as broader social and cultural factors (Abidin, 1992; Belsky, 1984; Maccoby, 1992). Because culture is thought to influence parenting, it is possible that inter-ethnic couples may experience a greater discrepancy than intra-ethnic couples in their parenting styles, but research considering the role of different cultural backgrounds and parenting has been sparse. The current study examined whether inter-ethnic couples showed greater differences in their parenting styles than couples in which parents were of the same ethnic background, and if so, whether consequences of discrepancy were reflected in children's behavior. Marital conflict and the number of years spent co-parenting were also examined as potential predictors of variability between couples. Results indicated no significant differences between inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic couples in parenting style, and no significant

associations between discrepancies in parenting style and child behavior. Marital conflict was found to be significantly associated with discrepancy in warmth for fathers in intra-ethnic relationships, in support for the spillover hypothesis (Margolin, 2001). This is the first study to examine parenting discrepancies between inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic couples. This research contributes to a growing understanding of the co-parenting relationship among inter-ethnic couples and has important clinical implications for family intervention with multi-cultural families.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Nearly one-third of marriages in the United States that include an Asian or

Hispanic partner cross ethnic-boundaries (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). With

approximately 4 million inter-ethnic marriages to date and projections indicating a

continuing trend (Cooney & Radina, 2000; Farley, 1997), it is increasingly important to

focus research efforts on the unique issues faced by multi-ethnic families. Unfortunately,

current literature does not reflect the pace at which this demographic shift is occurring.

Previous research has emphasized the need for more ethnic-specific research (Cote &

Bornstein, 2003; Killian, 2001; McClurg, 2004; McEvoy, Lee, O'Neill, Groisman,

Roberts-Butelman, Dinghra, & Porder, 2005), and while there has been a surge in

attention to minority groups in the United States, multicultural families remain

understudied.

Inter-ethnic couples

Although recent studies have acknowledged the dramatic increase in inter-ethnic

couples, research has tended to focus on factors influencing the rise of inter-ethnic

coupling (Gaines & Brennan, 2000; Killian, 2001; Rosenfeld & Kim, 2005) and on

attitudes toward inter-racial marriages (Model & Fisher, 2002; Watts & Henriksen,

1998). A smaller body of research has examined the relationship satisfaction of inter-

racial couples, and has found mixed results. Theory tends to support the idea that

opposing sociocultural contexts and different belief systems are likely to cause greater

conflict among inter-ethnic couples (Gaines & Agnew, 2003; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978;

Killian, 2002). Inter-ethnic and inter-racial couples have faced more historical adversity

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from society and are often stigmatized towards failure by family and friends who typically serve as support networks in homogamous marriages (Gaines & Brennan, 2000; Killian, 2001). Nonetheless, although a few studies suggest that inter-ethnic couples experience higher rates of divorce than intra-ethnic couples (Cooney & Radina, 2000; Gaines & Agnew, 2003), most studies suggest that inter-ethnic relationships are just as likely as intra-ethnic ones to sustain over time (Gaines & Brennan, 2000; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Stevenson, 1995 as cited in Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). Some empirical research also indicates greater relationship satisfaction among inter-ethnic couples than intra-ethnic couples (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Stringer, 1991 as cited in Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Troy, Lewis-Smith, Laurenceau, 2006). Mixed findings may reflect diversity within inter-ethnic couples, with couples who are able to successfully overcome cultural differences being able to achieve higher relationship satisfaction. A few studies have attempted to illuminate the factors predicting greater success among inter-ethnic relationships, the majority of which have been qualitative and ethnographic. The influence of racial/ethnic identity has often been examined in relation to marital quality among inter-ethnic couples (Killian, 2002; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Model & Fisher, 2002). As one might expect, the degree to which couples have resolved racial/ethnic differences predicts how likely they are to report higher levels of marital satisfaction (Leslie & Letiecq, 2004). This finding is consistent with the idea of a 'relational culture' proposed by Wood (2000), which is a shared culture formed between two individuals in a close relationship. For individuals who are part of an inter-ethnic relationship, it appears that satisfaction may be gained through the opportunity to learn about each other's beliefs and value systems, and additionally, by forming a relationship culture that allows them to

reconcile and prevent attitudinal conflicts surrounding emotionally charged life events (e.g., the birth of a child, death of family members) (Gaines & Brennan, 2001). In fact, studies show that inter-racial couples are often attracted to each other because they positively value the ethnic and cultural differences that are existent in their romantic partner (Killian, 2001; Model & Fisher, 2002).

While some research has been conducted on the inter-ethnic couple's relationship (Killian, 2001; Killian, 2002; Leslie & Letiecq, 2004; Negy & Snyder, 2000; Tzeng, 2000), little is known about the processes underlying the successful merge of multiple ethnic backgrounds and how this might affect childrearing strategies and outcomes. The task of parenting a child with a partner who may have differing views about parenting is not uncharted territory; however, cultural background adds a unique dimension to the complexities already inherent in co-parenting. An individual's culture likely plays an important role in the formation of his/her attitudes, beliefs, and practices regarding parenting. Furthermore, conflict over child-rearing has been found to be more salient for inter-ethnic couples compared to couples of the same ethnic background (Negy & Snyder, 2000). This may be due to each parent's differing expectations of parenting, which are presumably based on the cultural environment in which both parents were raised. Parenting styles are likely formulated through beliefs about what successful and socially acceptable parenting entails—ideas that are passed down through practice and often vary from culture to culture. However, no studies have examined the differences in parenting between inter-ethnic couples and how they influence each other's parenting over time.

The Importance of Understanding Parenting

The principal role of parenting involves the promotion of nurturing, balanced relationships or, contrastingly, the exacerbation of stress-prone, hostile exchanges between parents and children (Abidin, 1992; Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Katz & Woodin, 2002). Diana Baumrind's longstanding classification of parenting styles (1971) is well established in the parenting literature and includes three categories of parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Baumrind's studies (1967, 1991) found that children whose parents were coercive and lacked warmth (authoritarian) were obedient towards their parents, but were emotionally withdrawn and lacked self-esteem, while parents who used more permissive styles had irresponsible and impulsive children. More recent studies also support the finding that coercive parenting styles are predictive of poor peer relations, a greater number of conduct problems, and lower levels of school achievement in children (see Kendziora & O'Leary, 1993 for a review). By contrast, warm and firm (authoritative) parenting styles are associated with positive outcomes in cognitive functioning, social skills, and moral development (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Melby, 1990). Not surprisingly, then, the family context within which children develop has often been implicated in clinical interventions to address behavioral problems surfacing in the child (Shaw, 2006; Turner & Sanders, 2006).

Culture and Parenting

Given the critical role that parenting plays in child development, it is important to understand factors that may shape parenting. Jay Belsky's process model of the determinants of parenting (1984) identifies three major contributors to parenting: a parent's personality, the child's characteristics, and the social context within which the

parent-child relationship exists. Culture is a notable variable in the social context of a parent and should be taken into account when examining the parenting styles of ethnic minority groups. While much of the parenting literature to date has been conducted using European-American samples, studies suggest that attitudes toward parenting do differ across ethnic groups (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Calzada & Eyberg, 2002; Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox, 2000; McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi & Wilson, 2000; Rodriguez, Davis, Rodriguez & Bates, 2006).

Studies conducted with African-American parents suggest that their attitudes of acceptable discipline strategies differ from European-American parents' conceptions of positive parenting (McLoyd, et al., 2000). For example, African-American parents have been found to use more punitive and harsh parenting behaviors (e.g. spanking) and less reasoning and verbal communication in their discipline than European-American parents (Baumrind, 1971; Brooks -Gunn & Markman, 2005; McLoyd, et al., 2000), although these differences become smaller when demographic differences are controlled (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005).

Empirical differences have also been found between Latin-American and European-American parents, with cultural values often being predictive of parental behaviors (Rodriguez, et al., 2006). Julian and colleagues (1994) demonstrated that compared to European-American parents, Latino parents tended to place a greater emphasis on the family, obedience and respect toward elders, and exercising control over one's temper, favoring a strict and authoritarian style. Hispanic mothers also reported disciplining their children more frequently than European-American mothers and displayed lower levels of nurturance (Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox, 2000). Additionally,

Latino fathers reported spending more time engaged in social activities with their children than European-American fathers, which may be linked to a stronger value of familism in Hispanic cultures (McLoyd, et al., 2000). However, the literature has tended to examine parenting styles across different Latin origins, and there is evidence that parenting styles may differ depending on country of origin (Calzada & Eyberg, 2002).

Research on the influence of culture on parenting is in its infancy. Although cultural differences have been documented, researchers are only beginning to understand the complex role of culture in parenting. First, diversity within ethnic groups make universals in parenting styles difficult to elucidate (McEvoy, et al., 2005; McLoyd, et al., 2000). Efforts to examine this diversity point to a number of variables that may moderate the influence of culture on parenting, including socioeconomic status, country of origin, and acculturation (Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox, 2000; Martinez, 1988). Acculturation appears to have a slow-moving effect on parenting cognitions (Cote & Bornstein, 2003), and emerges more vividly in observations of parenting behavior rather than self-reports of parenting attitudes (Calzada & Eyberg, 2002). For example, over time, Hispanics and Mexican-Americans tend to assume attitudes and characteristics that are more similar to their European-American counterparts than to those individuals in their countries of origin (Kagan & Madsen, 1971; Negy & Woods, 1993; O'Guinn, Imperia, & McAdams, 1987). Second, parenting practices may have different consequences for children's development across different cultures. For example, studies suggest that physical punishment may have negative consequences for European-American children but not for African-American children (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, and Pettit, 1996; McLoyd & Smith, 2002). Third, existing measures of parenting

practices may not adequately capture parenting qualities among non-European American parents (Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005).

Parenting Dissimilarity

Although no studies have examined parenting dissimilarity among inter-ethnic couples, there is a small body of research focusing on intra-ethnic couples. Research suggests that inter-parent differences in parenting styles are associated with poorer child functioning as well as marital discord (Abidin & Brunner, 1985; Block, Block, and Morrison, 1981; Harvey, 2000; Minuchin, 1985; Katz & Woodin, 2004). In one study, however, Deal and colleagues (1989) were able to demonstrate that parental agreement was highly correlated with parental effectiveness, leading them to examine whether parental agreement predicted child functioning controlling for individual parental effectiveness. Results indicated that associations between parental agreement and child outcome were no longer significant when parenting effectiveness was controlled. Parents who tended to agree were also categorized as highly effective parents, while parents who were low on effectiveness tended to disagree with their spouses as well as other effective parents. Apart from the study conducted by Harvey (2000), the aforementioned studies did not control for individual parenting behavior, so it is unclear whether the relation of parenting dissimilarity to negative child outcome was indeed due to discrepancies in parenting, or to ineffective parenting.

Some research also discusses the association between parenting discrepancy and marital conflict (Katz & Woodin, 2002, Sturge, Davies, & Cummings, 2006). Disagreement over parenting may lead to increased marital conflict, or a relationship characterized by marital conflict may fuel discrepant parenting. Either way, the existence

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of marital conflict can have long lasting effects on children's own coping strategies for dealing with conflict and may cause them to view relationships negatively in the future (Katz & Woodin, 2002).

The Current Study

An examination of inter-ethnic couples' parenting styles is essential as the number of multi-ethnic families rise. The current study contributes to a small, but growing body of literature that aims to understand the impact of culture on parenting with the added dimension of differing ethnic backgrounds. Research in this area may lend itself to family-based interventions that take into account the specific issues faced by inter-ethnic couples by examining both between-group and within-group differences. This study investigated the following questions:

1. *Do inter-ethnic couples experience greater discrepancy in their parenting styles than intra-ethnic couples?* The different cultural beliefs brought by each partner into an inter-ethnic relationship are likely to be more salient in areas that require a degree of compromise, such as parenting. Since both individuals bring a unique set of ideas and expectations of parenting, it was hypothesized that inter-ethnic couples would show more discrepancy in their parenting styles than couples in which partners are of the same ethnic background.

2. *How is the amount of time a couple has spent parenting together associated with variability in parenting discrepancies?* The number of months a couple has parented together is likely to affect the amount of discrepancy they experience, since it is expected that parents learn to

compromise and perhaps adapt to each other's parenting styles over time. It was hypothesized that couples who have parented together longer will have less discrepant parenting practices than couples who do not share these qualities. This question was exploratory for inter-ethnic couples because power was low for within group analyses.

3. *Is parenting discrepancy associated with marital conflict and child functioning?* Although studies on homogamous couples suggest that parenting dissimilarity is associated with poor marital and child outcomes, research has not examined this relation among inter-ethnic couples. The effect of parenting dissimilarly may be different when it is due to cultural differences. This question was also exploratory for inter-ethnic couples due to low power.

CHAPTER 2

METHOD

Participants

Participants for this project were 179 couples drawn from a larger sample of 259 children and their mothers and fathers who participated in the first year of a larger longitudinal study examining the development of behavioral problems in children. Children were between the ages of 38 and 50 months during the first yearly assessment (Time 1). Of these couples, both parents were European American in 112 couples, both parents were Latino in 25 couples, both parents were African American in 14 couples and 28 were inter-ethnic couples of various combinations.

Parents were recruited through pediatricians' offices, community centers, and birth records in Western Massachusetts, and screened using the Behavioral Assessment System for Children-Parent Report Scale (BASC-PRS) as well as a questionnaire regarding concerns about their child's activity level, aggression, defiance, or impulse control. Approximately 78% of the 179 included children who scored at least 65 on the Aggression and/or Hyperactivity subscales of the BASC during the screening, and whose parents indicated concern about their children's behavior. Approximately 22% of the 179 children showed no signs of behavior problems on the BASC-PRS during the screening, and their parents indicated no concern about their behavior. In addition, participating children were limited to those with no evidence of cognitive impairment, deafness, blindness, language delay, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, or psychosis, based on parental interviews and questionnaires, and child observations.

Procedure

Families were invited to participate in comprehensive assessments in their homes when children were age 3, 4, 5, and 6. During home visits, parents were interviewed and completed rating scales, and children were administered cognitive and behavioral tests. Mothers and fathers also audio taped themselves interacting with their children outside of the home visits at age 3 assessments. Parents were paid for their participation.

Measures

The present study will use the following measures from Time 1:

Demographic information. Parents provided information about a number of variables on a demographic questionnaire. The following are descriptions of how the variables pertinent to this study were calculated and reported.

Ethnicity. Parents were asked to indicate their race/ethnicity. Couples were determined to be 'inter-ethnic' when one partner in a relationship self-identified ethnically and/or racially differently from the other partner. If parents were multi-racial, they were considered to be part of an inter-ethnic couple as long as they did not share more than 50% of an ethnic/racial background with their partner.

Education. Education was measured by having parents report their highest level of education; each level was then assigned a number to represent number of years of education (e.g. B.A. was assigned a 16).

Total family income. Parents were asked to report the annual income and support received from all adults in the home; the income of all parents/guardians who lived in the parents' home was summed to obtain a measure of family income.

Number of children. Parents were asked to indicate the number and ages of

children living in the household, including siblings, cousins, extended family, etc.

Amount of time spent parenting together. This was calculated for each couple using information about the age of the eldest child, and the number of months parents reported living together. For most couples, the eldest child's age was used. However, if one parent had custody of a child from a previous relationship, then the number of months the parents lived together was used.

Self-reported overreactivity, laxness, and warmth at Time 1. Parents completed the Parenting Scale, a 30-item self report scale regarding their discipline in response to their child's misbehavior, which yields an overreactivity and laxness factor. The Parenting Scale has demonstrated good internal consistency (α = .83 for Laxness and .82 for Overreactivity), good test-retest reliability (.83 for Laxness and .82 for Overreactivity), and has been found to correlate with observations of parenting and child behavior (Arnold et al., 1993). Parents use a 7-point Likert scale to indicate rate their typical style of discipline. The Laxness and Overreactivity factors of the scale were used for the present study. The Laxness factor includes 11 items related to permissive discipline. These items describe ways in which parents give in, allow rules to go un-enforced, or provide positive consequences for misbehavior. The Overreactivity factor consists of 8 items reflecting mistakes such as anger, meanness, and irritability.

A modified version of the Child Rearing Practices Report (Rickel & Biasetti, 1982) was used to measure nurturance, or warmth expressed by the parent. The modified CRPR consists of 40 items taken from a 91-item Q-sort and yields factor scores for nurturance and restrictiveness. The 18 items that loaded on the nurturance factor were administered in the present study using a 7-point Likert scale. Scores were calculated by

averaging across items on the nurturance factor, where high scores indicated a willingness of parents to listen to and share feelings and experiences with their children. According to previous research (Rickel & Biasetti, 1982), the nurturance factor exhibits high internal consistency (α = .84, .82, and .73 over three studies) in diverse samples.

Observed warmth and negative affect at Time 1. Mothers and fathers were asked to each record 2 hours of interactions with their children using a micro-cassette player. Parents were instructed to select times that tended to be challenging for them as parents. Thirty minutes of audiotape was coded for each parent.[1] Graduate and undergraduate research assistants were trained to code the audiotapes and two raters overlapped for 88 participants (24%). Intraclass correlations (ICC) were then calculated to determine reliability for each code. The coding system included both event-based and global coding. Global ratings of parent behavior were made after each segment on the following dimensions: *warmth, maternal negative affect, and laxness*. In this study, the codes for parent warmth and negative affect were used. *Warmth* referred to the extent to which the parent was positively attentive to the child; used praise, encouragement, and terms of endearment; conveyed affection; was supportive and available; was cheerful in mood and tone of voice; and/or conveyed interest, joy, enthusiasm, and warmth in interactions with the child. Using this definition, global ratings of parent warmth (*ICC* = .53) were made every 5 minutes and ranged from 1 (not warm) to 7 (extremely warm). *Negative affect* ratings indicated irritation, annoyance, frustration (e.g., repeated sighing), whininess, and/or an angry tone. Each instance of parent negative affect was rated on a scale from 1

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[1] Thirty minutes of audiotape was coded for each parent, because not all parents were able to complete 2 hours of recording, whereas all parents completed at least 30 minutes of tape.

(slight) to 6 (strong), and these ratings were summed across the 30 minutes of interaction to create a *parent negative affect* score (*ICC* = .60).

Marital conflict. Inter-parental conflict was measured using marital conflict frequency subscale of the Conflicts and Problem-Solving Scales (CPS; Kerig, 1996). The CPS was administered to all married or cohabitating couples. This self-report measure assesses frequency of conflicts, global satisfaction, and eight conflict strategies (cooperation, avoidance/capitulation, stonewalling, verbal aggression, moderate physical aggression, severe physical aggression, child involvement, and emotional abuse). Husbands' and wives' reports have been shown to correlate (r = .59), this scale is moderately stable (r = .63 over three months), and it correlates with other measure of marital adjustment and conflict, and with children's reports of marital conflict (Kerig, 1996).

Externalizing and internalizing behavior. Children's behavior was assessed with the BASC-PRS (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992). The BASC-PRS is a comprehensive rating scale that assesses a broad range of psychopathology in children ages 2-6 and older. Mothers' T-scores (based on general, not gender-specific norms) for the Externalizing and Internalizing scales were used. These scales have demonstrated good reliability for 2- to 3-year-old children (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 1992) for the BASC-PRS (α = .89 and .86, respectively).

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

Analytic Plan

Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) was used to first calculate inter-parent parenting discrepancies for each of the self-reported and observed parenting variables. In the Level 1 model, each parenting variable was regressed on parent gender. The equations for the unconditional models for each parenting variable were as follows:

$$Y_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}*(DADMOM) + r_{ij},$$

where Y was the self-report or observed rating for the five parenting variables by partner *i* in couple *j*. The DADMOM variable was coded as -.5 for the father and .5 for the mother in the couple. The parameter β_{1j} yielded the slope that estimated the difference between the mother and father in couple j. The absolute values of the slopes obtained from this analysis provided measures of parenting discrepancy within couples. The Level 1 model was examined to see if there was significant variability among discrepancy scores for each parenting variable in order to determine whether to proceed with analyses focused on predicting these discrepancies. Significant residual terms u_0 and u_1, obtained from running the Level 1 model would indicate that there is significant variability across couples. If there was significant variability among the discrepancy slopes in the Level 1 model, the absolute value of these slopes became the dependent variables in subsequent analyses conducted with predictors of discrepancy.

The following analyses were conducted to answer the questions posed:

1.   *Do inter-ethnic couples experience greater discrepancy in their parenting styles than intra-ethnic couples?* One-way ANOVA was used to compare inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic parents' discrepancy based on discrepancy values obtained from the Level 1 model. This analysis was done through ANOVA rather than in HLM so that absolute discrepancy scores could be used as the dependent variable.

2.   *How is the amount of time a couple has spent parenting together associated with variability in parenting discrepancies?* For inter-parent discrepancy slopes that exhibited significant variability in the Level 1 model, correlations were conducted between these slopes and the number of months each couple had spent parenting together. This was done separately for inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic couples, although the analysis for inter-ethnic couples was exploratory due to low power.

3.   *Is parenting discrepancy associated with marital conflict and child functioning?* Correlations were conducted between inter-parent discrepancy slopes and the conflict frequency subscale from the Conflict and Problem Solving scales (Kerig, 1996), mother's reports of BASC Externalizing and Internalizing scales. Correlations were conducted separately for inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic couples. Analyses for inter-ethnic couples were exploratory because power was low.

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations

Means and standard deviations for parents' education, age, parenting, and predictor variables are provided in Table 1, separately for mothers and fathers and for inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic couples. Intercorrelations among parenting variables are shown in Table 2, with mothers' and fathers' intercorrelations on each parenting variable represented on the diagonal.

Mothers' laxness was significantly and negatively correlated with observations of mothers' warmth and significantly and positively associated with observations of her negative affect. In addition, there was a significant, negative correlation between mothers' observed warmth and observations of her negative affect. For fathers, self-reports of warmth were significantly positively related to observations of warmth. Observations of mothers' and fathers' warmth were significantly positively correlated with each other, as were observations of their negative affect.

Level 1 Model

First, an unconditional level 1 model was fit for each parenting variable. There was significant variability in parenting discrepancy scores for self-reported overreactivity (variance = .79, $\chi^2(170) = 738.53$, $p < .001$), self-reported laxness (variance = 1.14, $\chi^2(170) = 837.76$, $p < .001$), self-reported warmth (variance = .81, $\chi^2(165) = 829.63$, $p < .001$), and observed negative affect (variance = 3.55, $\chi^2(140) = 409.66$, $p < .001$). Discrepancy scores for observations of parental warmth did not show significant variability across couples and (variance = .12, $\chi^2(140) = 148.58$, $p = .29$); thus, this variable was not examined in further analyses.

Parenting Discrepancies Between Inter-ethnic and Intra-ethnic Couples

One-way ANOVAs conducted to compare discrepancy slopes for inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic couples yielded no significant differences for any of the self-reported or observed parenting variables (see Table 3). Interestingly, mean discrepancy scores for inter-ethnic couples were lower than mean discrepancy scores for parents in intra-ethnic couples on self-reports of laxness, warmth, and observations of warmth. Inter-ethnic couples' mean discrepancies for self-reported overreactivity and observations of negative affect, however, were generally higher than mean discrepancies for intra-ethnic couples on those variables, though the differences were not significant.

Associations Between Parenting Discrepancy and Number of Months Spent Parenting Together

Correlations between parenting discrepancy variables and the amount of time a couple had spent parenting together are provided for inter-ethnic couples and intra-ethnic couples in Tables 4 and 5, respectively. There were no significant findings between the number of months a couple had spent co-parenting and parenting discrepancies.

Associations Between Parenting Discrepancy and Family Functioning

Parenting discrepancy variables were correlated with marital conflict and child behavior and can be found on Tables 4 and 5 for inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic couples. Fathers' reports of greater marital conflict were associated with greater discrepancies in self-reported warmth among intra-ethnic couples ($r = .25, p < .01$). Because intra-ethnic couples with greater warmth discrepancies also tended to be less warm ($r = -.43, p < .01$ for mothers; $r = -.27, p < .01$ for fathers), a follow-up analysis was conducted to determine whether the association between warmth discrepancies and marital conflict

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was due to a confound between warmth discrepancies and levels of warmth. Among intra-ethnic couples, fathers' marital conflict frequency was regressed on self-reported warmth discrepancy, mothers' self-report of warmth and father's self-reported warmth. The association between fathers' reports of marital conflict and parenting discrepancy remained significant even after controlling for individual parenting style (β = .25, p = .02).

There was a significant relationship between mothers' reports of child's externalizing behavior and inter-ethnic observed negative affect discrepancies (r = .54, p = .01), but this relation was not significant when controlling for mothers' and fathers' observed negative affect (β =.14, p = .63).   The relationship between child's externalizing behavior and laxness discrepancy for intra-ethnic couples initially approached significance (r = .17, p = .05), but no longer approached significance when mothers' and fathers' laxness were controlled (β =.13, p = .13)[2].

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[2] Because Harvey (2000) found significant associations between parenting discrepancy and child behavior within a clinical sample of children with ADHD even when controlling for parenting behavior, whereas Deal, Halverson, & Wampler (1989) did not find a relationship in a community sample, I examined correlations between children's externalizing and internalizing behavior and intra-ethnic parents' discrepancy scores separately for the children in the behavior problem group and for the non-problem comparison group . Results were fairly consistent with both Harvey's and Deal et al.'s finding. Discrepancy scores were not associated with child behavior among the non-problem group. However, there was a positive correlation between externalizing behavior and laxness discrepancy (r = .21, p < .05) for the children in the behavior group. This association approached significance (β = .18, p = .06) when controlling for individual parenting behavior.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The present study examined whether parents in inter-ethnic couples exhibit greater parenting discrepancies when compared to parents in intra-ethnic couples. An additional aim of the study was to explore whether couples who had parented together longer showed less discrepant parenting, and whether parenting discrepancies were associated with measures of family functioning, including frequency of marital conflict and child behavior. In fact, parenting discrepancies were not more common among inter-ethnic couples, and parenting discrepancies were not associated with years parenting together and were not generally associated with measures of family functioning.

This is the first study to directly compare parenting discrepancies among inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic couples. However, these findings stand in contrast to one other study that compared inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic parenting, in which it was found that inter-ethnic parents experience their greatest difficulties and/or conflicts over child-rearing (Negy & Snyder, 2000). Negy and Snyder (2000) used both quantitative and qualitative measures to compare intra-ethnic Mexican-American and White couples to inter-ethnic couples where one partner was Mexican-American and the other was White. Using the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised scale, they were able to measure conflict over child-rearing and found that inter-ethnic couples expressed significantly higher conflict when compared to the intra-ethnic couples in their study. Additionally, open-ended questions about the difficulties they encountered because of their inter-ethnic marriage revealed that inter-ethnic couples spontaneously reported conflicts to occur most frequently in the area of child-rearing. Negy and Snyder (2000) suggested that

disagreements over gender and parenting roles that might be seen across all couples may be exaggerated within inter-ethnic couples due to differences in cultural upbringing and/or levels of acculturation of the Mexican-American partner. Intra-ethnic couples in their study were not asked qualitative questions, so it is unclear which aspects of their marriage they viewed as being most difficult, and it is possible that they share a similar sentiment to inter-ethnic couples regarding conflict over child-rearing.

While the present study did not find differences in actual parenting behavior, it may still be that inter-ethnic couples disagreed more about the discrepancies that do exist. It also may be that there are significant parenting discrepancies on dimensions that were not assessed in the present study. For example, inter-ethnic couples may show greater differences on what rules to establish in the household and do not differ on how to enforce those rules. Furthermore, it is possible that inter-ethnic couples exhibited greater parenting discrepancies early in the relationship, but these differences decreased over time as their parenting styles converged, although this could have been the case for intra-ethnic couples as well. While the present study did not find an association between parenting discrepancy and years parenting together, all parents in this study were parenting together for at least three years; it may be that parenting styles converge during the first few years of parenting. Future research should consider the possibility of parenting discrepancy earlier in the relationship, since it is not clear from this study whether inter-ethnic couples never differed significantly, or if they did initially experience parenting discrepancy earlier in their co-parenting relationship and, over time, came together. If the latter is true, further research is needed to understand the mechanisms behind the convergence of parenting styles and to determine whether this

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process is any different for inter-ethnic couples as compared to intra-ethnic couples. One current theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) supports the idea that convergence in parenting may result from parents influencing each other's parenting styles, but it would also be worth examining how the addition of different cultural backgrounds modifies, or is consistent, with this theoretical perspective. Greater attention to the inter-ethnic couples' co-parenting relationship in particular, would help inform how parents of disparate cultural upbringings perceive child-rearing differences before and after raising children together.

In contrast to other studies that have indicated discrepant parenting to be predictive of poorer child functioning (Abidin & Brunner, 1985; Block, Block, and Morrison, 1981; Harvey, 2000; Minuchin, 1985; Katz & Woodin, 2004), the present study found few associations between parenting discrepancies and child outcomes. Although more externalizing behavior was initially associated with greater negative affect discrepancy among mothers in inter-ethnic relationships, this effect did not remain after accounting for parenting behavior. Similarly, the association of higher externalizing behavior with differences in laxness for intra-ethnic couples was no longer significant when parenting behavior was controlled. Thus, to the extent that discrepancies are associated with externalizing behavior, it appears that this is due to the fact that couples with discrepant parenting styles are also more likely to use less effective parenting. Most studies on parenting similarity have not controlled for parenting styles. The two studies that have done so have found different findings. Harvey (2000) did find associations between parenting similarity and child behavior controlling for parenting behavior in a sample of children with ADHD. However like the present study, Deal, Halverson, and

Wampler (1989), found that parental agreement did not offer an enhanced ability to predict child functioning above and beyond individual parental effectiveness in a community sample. Exploratory analyses suggested that the discrepancy between Harvey's and Deal et al.'s findings may be due to the samples that were used; while correlations did not quite reach significance, it appeared that discrepancy was marginally associated with child outcome among a behavior problem group, but not among the nonproblem group. Further research is needed to explore this possibility.

While marital conflict was not generally associated with parenting discrepancies, there was some evidence of an association between fathers' reports of marital conflict and parenting discrepancy in warmth in intra-ethnic relationships. Moreover, this association remained even after controlling for parenting behavior. This is consistent with Harvey (2000) who also found an association between parenting similarity and marital functioning. It is not clear why this association was found only for intra-ethnic couples. This may be in part due to lower power for analyses with inter-ethnic couples; there was a small positive relation between marital conflict and parenting warmth discrepancy for interethnic couples, but it was not significant.

To the extent that there is an association between parenting discrepancies and marital conflict, the direction of the relationship is unclear, although theory and empirical research support the notion that higher levels of marital conflict may lead to greater discrepancies in warmth (Katz & Woodin, 2004; Margolin, 2001; Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006). Hostility expressed between partners (especially when having to do with child-rearing issues) may create a stressful, disruptive environment in which it becomes exceedingly difficult for warmth and nurturance to be expressed toward their

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children. The spillover hypothesis discussed by Margolin and colleagues (2001) similarly suggests that conflict experienced between parents may "spill over" into the co-parenting arena and both increase parenting stress and diminish parenting effectiveness, and this has been supported empirically (Katz & Woodin, 2004; Sturge-Apple, Davies, & Cummings, 2006). Furthermore, research has demonstrated differential parenting effects for mothers and fathers (Amato & Booth, 1991; Floyd & Zmich, 1991, Jouriles & Farris, 1992) in which fathers were more likely than mothers to report increased difficulty rearing their children when faced with conflict. It is possible that the negative experience of frequent marital conflict affects fathers more than mothers and causes fathers to re-channel their emotional energy in an effort to cope with the conflict, whereas mothers' parenting may be less susceptible to or contingent upon external factors. Thus, fathers' perceptions of marital conflict may lead to a decrease in paternal warmth which in turn causes greater warmth discrepancy.

It is also possible that differing levels of warmth expressed toward children is a source of conflict in the marital relationship, especially if one parent perceives diminished support from the other in co-parenting. Arguments stemming from differences in childrearing may be especially salient for fathers if they typically spend less time than mothers involved in parenting, and may cause them to report higher frequency of conflict than their counterparts. The direction proposed by this hypothesis is perhaps as compelling as the competing one described above, and future studies of a longitudinal or experimental nature may be able to better address causality in the relationship between marital conflict and parenting discrepancy.

These results should be interpreted in the context of a number of limitations.

First, inter-ethnic couples in this study were not a homogenous group, and included different combinations of ethnic groups. Second, the sample was too small to examine differences across various types of inter-ethnic couples. Similarly, the small sample size of inter-ethnic couples limited the power of this study, particularly for within-group analyses. Because of the small sample size, we were not able to examine whether parenting discrepancy may vary as a function of acculturation; while we had a measure of acculturation, it was only meaningful for Latino parents, and the questions were generally not applicable to African American and European American parents who tended to view the United States as their country of origin. Third, the reliability of observations of warmth was somewhat low, and this may have affected our ability to detect differences in parenting if they did exist. Fourth, it is possible that inter-ethnic couples may have experienced greater discrepancies in their parenting styles earlier but converged before the collection of this data. Finally, it is possible that parents do differ on other parenting variables that were not included in this study.

Despite the limitations in this study, there are several findings that can contribute to the state of research in this area. This study adds to the literature regarding inter-ethnic couples by focusing on child-rearing and co-parenting issues, rather than the romantic relationship, a construct that most other research with inter-ethnic couples has examined. Notably, it appears that parenting discrepancies are not more common among inter-ethnic couples than intra-ethnic couples. This study is also one of few that have examined parenting discrepancies and how they may relate to family functioning. Results from this study strengthen support for previous research that has also found differential effects of

marital conflict for fathers and mothers, although future studies should continue to investigate the association of parenting discrepancy with marital conflict. Finally, the findings of the present study suggest that discrepancies in parenting may not necessarily affect child outcome. It may be the process by which couples negotiate their differences that is more important and merits further study.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Inter-ethnic Couples		Intra-ethnic Couples	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
	M(*SD*)	*M*(*SD*)	*M*(*SD*)	*M*(*SD*)
Education (in years)	12.86 (2.99)	13.20 (2.90)	14.08 (2.61	13.73 (2.65)
	n = 28	*n* = 25	*n* = 150	*n* = 140
Age (in years)	30.89 (6.76)	33.41 (7.11)	33.13 (6.20)	36.73 (7.39)
	n = 27	*n* = 27	*n* = 151	*n* = 151
Time spent co-parenting (in months)	89.41 (56.74)		69.15 (46.73)	
	n = 27		*n* = 148	
Self-reported overreactivity	2.84 (.67)	2.20	2.65 (.74)	2.57 (.78)
	n = 27	(.83)	*n* = 144	*n* = 144
		n = 27		
Self-reported laxness	2.86 (.93)	2.76	2.80 (.90)	2.75 (.80)
	n = 27	(.68)	*n* = 144	*n* = 144
		n = 27		
Self-reported warmth	6.1 (0.70)	6.0	6.1 (0.65)	5.9 (0.65)
	n = 27	(0.71)	*n* = 139	*n* = 139
		n = 27		

Table continues

Table 1 continued

	Inter-ethnic Couples		Intra-ethnic Couples	
	Mother	Father	Mother	Father
	M(*SD*)	*M*(*SD*)	*M*(*SD*)	*M*(*SD*)
Observed warmth	4.62 (0.83)	4.99	4.64 (0.86)	4.64 (0.85)
	n = 22	(0.70)	*n* = 118	*n* = 118
		n = 22		
Observed negative	3.03 (2.91)	1.14	2.45 (2.41)	1.84 (1.73)
affect	*n* = 22	(1.26)	*n* = 118	*n* = 118
		n = 22		
Marital Conflict	4.14 (1.81)	4.04	4.22 (1.80)	3.97
	n = 25	(1.60)	*n* = 139	(1.75)
		n = 26		*n* = 136
BASC Externalizing	62.71 (15.29)	N/A	57.13 (12.41)	N/A
	n = 28		*n* = 151	
BASC Internalizing	52.77 (10.54)	N/A	51.35 (11.65)	N/A
	n = 26		*n* = 150	

Table 2

Inter-Correlations Among Parenting Variables For The Entire Sample

Parenting Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Self-reported overreactivity	.14†	.16*	-.22**	-.12†	.22**
	$n = 171$	$n = 242$	$n = 222$	$n = 209$	$n = 211$
(2) Self-reported laxness	.22**	-.01	-.18**	-.31***	.27***
	$n = 177$	$n = 171$	$n = 221$	$n = 208$	$n = 210$
(3) Self-reported warmth	-.19*	-.08	.01	.10	-.03
	$n = 163$	$n = 163$	$n = 166$	$n = 217$	$n = 219$
(4) Observed warmth	-.18*	-.11	.23**	.34***	-.53***
	$n = 143$	$n = 143$	$n = 140$	$n = 140$	$n = 221$
(5) Observed negative affect	.11	-.02	-.17*	-.30***	.42***
	$n = 142$	$n = 142$	$n = 139$	$n = 143$	$n = 140$

Note: Mothers' correlations above diagonal; fathers' correlations below diagonal. Values in the diagonal represent parenting variable correlations between mothers and fathers.

*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$, $^\dagger p < .10$

Table 3

Mean Discrepancy Scores For Inter-ethnic And Intra-ethnic Couples

Parenting variable	Inter-ethnic couples' discrepancy	Intra-ethnic couples' discrepancy	F
	M(SD)	*M(SD)*	
Self-reported laxness	0.67 (0.51)	0.75 (0.62)	0.43
	n = 27	*n* = 144	*df* = 170
Self-reported warmth	0.43 (0.63)	0.51 (0.52)	0.50
	n = 27	*n* = 139	*df* = 165
Self-reported overreactivity	0.74 (0.56)	0.58 (0.47)	2.43
	n = 27	*n* = 144	*df*=170
Observed warmth	0.11 (0.10)	0.12 (0.08)	0.49
	n = 22	*n* = 118	*df* = 139
Observed negative affect	1.42 (1.45)	1.16 (0.92)	1.29
	n = 22	n = 118	*df* = 139

Table 4

Correlations Between Inter-Ethnic Parenting Discrepancy And Marital Conflict, Child's Behavior, And Number Of Months
Spent Co-Parenting

Predictor		Self-reported overreactivity discrepancy	Self-reported laxness discrepancy	Self-reported warmth discrepancy	Observed negative affect discrepancy
Number of months spent co-parenting		-.001 $n = 26$	-.14 $n = 26$	.23 $n = 25$	.34 $n = 21$
Marital conflict	Mother	-.003 $n = 24$	.17 $n = 24$	-.05 $n = 24$	-.06 $n = 20$
	Father	-.27 $n = 25$	-.06 $n = 25$	.15 $n = 25$	-.13 $n = 21$

Table continues

Table 4 continued

Predictor		Self-reported overreactivity discrepancy	Self-reported laxness discrepancy	Self-reported warmth discrepancy	Observed negative affect discrepancy
Mother's report of child's behavior	BASC Internalizing	-.07 $n = 25$	.02 $n = 25$	.06 $n = 25$	.28 $n = 21$
Mother's report of child's behavior	BASC Externalizing	.21 $n = 27$	.15 $n = 27$	.01 $n = 27$	.54 ($p = .63$)[1] $n = 22$

*p <.05

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[1] Correlation was initially significant ($p = .01$), but did not remain significant when controlling for individual parenting style ($p = .63$)

Table 5

Correlations Between Intra-Ethnic Parenting Discrepancy And Marital Conflict, Child's Behavior, And Number Of Months Spent Co-Parenting

Predictor		Self-reported overreactivity discrepancy	Self-reported laxness discrepancy	Self-reported warmth discrepancy	Observed negative affect discrepancy
Number of months spent co-parenting		.06 $n = 142$	-.07 $n = 142$	.11 $n = 136$	-.02 $n = 116$
Marital Conflict	Mother	.05 $n = 133$	.11 $n = 133$	.15 $n = 129$	.02 $n = 109$
	Father	.09 $n = 130$	.09 $n = 130$	0.25* (p=.02) [1] $n = 127$	.10 $n = 105$

Table continues

[1] Correlation was initially significant at $p < .01$ level ($p = .006$); when controlling for individual parenting style, correlation was found to be significant at $p < .05$ level ($p = .02$).

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Table 5 continued

Predictor		Self-reported overreactivity discrepancy	Self-reported laxness discrepancy	Self-reported warmth discrepancy	Observed negative affect discrepancy
Mother's report of child's behavior	BASC Internalizing	-.06 $n = 143$	.02 $n = 143$	-.06 $n = 138$	-.02 $n = 118$
Mother's report of child's behavior	BASC Externalizing	.03 $n = 144$	0.17 (p=.13) [2] $n = 144$	.02 $n = 139$	.16 $n = 118$

* $p <.05$

[2] Correlation initially approached significance (p = .05) but was not found to be significant when controlling for individual parenting style (p=.13).

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