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# Relationship Between Parental Physical Discipline and Child Externalizing Problems in the Caribbean Subculture in New York City

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE  
AND CHILD EXTERNALIZING PROBLEMS  
IN THE CARIBBEAN SUBCULTURE IN NEW YORK CITY

by

MELTEM PAKER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Educational Psychology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
The City University of New York

2006

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in Educational  
Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of  
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Prof. Georgiana Shick Tryon

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

To Yunus and Mayra,  
who surround me with love,  
give me energy, and  
inspire me to ever go further.

I also dedicate this work to two wonderful women, my mother and my mother-in-law, who gave their love and care to my little Mayra during this difficult process, and to my father-in-law for his understanding. Without them, none of this would be possible in such a short time.

And to my father, whom I thought would be with me at the end, like he was in the beginning of this road, but he is no longer. I am sure he would be very happy to see this come to being. Wherever you are, this is also for you, dad, for all the support you have given me over the years.

A human being is a part of the whole, called by us “universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal decisions and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole nature in its beauty.

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

## Abstract

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTAL PHYSICAL DISCIPLINE  
AND CHILD EXTERNALIZING PROBLEMS  
IN THE CARIBBEAN SUBCULTURE IN NEW YORK CITY

by

MELTEM PAKER

Adviser: Prof. Georgiana Shick Tryon

This study investigated the relationship between parental physical discipline (PD) and child externalizing behaviors (EB) in the Caribbean subculture and examined whether acculturation to the European American and Caribbean cultures, generational status, normativity of PD, and warmth in the parent-child relationship moderated this relationship. Eighty-nine parents of Caribbean origin answered an anonymous survey consisting of various scales and demographic questions.

Descriptive analyses indicated that parents in this study used PD an average of 10 times during the past year. The majority (69 %) reported using at least one PD act in the past year. All forms of more severe PD (e.g., slap on face or head, hit with belt or hard object, pinch) were more prevalent in this sample compared to a national sample, suggesting that they are more culturally approved in the Caribbean subculture. Correlational analyses revealed that PD tended to decrease as children got older. In addition, older parents tended to use less PD. However, the more normative and socially accepted parents perceived PD to be in their culture, the more they used it.

The major finding of this study was that parents' generational status moderated the relationship between PD and EB. A regression analysis demonstrated that the effect of PD on EB varied as a function of generational status. The earlier parents' families came to the United States, the stronger was the relationship between PD and EB. It was the strongest for parents whose great grandparents (or earlier generations) immigrated to this country. For parents who themselves immigrated, PD did not predict EB.

Earlier research conducted with European American families firmly established the relationship between PD and EB. This study, however, showed that this finding could not be generalized to the Caribbean subculture. When factors such as acculturation and generational status were taken into account, PD did not predict EB. As parents' generational status increased, the relationship between PD and EB became stronger, approximating the pattern that was consistently found in European American families. Theoretical and practical implications, as well as directions for further research were discussed in light of the findings.

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

This study examined the relationship between parental physical discipline (also called corporal punishment and physical punishment in the literature) and child externalizing behavior problems in the Caribbean subculture in New York City. Straus, Sugarman, and Giles-Sims (1997) define corporal punishment as the use of physical force (such as spanking, hitting, or pinching) intended to cause a child pain, but not injury, for the purpose of controlling or correcting the child's behavior. Similarly, in this study, physical discipline is defined as nonabusive use of physical punishment by parents for disciplinary purposes. Externalizing behavior problems refer to aggressive, oppositional, destructive, and antisocial behavior.

The topic of physical discipline is a controversial one and is often confused with physical abuse. Early studies on the subject conceptualized physical discipline as a categorical construct (abuse vs. nonabuse). In the past two decades, however, there has been a shift from a categorical to a dimensional conceptualization of physical discipline and abusive behavior. According to this view, these behaviors are considered to occur along a continuum.

There is an extensive literature on the relationship between parental physical discipline and externalizing problems in children pointing to a positive association between the two. However, most research is cross-sectional and correlational and cannot establish causality. Experiments using random assignment cannot be conducted to

investigate spanking children. Thus, researchers turned to longitudinal studies that are correlational in nature but also causally conclusive, because (a) the referent period for parental physical punishment precedes the time period for the child outcome measure and (b) earlier externalizing problems are controlled for. Such studies on the subject suggest that physical discipline may indeed increase subsequent externalizing problems.

Almost all of the research in this area employed European American families. Although a positive concurrent and prospective relationship between the use of physical discipline and externalizing behaviors is found consistently and invariably in studies of European American families, a few studies conducted with African American families found a negative association or none at all, with only one study (Kilgore, Snyder, & Lentz, 2000) reporting a positive association. Thus, the generality of the prospective association of parental physical discipline and child externalizing problems across race or ethnicity is currently an open question. Little is known about the similarities and differences in these processes across ethnic and cultural groups.

In his review of the literature, Larzelere (2000) concluded that physical punishment significantly increases subsequent externalizing problems but that this detrimental outcome is neutralized or reversed in African Americans, a subculture that views spanking more normatively. Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, and Pettit (1996) argued that the meaning of physical discipline may be different for different ethnic groups leading to ethnic subcultural differences in the outcomes of physical discipline. Among European American families, the presence of harsh discipline may imply an out-of-control, parent-centered household, whereas a lack of physical discipline among African-American parents may indicate an abdication of the parenting role to others.

Spanking is more likely to be perceived as evidence of parental concern in African-American families, whereas it is more likely to be seen as an indication of parental rejection in European-American families. Even more important may be ethnic and cultural group variations in the ways children view the meaning of their parents' behavior. Deater-Deckard et al. (1996) argued that physical discipline by parents is not associated with externalizing problems in children when such discipline practices are normative and socially accepted in a particular ethnic, racial, or cultural group. Where normative and accepted, they suggest, harsh discipline may even be viewed as positive parental involvement and have a different developmental function.

It is important to emphasize here that the controversy is about nonabusive physical discipline, not overly severe forms of physical punishment. Ethnic group differences in the effects of physical discipline on externalizing outcomes hold only within the nonabusive range of discipline. Deater-Deckard et al. (1996) showed that physically abused children displayed significantly more externalizing behaviors than children who received physical discipline regardless of their ethnicity. In other words, the cultural meaning, implications, and outcomes of physical abuse do not differ across ethnic groups, and cultural differences lie in the meaning attached to physical discipline that is in the nonabusive range.

Since the controversy is only about the nonabusive range of physical punishment, this study focused on physical discipline defined as nonabusive use of physical punishment by parents for disciplinary purposes and not on physical abuse. As mentioned above, physical discipline and physical abuse are viewed as points on a continuum of physical acts toward children and, as with any continuum, it is difficult to draw the line

between acceptable physical discipline and dangerous physical abuse. For the purposes of this study, behaviors that do not result in significant physical injury (e.g., spanking, slapping) were considered physical discipline, whereas behaviors that risk injury (e.g., punching, kicking, burning) were considered physical abuse. This distinction is consistent with Gershoff's (2002) selection criteria for her meta-analysis on corporal punishment and with the physical assault subscales in the Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales (Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998). The Physical Assault scale has three subscales that represent different ranges of severity and legality: Minor Assault (Corporal Punishment), Severe Assault (Physical Maltreatment), and Very Severe Assault (Severe Physical Maltreatment). This study explicitly targeted parental physical discipline, rather than parental physical abuse, as a potential predictor of child externalizing behaviors.

This study is based on a pluralistic, contextual, and social constructivist theoretical framework. Human beings do not function in isolation. Human behavior and development always occur within a culture that shapes our construction of reality but they are rarely studied as such by academic psychology (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). The fact that culture has an important role in human behavior made some psychologists question the cross-cultural validity and universality of psychological laws and theories and argue for the inclusion of culture in psychological theories. Despite this awareness by some psychologists regarding the significance of culture, the study of culture and related variables has largely been ignored in American mainstream psychology (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). It is largely assumed that psychological knowledge developed in the

United States by European American scholars using European American participants is universal.

Gergen (1973) claims that theoretical principles are culturally and temporally bound. Many psychological theories are cultural constructions reflecting a particular orientation to and interpretation of “reality” (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). Some basic psychological laws depend on a certain cultural or subcultural context and may be cross-culturally invalid. Emic or cultural approaches emphasize the uniqueness of concepts in each cultural context, because the concepts derive their meanings from these contexts (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). Culture is the ultimate source of meaning. As such, psychologists must take culture into account to determine if the stimuli that theoretically produce certain behaviors have the same meaning everywhere and if those given meanings have the same affect everywhere. This increases the need for replication studies in various cultures and subcultures that consequently will broaden our understanding of the specificity and universality of psychological findings and theories. If the stimulus conditions for the behavior involve meaning, the universality claim is difficult to sustain without considerable qualification of theories (Pepitone & Triandis, 1987).

Besides other things, culture also affects parenting beliefs, goals, and behaviors. How parents socialize their children into society, and the social goals they embrace, varies widely across cultures and subcultures (Small, 2001). In other words, parenting is culturally constructed (Harkness & Super, 2002). In some cultures, the primary parenting goal is to make children obey and respect their parents; in others, it is to raise independent and assertive children. These parenting beliefs and goals that are rooted in culture inevitably affect the childrearing practices used by parents.

Moreover, the “same” parenting behavior may have different meanings across cultures and subcultures. For example, the meaning of parental control is culturally defined. High parental control is associated with perceived parental hostility and rejection in North America and Germany (Rohner & Rohner, 1978; Saavedra, 1980; Trommsdorff, 1985), whereas it is associated with perceived parental warmth and acceptance in Japan (Kornadt, 1987; Trommsdorff, 1985) and in Korea (Rohner & Pettengill, 1985).

Attribution of opposite meanings to the “same” parenting behavior in different cultural contexts can only be explained by considering the contextually situated meaning systems that define what is and is not “normal” in these cultures (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). The environment as it is perceived, rather than as it may exist in “objective” reality, is what matters for behavior and development. The meaning of a parental behavior derives from how it is perceived and whether or not it is seen as “normal” and legitimate in different cultural contexts, an attribution that is influenced by social conventions and norms.

An important aspect of parental control is discipline. Parents’ choice of disciplinary practices is based on their parenting philosophy that is part of a larger parental script including values, beliefs, and goals that in turn is anchored in culture and history (Small, 2001). This study focused on one particular type of disciplinary practice, namely physical discipline. Physical discipline is widely used, normative, and socially accepted in some cultures and completely condemned in others. In some cultures, almost all physical discipline is considered abusive and harmful. Consequently, when different cultures come into contact with each other (e.g., as a result of immigration), confusions, misunderstandings, and conflicts inevitably emerge concerning the use of physical

discipline. The official belief in a society is usually biased in favor of the dominant culture.

In many homes in the Caribbean, harsh, punitive, and authoritarian discipline and childrearing practices are the norm (Evans & Davis, 1997). Many parents use corporal punishment as a major form of discipline. One of the most severe conflicts that Caribbean immigrant parents experience with the larger system in the United States occurs in the domain of physically disciplining children. Different beliefs concerning the appropriateness of physical punishment lead to this conflict between Caribbean immigrant parents and the U.S. culture. Caribbean parents often report feeling restrained in their authority to discipline children “appropriately” in “their way,” consistent with the usual and acceptable modes of disciplining children in their native countries. These parents often express anger and confusion regarding the system’s devaluation of their belief about physical punishment and the punitive measures that are taken against them for using such disciplinary techniques. Although many child abuse allegations are made against Caribbean parents, a substantial number of these allegations are dismissed. During acculturation, families combine ethnic, minority, and dominant culture parenting values. To some extent, parents determine the aspects of parenting (e.g., disciplinary practices and educational expectations) they uphold and those they relinquish in favor of the parental values, attitudes, and practices of the dominant culture.

The demographic profile of the U.S. has been changing dramatically. Non-white or non-European Americans will make up 50% of the U.S. population by the year 2050 (Gonzales, Brusca-Vega, & Yawkey, 1997). Due to the rapidly changing demographics in the national and the student population, psychologists, and especially school

psychologists, must be prepared to work with culturally diverse children and adolescents and their families. School psychologists are usually not well equipped with theory about the complexities of culture and are not adequately introduced to the impact of culture upon practice (Rogers, Ponterotto, Conoley, & Wiese, 1992). In addition to a lack of information and exposure, some school psychologists have not yet clarified their thinking about the construct of cultural diversity (Mosley-Howard, 1995). It is imperative for school psychologists to examine what role culture plays in the lives of children from diverse backgrounds.

Despite general agreement about the need for more research on children across ethnic groups, contributors to psychological literature continue to show apathy toward cultural issues (Sue, 1999). Most theories and interventions for children and adolescents are based on research conducted with European American, middle-class samples and, thus, are unable to shed light on the specific needs of children from other cultural backgrounds (Dumas, Rollock, Prinz, Hops, & Blechman, 1999). Culture forms a significant part of psychological reality. Because meaning is defined culturally, cultural context must be integrated into psychological analysis. The study of parenting and development as culturally contextualized is also valuable for the check it provides against an ethnocentric worldview as well as the implications of such a view (Bornstein, 1991). It is dangerous to project essentially European American ideas onto the behavior and experience of people from other cultures and subcultures.

While we cannot take the extreme relativist position that any cultural practice is acceptable by worldwide standards, we must avoid imposing our own standards and expectations onto members of other cultural and ethnic groups. An appreciation of

cultural differences is necessary to uncover areas of childrearing in minority cultures that are likely to be misunderstood by the dominant culture. We may react to certain childrearing practices with disbelief and disapproval, since we have been socialized into a particular cultural milieu with its own patterns of beliefs and behaviors. However, we should not let our worldview blind us to the differences that permeate family life in ethnic and minority families. Psychologists should be very careful in how they walk the line between condemning, supporting, and empathizing with parents who are referred to them.

The study of parenting in general and physical discipline in particular among ethnic groups in the United States is important not only for scholarly reasons concerning our understanding of normative parenting processes in general or within certain groups. As ethnic children become the majority of the youth population in this country as a result of the recent demographic shift, such subcultural research in parenting is necessary to inform public policy, practice, and effective intervention on these children's behalf.

This study was a step in that direction. Its purpose was to investigate the relationship between parental physical discipline and children's externalizing problems in the Caribbean subculture living in New York City. The Caribbean population was selected because physical disciplinary practices are quite common, normative, and socially accepted in this subculture unlike they are in the European American culture. However, the implications of harsher forms of discipline remain largely unexplored in the Caribbean psychological literature. Studying this subgroup allows us to see the similarities and differences in the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing problems across subcultures. Another purpose of the study was to examine

whether acculturation to the dominant (European American) culture and generational status moderated the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing problems. In addition, this study indirectly explored if the cultural differences lie in the normativity and social acceptability of physical discipline by making extrapolations from intragroup variations. Furthermore, it explored at a preliminary level whether the degree of warmth in the parent-child relationship had an affect on the association between physical discipline and externalizing problems.

This study sheds some further light on the controversy regarding ethnic and cultural group differences in the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing problems and on the mechanisms that underlie such differences.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

#### *Culture as Context*

Pluralism and contextualism are two of the main characteristics of the postmodern worldview. Pluralism is “the notion that there is more than one correct theory or perspective by which to view any phenomenon,” and contextualism is “the hypothesis that an event cannot be studied as an isolated element, but only within its setting” (Safran & Messer, 1997, p. 2). Postmodernism critiques the pretenses of absolute and neutral knowledge that are often considered to be the hallmarks of modernity. The interpretations or meanings we give to an event are determined by the context, and there are multiple perceptions of truth, each one influenced by the context in which the perceiver does the perception. However, in the epistemological stance of logical empiricism and its associated methodology of experimental research, which psychologists have adopted from the natural sciences, findings are presumed to be context-free and lead to universal, nomothetic laws (Safran & Messer, 1997). However, many psychological theories are cultural constructions reflecting a particular orientation to and interpretation of “reality” (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996).

As Bronfenbrenner (1979) put it, human beings do not function in isolation. They are all influenced pervasively by the multiple systems surrounding them and of which they are a part. Therefore, a noncontextual approach to behavior in general and to human development in particular is inadequate. Ecological theory conceptualizes human behavior as a function of continuous interactions between the characteristics of

individuals and the multiple environments within which they function (Sheridan & Gutkin, 2000). Bronfenbrenner (1979) differentiated among four levels of environmental systems increasing in complexity and comprehensiveness from micro- to meso- to exo- to macrosystems. The macrosystem, the most complex and comprehensive of the environmental systems, corresponds to the cultural context in which all the other systems nest. Therefore, it has an immense influence on human development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines development “as a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment” (p. 3). The environment as it is perceived rather than as it may exist in “objective” reality is what matters for behavior and development. Human development always occurs within a culture that shapes our construction of reality but it is rarely studied as such by academic psychology (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996).

Rohner (1984) conceptualized culture in terms of highly variable systems of meanings that are learned and shared by a people or an identifiable segment of a population. It represents designs and ways of life that are normally transmitted from one generation to another. Triandis et al.’s (1980) formulation is more explicit about the psychologically relevant aspects that constitute culture and defines it in terms of elements such as social norms, roles, beliefs, and values. The concept of ethnicity is also associated with culture and is often used interchangeably with culture. The term ethnicity is usually used in reference to groups that are characterized in terms of a common nationality, culture, or language (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Ethnicity refers to the ethnic quality or affiliation of a group that is normally characterized in terms of culture. Although being a part of a culture often means sharing certain social norms, beliefs, and values, it is imperative to keep in mind that, contrary to what is often assumed, there is much within-

group variance and heterogeneity within each ethnic or cultural group. (Mosley-Howard, 1995).

There is not always a one-to-one correspondence between ethnic origin and cultural practices (Mosley-Howard, 1995). The connection between ethnicity and culture can partly be understood by examining acculturation. Acculturation refers to the process by which ethnic values, beliefs, customs, and behaviors are relinquished or modified for the adoption of the dominant or mainstream culture (Aponte & Barnes, 1995). The degree of acculturation has a significant influence on the adherence to original cultural norms. Socioeconomic status serves as a moderating factor in the process of acculturation. Often the groups at lower socioeconomic levels are those least acculturated into the dominant culture (Aponte & Barnes, 1995). Acculturation is a continuous, dynamic, and open-ended process; it is rarely complete. Understanding the acculturation process helps psychologists serve culturally diverse individuals more effectively.

Culture has an important role in human behavior. This role has been recognized by many for many years, from Hippocrates in the classical Greek era (see Dona, 1991) to Wundt in the early years of psychology as a discipline. The importance of Wundt and his folk psychology were properly recognized by Allport (1968) in his article on the historical background of modern social psychology. Wundt stressed that thinking was heavily conditioned by language, by custom, and by myth, the three primary areas of his *Volkerpsychologie*. In more recent years, some psychologists have questioned the cross-cultural validity and universality of psychological laws and theories and argued for the inclusion of culture in psychological theories (Amir & Sharon, 1987; Pepitone & Triandis, 1987).

Despite this awareness by some psychologists regarding the significance of culture, the study of culture and related variables has largely been ignored in American mainstream psychology and has often been seen as the domain of cross-cultural psychology that is essentially segregated from mainstream psychology (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Mainstream psychology seems to assume that the study of culture has little to contribute to the study and understanding of basic psychological processes and to the practice of psychology in the United States. Theories usually do not include any cultural variables, and principles are assumed to apply to individuals everywhere. In other words, it is suggested that psychological knowledge developed in the United States by European American scholars using European American participants is universal (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993).

Such an etic or universalist perspective makes the implicit assumption that there are “principles, aspects, or processes of human existence that transcend (socio)racial and cultural boundaries and, therefore, are applicable to all human beings” (Helms & Cook, 2000, p.73). An outcome of this assumption is that theories and findings can be developed in one setting with one population and then successfully transported to other settings and populations. According to a recent review, 40% of articles published in major clinical, counseling, and school psychology journals between 1993 and 1997 failed to report the ethnicity of their participants (Case & Smith, 2000). This finding clearly demonstrates the indifference of researchers to the generalizability of their findings across different ethnic groups.

On the other hand, cross-cultural psychology has focused on the comparative study of behavioral phenomena between countries or groups assumed to represent

different cultures. However, cross-cultural psychologists also endorse the principle that their major function is to formulate laws that would hold for all individuals by testing the range of theories (Price-Williams, 1979). Culture has become a variable to be taken into account but the search for universals continues. Cross-cultural research largely disregards the measurement of relevant cultural variables responsible for observed differences and their relationships to the psychological phenomena demonstrated (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). In other words, it uses culture as an explanatory factor for intergroup variations in psychological phenomena without further exploring what aspects of the culture influence the phenomena. This approach ignores the complexity of culture as well as the cultural heterogeneity of nations or ethnic groups (Berry, 1985). It also does not tell much about the role of culture in human behavior. Identifying culturally relevant dimensions would allow for some cross-cultural generalizations as well as for a better understanding of intercultural similarities and differences.

Gergen (1973) claimed that theoretical principles are culturally and temporally bound. In his contextual approach, McGuire (1983) stressed the importance of finding the different contexts in which hypotheses are true or false. A theory's validity may vary across dimensions such as time, population, or culture. For example, Schachter's "law" (1959) that was based on American samples may be culture-bound. This law states that firstborns are more anxious than later-borns, and therefore, avoid anxiety-arousing situations. Amir and his colleagues (Amir, Sharan, & Kovarsky, 1968; Sharan, Amir, & Kovarsky, 1969) found this to be true for Israelis with Western backgrounds but not for other Israeli ethnic groups. For these differing groups, even opposite findings were found. This example, and many others, suggests that some basic psychological laws depend on a

certain cultural or subcultural context and may be cross-culturally invalid. This increases the need for replication studies in various cultures and subcultures that consequently will broaden our understanding of the specificity and universality of psychological findings and theories. A differentiation should be made between so-called emic findings that may be appropriate only in a specific culture and etic findings that are cross-culturally valid.

As Pepitone and Triandis (1987) pointed out, for theories to be universal, the meaning of the stimulus conditions has to be constant across cultures. However, since culture is the ultimate source of meaning, meaning constancy cannot be taken for granted. Emic or cultural approaches emphasize the uniqueness of concepts in each cultural context, because the concepts derive their meanings from these contexts (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). Culture, in its broadest definition, refers to the shared meanings that are encoded into the norms that constitute it. It is an “organizer” of meaning (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). Cultural systems such as values, beliefs, rules, worldviews, theories, customs, and other norms have a major influence on cognitions, attitudes, actions, and certain emotions. As such, psychologists must take culture into account to determine if the stimuli that theoretically produce certain behaviors have the same meaning everywhere and if those given meanings have the same affect everywhere. Pepitone and Triandis (1987) concluded that the universality claim is difficult to sustain without considerable qualification of theories, if the stimulus conditions for the behavior involve meaning.

Psychology as a discipline would benefit from efforts to incorporate culture in mainstream research and theory as well as from efforts to study culture and develop theory in cross-cultural psychology (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). Progress in this area is required for psychology to enhance its status as a scientific discipline and its standards of

ethical and social responsibility as a profession. Advancement of knowledge in the understanding of culture and its role in psychology would result in more universal principles and theories because it would make it possible to tease out culturally general and specific parts of theories. It would also result in interventions that are more sensitive to the reality and cultural diversity of society.

The need to study culture in psychology was emphasized in an American Psychological Association (APA) report on education (McGovern, Furumoto, Halpern, Kimble, & McKeachie, 1991). As this report also indicated, the demographic profile of the U.S. has been changing dramatically. Over 30% of the students in public and private elementary and secondary schools are from racial/ethnic minorities, with some areas of New York, Florida, and California having between 30% and 80% “minority” students (National Center for Education Statistics, Office of Education and Improvement, 1993). It is expected that non-white or non-European Americans will make up 50% of the U.S. population by the year 2050 (Gonzales et al., 1997). Due to the rapidly changing demographics in the national and the student population, McGovern et al. (1991) stated that an “important social and ethical responsibility of faculty members is to promote their students’ understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, and class issues in psychological theory, research, and practice” (p. 602).

School psychologists are usually not well equipped with theory about the complexities of culture and are not adequately introduced to the impact of culture upon practice (Rogers, Ponterotto, Conoley, & Wiese, 1992). In addition to lack of information and exposure, some school psychologists have not yet clarified their thinking about the construct of cultural diversity (Mosley-Howard, 1995). Some may even suffer from

‘cultural blindness’ and the related ‘ethnocentric fallacy’ (Atkinson, Atkinson, Smith, & Hilgard, 1987). These refer to a disposition to view the world through the values and norms of one’s own culture without an awareness of differing values and cultural norms that may underlie the thoughts and actions of another. Culture is one of many factors that have an impact on psychological processes and human behavior, and it is very important to the understanding of culturally diverse populations. It is, therefore, imperative for school psychologists to examine what role culture plays in the lives of children from diverse backgrounds.

Despite general agreement about the need for more research on children across ethnic groups, contributors to psychological literature continue to show apathy toward cultural issues (Sue, 1999). Most theories and interventions for children and adolescents are based on research conducted mostly with European American, middle-class samples and, thus, are unable to shed light on the specific needs of children from other cultural backgrounds (Dumas, Rollock, Prinz, Hops, & Blechman, 1999).

### *Culture and Parenting*

It is interesting to note that culture, which is collectively created, transformed, and transmitted by human beings, in turn shapes how they perceive the world, construct reality, process information, and behave. There is an ongoing circular and dynamic relationship between these two currents. Likewise, culture affects parenting beliefs, goals, and behaviors while parents socialize their children into their culture.

How to care for children, how to rear them, and how to apprentice them into the culture are constant concerns of parents in every society. Parents are the primary socialization agents who guide children into adulthood and socialize them into society.

However, how parents do this, and the social goals they embrace, varies widely across cultures and subcultures (Small, 2001). In other words, parenting is culturally constructed (Harkness & Super, 2002). Parents in different cultures receive many different kinds of guidance that are rooted in culture as to how to raise their children properly. Parenting can be conceptualized as a culturally constructed interface between the larger environment and the development of children.

Anthropologists and cross-cultural psychologists are especially interested in how parents from different cultures socialize their children, and they have tried to make sense of these paths of socialization. In some cultures, the primary parenting goal is to make children obey and respect their parents; in others, it is to raise independent and assertive children. Some cultures believe that children are free spirits who should roam free; others believe they are unruly beings in need of order. These parenting beliefs and goals that are rooted in culture inevitably affect the childrearing practices used by parents. Parents' cultural belief systems or "ethnotheories" play a powerful role in shaping parental behavior (Harkness & Super, 2002, p. 274).

Even within the United States, certain aspects of parenting (e.g., authoritative style and expected educational attainment) are not only distributed differently in different ethnic groups, but the same parenting behaviors are associated with positive developmental outcomes in some groups but not in others (Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Thus, studying parenting not only across cultures but also across subcultures within the same country would inform our understanding of normative parenting processes and their associations with developmental outcomes.

Another important and related aspect of a cultural perspective to parenting is to consider culture as a source of meaning. According to a contextual approach to person-environment relations that focuses on culture, the “same” behavior may have different meanings in different contexts. Recent formulations of cultural psychology highlight cultural context as a source of meaning and stress the “implicit meanings that shape psychological processes” (Shweder & Sullivan, 1993, p. 507). In other words, the “same” parenting behavior may have different meanings across cultures and subcultures. The example of parental control provided below will clarify this point.

#### *Parental Control in Context*

Baumrind (1971) conceptualized two basic dimensions of parenting—warmth (acceptance-rejection) and control (permissiveness-strictness)—the various combinations of which lead to different parenting styles. The first dimension concerns the affective continuum of parenting and ranges from warm, accepting, and sensitive behavior on the one hand to cold, rejecting, and hostile behavior on the other hand. The second dimension concerns issues of power assertion and ranges from frequent use of restrictive demands and high control to frequent lack of supervision and low control. The interaction of these two continua results in four different parenting styles: (1) authoritative parenting (high warmth, high control), (2) authoritarian parenting (low warmth, high control), (3) indulgent-permissive parenting (high warmth, low control), and (4) indifferent-uninvolved parenting (low warmth, low control) (Baumrind, 1971).

Following our discussion of culture as a source of meaning, it is interesting to note that cross-cultural research on parental control has found that the meaning of parental control is culturally defined. Research conducted in North America and

Germany found high parental control to be associated with perceived parental hostility and rejection (Rohner & Rohner, 1978; Saavedra, 1980; Trommsdorff, 1985). However, parental control was found to be associated with perceived parental warmth and acceptance in Japan (Kornadt, 1987; Trommsdorff, 1985) and in Korea (Rohner & Pettengill, 1985).

Attribution of opposite meanings to parental control in different cultural contexts can only be explained by considering the contextually situated meaning systems that define what is and is not “normal” (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). In cultures such as United States and Germany, the emphasis in child socialization is on autonomy and, thus, nonrestrictive discipline is the norm. Strong parental discipline is an exception in such contexts. Therefore, it is more likely to be viewed as “not normal” and as indicating parental hostility or rejection.

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) suggests that individuals would interpret behavior or experience that is different from others’ as “not normal.” Only children old enough to perceive the differences between their own situation and that of other children can do such comparisons. Non-normative or deviant childrearing behavior may even function as pathology, precisely because children exposed to it would interpret it as “not normal” in comparing themselves to peers (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). Also, deviant restrictive parental control can actually reflect parental hostility in such a cultural context.

In Japan and Korea, on the other hand, childrearing is characterized by strong parental control that is considered “normal” and therefore “good.” When a child who is exposed to strong parental control compares herself to peers, she sees that she is not treated differently and, thus, is not rejected by her parents (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1996). However,

if the child finds that she is treated differently than other children, then she feels rejected by her parents. Trommsdorf (1985) notes, “Japanese adolescents even feel *rejected* by their parents when they experience only little parental control and a broader range of autonomy” (p. 238; emphasis in original).

The environment as it is perceived rather than as it may exist in “objective” reality is what matters for behavior and development. The meaning of parental control derives from how it is perceived and whether or not it is seen as “normal” and legitimate in different cultural contexts, an attribution that is influenced by social conventions and norms. In general, high levels of parental control are common in closely-knit familial and cultural contexts where childrearing values stress conformity rather than individualistic independence in the child (Bond, 1986). In a cross-cultural study (Kağıtçıbaşı, 1970) that compared Turkish and American adolescents on perceived parental control and affection, no difference was found in parental affection but there was higher perceived parental control among Turkish adolescents. This study shows the independence of parental affection and control dimensions of childrearing while also pointing to the social-normative and cultural basis of parental control, though not of parental affection.

Parental affection can have its basis in biological/evolutionary processes involving protection and care of the offspring for the continuation of the species and, thus, can be a more universal psychological process (Batson, 1990). Parental control, on the other hand, is closely related to values and goals of socialization that vary across cultures and through time (Peisner, 1989). Whether a culture values dependence and obedience vs. independence and autonomy in child socialization will have an effect on how common parental control is in that culture, how it is perceived, and what meaning it

has. The body of literature discussed above provides strong evidence for the importance of cultural meanings of parental control as they affect children's developmental trajectories across different cultural contexts.

Culture forms a significant part of psychological reality. Because meaning is defined culturally, cultural context must be integrated into psychological analysis. The study of parenting and development as culturally contextualized is also valuable for the check it provides against an ethnocentric worldview as well as the implications of such a view (Bornstein, 1991). It is dangerous to project essentially European American ideas onto the behavior and experience of people from other cultures and subcultures.

### *Physical Discipline*

An important aspect of parental control is discipline. All children misbehave from time to time. Regardless of the child, the parents, and the culture, even the most well-behaved child does something unacceptable at some point. And, as part of the child's socialization, parents must deal with that behavior. There are many ways to deal with unacceptable behavior. Parents' choice of disciplinary practices is based on their parenting philosophy that is part of a larger parental script, including values, beliefs, and goals, that in turn is anchored in culture and history (Small, 2001).

This study focused on one particular type of disciplinary practice, namely physical discipline (also called corporal punishment and physical punishment in the literature). Straus (1994) defines corporal punishment as the use of physical force (such as spanking, hitting, or pinching) intended to cause a child pain, but not injury, for the purpose of controlling or correcting the child's behavior. This corresponds in practice to the legal definition of corporal punishment in all states of the U.S. (Straus, 1994).

Similarly, in this study, physical discipline was defined as nonabusive use of physical punishment by parents for disciplinary purposes. More specifically, the term refers to parental behaviors such as spanking and slapping.

As mentioned before, different cultures have different childrearing practices based on parental goals, beliefs, and values that are shaped by the culture. Similarly, physical discipline is widely used, normative, and socially accepted in some cultures and completely condemned in others. Several countries have banned all parental spanking, and others are considering such a ban (Larzelere, 2000). In some cultures, almost all physical discipline is considered abusive and harmful. Consequently, when different cultures come into contact with each other (e.g., as a result of immigration), confusions, misunderstandings, and conflicts inevitably emerge concerning the use of physical discipline.

Perceptions of the relative value and harm of different childrearing practices unavoidably depend on the background of the observer. However, the official view in a society is usually biased in favor of the dominant culture. After analyzing cultural contextual factors that indicate whether a practice is harmful within an ethnic group, Korbin (1977) concluded that the behavior should not be considered abusive if the following conditions are satisfied: (1) the behavior reflects a sanctioned practice of that culture; (2) it falls within the limits of behavior and deviation acceptable in that culture; (3) the intent of the caretaker is consistent with cultural norms governing the practice; (4) it is the perception of the child that this is an appropriate practice in the situation; (5) the practice is important in the development of the child as a member of the culture.

While we cannot take the extreme relativist position that any cultural practice is acceptable by worldwide standards, we must avoid imposing our own standards and expectations onto members of other cultural and ethnic groups. An appreciation of cultural differences is necessary to uncover areas of childrearing in minority cultures that are likely to be misunderstood by the dominant culture.

### *Physical Discipline in the Caribbean Culture*

The Caribbean as a geographic location refers to a group of islands that are situated in the Caribbean Sea from the north coast of Venezuela in South America to the south coast of Florida in the United States. Most countries in this region have gained their independence in the past 34 years, but some are still colonies of Britain, France, the Netherlands, and the United States (Baptiste, Hardy, & Lewis, 1997). Based on previous European occupation, the Caribbean is subdivided into: British English speaking (e.g., Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Belize, and Guyana); Spanish speaking (e.g., Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico); French speaking (e.g., Guadeloupe, Haiti, Martinique, and St. Martin); and Dutch speaking (e.g., Aruba, St. Maarten, and parts of the Netherland Antilles).

The population of these countries is multicultural/multiracial. However, people of African descent comprise a majority of the inhabitants except in Guyana and Trinidad where people of East Indian descent constitute approximately 50% of the population (Baptiste et al., 1997). Due to the former European colonization and the importation of African slaves and East Indian labor, Caribbean cultural customs are influenced by a mix of European, West African, East Indian (Hindu and Moslem), Asian (primarily Chinese), and to a lesser extent indigenous Arawak and Carib cultures. Although each country has

developed a unique culture that distinguishes it from the others, they also share many commonalities that link them.

Children are seen as desirable and are highly valued by all societies in the region.

As Evans and Davis (1997) state:

Children are highly valued throughout the Caribbean, and parents, in general, state that they want the best for their children. Embedded in this stance are certain cultural beliefs that influence childrearing practices and the socialization process. The biblical injunction not to 'spare the rod and spoil the child' and the idea that children 'should be seen and not heard' are adhered to by many Caribbean parents. Across socioeconomic groups, parents value a punitive, restrictive approach to discipline and childrearing....Harsher corporal punishment is often meted out to boys, at home and at school. (p. 5)

In many homes in the Caribbean, harsh, punitive, and authoritarian discipline and childrearing practices are the norm. Many parents use corporal punishment as a major form of discipline. There are several factors related to this tendency. It may stem not only from the beliefs held about children, but also from the unrealistic expectations of behavior required of young children. Behaviors that may be normative for a certain age, but that displease the parent can be severely punished (Landmann, Grantham-McGregor, & Desai, 1983). In addition, the tendency to punish the child physically may be a result of parents' lack of knowledge of alternative ways of disciplining the child (Wint & Brown, 1988). Parents often revert to methods that their parents used that are passed down over many generations. Another reason for the use of corporal punishment may be

the harsh conditions of poverty that make the parent exhausted, worried, and preoccupied with day-to-day survival (Evans & Davis, 1997).

Corporal punishment is also frequently used as a means of disciplining students in the primary and all-age schools (public schools for ages 6 to 15) as well as in a number of secondary schools (Evans & Davis, 1997). Teachers state that they use corporal punishment to maintain order in the classroom and to get children to learn. Corporal punishment appears to be part of the pedagogical strategy in the schools.

### *Caribbean Families and Immigration*

Caribbean families have been immigrating to the United States since the beginning of 19<sup>th</sup> century, and by early 20<sup>th</sup> century, their numbers had begun to increase substantially (Ueda, 1980). During the early (1850s) and middle (1900s) phases of this immigration, the majority of immigrants came from the upper and middle classes, respectively. However, as a result of immigration regulation changes in the United States in the 1970s, recent immigrants came from all socioeconomic classes, with the majority from the lower class. Many came from the rural areas of the Caribbean and were not equipped with the skills needed to function in large urban communities such as Boston, Miami, and New York City. Therefore, many of the new immigrants experienced greater postimmigration difficulties in adjusting to the United States than did the earlier immigrants.

One of the most severe conflicts that Caribbean immigrant parents experience with the larger system in the United States occurs in the domain of physically disciplining children (Baptiste et al., 1997). Different beliefs concerning the appropriateness of physical punishment lead to this conflict between Caribbean immigrant parents and the

U.S. culture. As mentioned previously, physical punishment is widely used in the Caribbean as the primary mode of disciplining children. As a result, when they come to the United States, Caribbean immigrant parents accept and use physical discipline as an appropriate method of socializing children and guiding them into adulthood (Thrasher & Anderson, 1988). However, they soon discover that physical punishment of children is not acceptable in the United States. Consequently, they often report feeling restrained in their authority to discipline children “appropriately” in “their way,” consistent with the usual and acceptable modes of disciplining children in their native countries.

Not surprisingly, Caribbean parents are overrepresented, especially in large Northeastern cities, among parents against whom allegations and charges of child abuse and neglect have been filed and convictions obtained (Baptiste et al., 1997). These parents often express anger and confusion regarding the system’s devaluation of their belief about physical punishment and the punitive measures that are taken against them for using such disciplinary techniques in the United States. It is important to note that although many child abuse allegations are made against Caribbean parents, a substantial number of these allegations are dismissed.

The concept of acculturation highlights the variation and individual differences within any given group. These distinctions are critical if we want to move beyond stereotypes and superficial generalizations. Acculturation, generational status as a proxy for acculturation, and recency of migration of the family should be taken into account when working with ethnic and minority parents. Acculturation is the process through which cultural adaptation and change occurs (García Coll & Pachter, 2002). Individuals strive to establish a critical balance between maintaining their unique cultural identity and

adapting to the ways of the new cultural settings in which they find themselves. The outcome of cultural contact is based on the attitudes of both the host and minority groups (e.g., the degree to which maintaining one's cultural identity is important, the degree to which relationships with other groups in society are valued, and so forth).

During acculturation, families combine ethnic, minority, and dominant culture parenting values (García Coll & Pachter, 2002). Family acculturation level may have an impact on parenting style by influencing developmental expectations, mother-infant interaction, and disciplinary practices. To some extent, parents determine the aspects of parenting (e.g., disciplinary practices and educational expectations) they uphold and those they relinquish in favor of the parental values, attitudes, and practices of the dominant culture.

The context of ethnic and minority families reflects cultural dimensions that are unique and that may be foreign to us. We may have stereotypes due to our unfamiliarity or our own cultural biases. We may react to certain childrearing practices with disbelief and disapproval, since we have been socialized into a particular cultural milieu with its own patterns of beliefs and behaviors. However, we should not let our worldview blind us to the differences that permeate family life in ethnic and minority families.

Psychologists should be very careful in how they walk the line between condemning, supporting, and empathizing with parents who are referred to them.

Most of the extant literature on “normative” aspects of parenting is based on middle-SES, European American samples. The study of parenting in general and physical discipline in particular among ethnic groups in the United States is important not only for scholarly reasons concerning our understanding of normative parenting processes in

general or within certain groups. As ethnic children become the majority of the youth population in this country as a result of the recent demographic shift, such subcultural research in parenting is necessary to inform public policy, practice, and effective intervention on these children's behalf.

### *Physical Discipline and Externalizing Problems*

Children who have conflicts with the environment reflected by aggressive and antisocial behaviors are referred to as having externalizing problems (Rubin & Burgess, 2002). A wide variety of studies identified an empirically derived syndrome involving aggressive, oppositional, destructive, and antisocial behavior (Wicks-Nelson & Israel, 2000). This syndrome has been given a variety of names including externalizing, undercontrolled, or conduct disorder. Researchers also distinguished narrower groupings within this broad syndrome. For example, Achenbach (1993) described two syndromes, aggressive behavior (e.g., fights, destroys things, is explosive) and delinquent behavior (e.g., lies, steals, is truant), within the broader externalizing syndrome.

Externalizing problems are one of the most common childhood disorders and one of the major reasons for treatment referral in childhood. The predominant interest in externalizing problems stems from a variety of significant factors. First, externalizing behaviors are more salient compared to internalizing problems (e.g., social withdrawal, anxiety, and depression) and more likely to evoke some kind of negative affect (e.g., anger) in the adults around the child (Mills & Rubin, 1990). Second, children in Western cultures are attending group care and educational settings at earlier ages for longer periods of the lifespan than in earlier generations, making control in these group settings necessary for caregivers and educators. Consequently, children with externalizing

problems are viewed as serious challenges to the delivery of appropriate group care and education and, thus, are targeted early for treatment (Coie & Dodge, 1998).

There is growing evidence that the quality of children's relationships with parents and the experience of particular forms of parenting practices contribute significantly to the development of externalizing behavior problems. There is a substantial literature on the relationship between parental physical discipline and the development of externalizing problems in children. Early studies that conceptualized physical discipline as a categorical construct (abuse vs. nonabuse) lent support to the hypothesis that being physically abused is associated with an increased likelihood that a child later will exhibit abnormally high levels of aggression (Widom, 1989). However, this categorical approach is found to be unsatisfactory, since one must draw what is, ultimately, an arbitrary line between abuse and nonabuse. In the past two decades, there has been a shift from a categorical to a dimensional conceptualization of physical discipline and abusive behavior by parents according to which these behaviors are considered to occur along a continuum (Weiss, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1992).

In a meta-analysis by Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1986), several types of socialization variables emerged as being most consistently associated with externalizing problems in past research: parental involvement in their child's activities, parental supervision of their child, and the use of harsh or inconsistent discipline. This meta-analysis demonstrated that two types of parental discipline (harsh/abusive parental discipline and parental inconsistency in providing discipline) were significantly related to child externalizing problems in many studies, although their relationship was not as consistent as the two other types of socialization practices.

Several studies published after this meta-analysis supported the relationship between parental physical discipline and child conduct problems including oppositional defiant disorder and conduct disorder (Frick et al., 1992; Rey & Plapp, 1990). Another meta-analysis by Rothbaum and Weisz (1994) found evidence for a positive association between harsh parental control and child externalizing problems such as hostility and aggression. However, correlational findings do not prove causality, and experiments using random assignment cannot be conducted to investigate spanking children. It is very possible, therefore, that child externalizing behaviors lead to more parental physical discipline, rather than the other way around.

Research on children at risk for externalizing problems has shown that, over time, harsh and coercive parent-child transactions lead to more externalizing problems (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Socialization theorists, who conducted these studies, have proposed that parents who use more physical discipline have children who become more aggressive because of various learning mechanisms such as modeling and escape and aversive conditioning.

Patterson (1982) and his colleagues at the Oregon Social Learning Center have developed a social learning model for the development of aggression in children. In this model, family interactions provide a training ground for a child to learn coercive methods of controlling interactions with others. Through analyses of micro-social interactions between parents and children, Patterson (1982) outlined the development of a coercive cycle that develops between parent and child and that escalates through aversive conditioning. The cycle starts when a parent makes a demand of a child and a child reacts aversively (e.g., whines, becomes defiant). Rather than pushing the child, the parent

withdraws the demand, which reinforces the child's aversive response. During the next phase of the cycle the parent again makes a demand of the child but decides not to give in to the child's aversive behaviors. As the child becomes more aversive (e.g., temper tantrum), the parent becomes more aversive (e.g., yelling, spanking). As the parent becomes more aversive, the child eventually complies, which reinforces the parent's increase in aversive behavior. This cycle repeats itself over and over again, leading to each party reinforcing increasing levels of aversiveness in the other. This training in coercive responses is then carried over by the child into other settings with other people (e.g., teachers and peers). Patterson's (1982) social learning model shows how important the child's family environment, especially parent-child interactions, is to the development of aggression in children.

In addition to the numerous studies that directly demonstrated the link between harsh parental discipline and externalizing problems, many treatment evaluation studies provided further support for this link. Interventions designed to change parental discipline practices (e.g., increase consistency, reduce harshness) tend to be the most effective interventions in reducing externalizing problem behavior in children (Kazdin, 1987; Patterson et al., 1992).

Some studies that have looked at the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors longitudinally—measuring both variables at one time and then measuring externalizing behaviors again at some later point—suggested that physical discipline may indeed increase subsequent externalizing problems. One study (Eron, Huesmann, & Zelli, 1991) found that boys who received physical punishment at age eight were more aggressive than other males twenty-two years later on several measures of

aggression, such as number of arrests, tendency to hit their spouses, and self-reported serious aggression. Another longitudinal study (Straus et al., 1997) reported that the more times a child was spanked during one week (as reported by the child's mother), the more likely the child was to display antisocial behavior, including aggression, two years later—even after the child's earlier antisocial behavior, gender, and ethnic background and the family's socioeconomic status were controlled for. Children who were spanked even once during that first week showed an increase in antisocial behavior two years later.

Weiss et al. (1992) suggested that many of the earlier studies had methodological shortcomings including, but not limited to, their reliance on retrospective designs, biased sampling techniques, and a lack of appropriate comparison groups. They conducted a study to determine whether harsh parental discipline occurring early in life was predictive of later aggressive behavior in children. They used a prospective design with randomly selected samples to avoid some of the methodological difficulties mentioned above. Two cohorts of children were employed at the time of pre-registration for kindergarten. The first cohort was 83% Caucasian (16% African-American), and the second cohort was 81% Caucasian (18% African-American). Parental discipline ratings were obtained through interviews with parents. The researchers controlled for three variables (marital/partner violence, SES, and early child temperament) that potentially could be confounded with harsh parental behavior. In each cohort, ratings of the severity of discipline were significantly correlated in a positive direction with each of the parent-rated and school-based aggression scores. Thus, the authors concluded that early physical punishment was positively correlated with child aggressive behavior as assessed by

parents, peers, teachers, and direct observations. This study used a heavily Caucasian sample and did not look at the moderating effects of ethnicity.

Almost all of the research reviewed so far has focused on middle-class, European American families, which is an apparent shortcoming. The generality of the prospective association of parental physical discipline and child externalizing problems across race or ethnicity is currently an open question (Rowe, Vazsonyi, & Flannery, 1994). Little is known about the similarities and differences in these processes across ethnic and cultural groups (Deater-Deckard et al., 1996).

Rowe and colleagues (1994) drew a useful distinction between two competing hypotheses. The *no group differences* hypothesis is that there are few, if any, ethnic group differences in most developmental processes, with *processes* defined as the patterns of covariation among relevant variables. According to this hypothesis, most members of a society, including members of ethnic minorities, are exposed to variables common to all ethnic groups in that society; culturally specific environmental experiences do not alter the associations among developmental variables. This hypothesis accommodates main effect differences in variables (e.g., higher rates of physical discipline found among ethnic minority families) but states that correlations among variables do not differ between groups. In contrast, the *group differences* hypothesis states that correlations among variables do differ between groups. According to this model, development occurs within cultural contexts that are associated with qualitatively different processes, with *processes* defined as different patterns of correlations among relevant variables. Any observed differences in developmental processes are assumed to be adaptive responses to the demands of the environment.

The study of ethnic and cultural group variations in developmental processes is important for two reasons (Deater-Deckard et al., 1996). First, it informs basic developmental theory by testing the generalizability of a developmental model to multiple identifiable groups. Second, it helps to determine the appropriateness and value of empirically based interventions intended for multiple groups of individuals.

There are not many studies that have explored cultural and ethnic group differences in the relationship between parental discipline and externalizing problems. In their paper “Discipline practices among Bermudian mothers of young children” presented at the biennial meeting of the International Society for Research in Child Development in Amsterdam, Deater-Deckard and Scarr (1994; cited in Deater-Deckard et al., 1996) reported no association between physical maternal discipline and observer or mother ratings of child hyperactivity and manageability problems among Bermudian families. McLeod, Kruttschnitt, and Dornfeld (1994) reported that spanking frequency predicted antisocial behavior in European Americans but not in African Americans, controlling for previous antisocial behavior. Gunnoe and Mariner (1997) also found that spanking frequency predicted an increased frequency of fighting five years later for European Americans, whereas it predicted a decrease of subsequent fighting for African Americans, controlling for previous bullying. In his review of the literature, Larzelere (2000) concluded that physical punishment significantly increases subsequent externalizing problems but that this detrimental outcome is neutralized or reversed in African Americans, a subculture that views spanking more normatively. All these studies controlled for SES that is a possible confounding variable.

Two relatively recent studies that have explored the potential for ethnic group differences will be reviewed here at length. The first study was conducted by Deater-Deckard and his colleagues (1996). Their aim was to test whether the relation between physical discipline and child aggression was moderated by ethnic-group status. A sample of 466 European-American and 100 African American children from a broad range of socioeconomic levels were followed from kindergarten through third grade. SES and maternal marital status were controlled for so that ethnic group differences in the discipline-child behavior link could be tested more directly. The interaction between ethnic status and discipline was tested through hierarchical linear regression, and the results supported the groups differences hypothesis. More harsh physical discipline was associated with higher externalizing problems, a finding that is consistent with past research. However, this association was found only for European American children. There was no relation between externalizing problems and the harshness of physical discipline for African American children, and there was even a trend whereby African American children receiving harsher physical punishment had lower aggression and externalizing scores.

Deater-Deckard et al. (1996) argued that the meaning of physical discipline may be different for different ethnic groups. Among European American families, the presence of harsh discipline may imply an out-of-control, parent-centered household, whereas a lack of physical discipline among African-American parents may indicate an abdication of the parenting role to others. Even more important may be ethnic and cultural group variations in the ways children view the meaning of their parents' behavior. For instance, as mentioned before, studies have shown that the correlation

between parental warmth and control varies for different ethnic groups. The researchers' interpretation of their findings is congruent with culturally relative models of socialization. They argue that physical discipline by parents is not associated with externalizing problems in children when such discipline practices are normative and socially accepted in a particular ethnic, racial, or cultural group. Where normative and accepted, they suggest, harsh discipline may even be viewed as positive parental involvement and have a different developmental function.

Another important finding of this study was that ethnic group differences in the effects of harsh discipline on externalizing outcomes hold only within the nonabusive range of discipline. When the researchers classified children in this study into three groups (low in harsh discipline, high in harsh discipline, and physically abused no matter what other discipline pattern), they found that the physically abused group displayed significantly higher externalizing scores than each of the other two groups among both European American and African American children. In addition, the group high in harsh discipline displayed more externalizing problems than the group low in harsh discipline, but only among the European American children. Among the African American children, the direction of the effect was opposite, although small in magnitude. This pattern of results suggests that the cultural meaning, implications, and outcomes of physical abuse do not differ across these two ethnic groups and that the cultural differences lie in the meaning attached to harsh discipline that is in the nonabusive range.

Another study from which inferences can be made about the ethnic differences hypothesis was conducted by Kilgore, Snyder, and Lentz (2000). The researchers assessed the association between parental physical discipline and early externalizing

problems in 123 highly disadvantaged African American boys and girls who were attending a local-neighborhood Head Start program. The sample was followed up from the beginning of Head Start through the end of kindergarten. Hierarchical regression analyses showed that physical discipline was reliably associated with concurrent early child externalizing problems after controlling for family income. A stringent test of parent discipline entailed the prospective prediction of child externalizing problems. The results of a hierarchical regression equation showed that coercive parental discipline continued to make a reliable contribution to the prediction of later externalizing problems after the earlier levels of those problems were accounted for.

Kilgore et al. (2000) made inferences about culture and ethnicity on the basis of indirect comparisons to findings derived from other studies of alternate groups. According to the researchers, their data suggest that the increased risk for externalizing problems associated with coercive and harsh discipline applies to disadvantaged, African American families as well as to families with other racial and ethnic characteristics. This result is congruent with the hypothesis of no ethnic difference in developmental processes. It stands in sharp contrast to Deater-Deckard et al.'s (1996) report that physical discipline was unrelated to child externalizing problems among African Americans.

Another factor that influences the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing problems and that may help explain some of the seemingly contradictory findings is the overall family environment. Several studies suggest that physical discipline is less likely to increase externalizing problems when it is administered in the context of an overall warm and supportive parent-child relationship

(Baumrind, 1996, 1997; Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997). Deater-Deckard and Dodge (1997) reported that harsh discipline predicted subsequent externalizing problems in European Americans, but not in African Americans, unless African American parents were nonnurturing. The role of warmth in the parent-child relationship in shaping the developmental consequences of the use of physical discipline needs to be further explored.

### *Problem Statement*

As discussed above, there is an extensive literature on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing problems. Recent longitudinal and prospective studies suggest that physical discipline contributes to externalizing problems. However, most of this research was conducted with European American samples. Considering that meaning is contextually situated and cultural meanings of physical discipline may affect children's developmental trajectories differently across different cultural contexts, it is hard to make generalizations to other ethnic and cultural subgroups. The few studies conducted with African American samples gave inconsistent results. Given the scarcity and inconsistency of findings relevant to this issue, the degree to which culture and ethnicity moderates the relation between parental physical discipline and child externalizing problems remains an open question. More research is clearly needed to further explore this issue.

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between parental physical discipline and children's externalizing problems in the Caribbean subculture living in New York City. The Caribbean population was selected for this study because,

as mentioned before, physical disciplinary practices are quite common, normative, and socially accepted in this subculture unlike they are in the European American culture. However, the implications of harsher forms of discipline remain largely unexplored in the Caribbean psychological literature (Evans & Davies, 1997). Studying this subgroup allows us to see the similarities and differences in the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing problems across subcultures.

Another purpose of the study was to examine whether acculturation to the European American and Caribbean cultures and parents' generational status moderate the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing problems. In addition, this study indirectly explored if the cultural differences lie in the normativity and social acceptability of physical discipline by making extrapolations from intragroup variations. Furthermore, it explored at a preliminary level whether the degree of warmth in the parent-child relationship has an affect on the association between physical discipline and externalizing problems.

This study sheds some further light on the controversy regarding ethnic and cultural group differences in the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing problems and on the mechanisms that underlie such differences.

### *Hypotheses*

Based on the literature review, problem statement, and purpose, the following hypotheses were tested:

HY1: Parental physical discipline (PD) is not related significantly to child externalizing behaviors (EB), after controlling for socioeconomic status (SES) and early temperament (T).

HY2: Acculturation to European American culture (AA) has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors.

HY3: Acculturation to Caribbean culture (AC) has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors.

HY4: Generational status (G) has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors.

HY5: Normativity/social acceptance (N) of physical discipline in the Caribbean subculture as perceived by the parents has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors.

HY6: Warmth in the parent-child relationship (W) as perceived by the parents has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors.

The complete regression equation:

$$\begin{aligned}
 EB = & b_0 + b_1 \text{ SES} + b_2 \text{ T} && \{control\ variables\} \\
 & + b_3 \text{ PD} + b_4 \text{ AA} + b_5 \text{ AC} + b_6 \text{ G} + b_7 \text{ N} + b_8 \text{ W} && \{main\ effects\} \\
 & + b_9 \text{ (PDxAA)} + b_{10} \text{ (PDxAC)} + b_{11} \text{ (PDxG)} + b_{12} \text{ (PDxN)} + b_{13} \text{ (PDxW)} && \{interaction\ effects\}
 \end{aligned}$$

## CHAPTER III

### Method

This chapter includes five sections: participants, measures, procedure, design, and data analysis. It provides a detailed description of who participated in the study, what measures were used, how the study was conducted, the research design the study had, and how the data were analyzed after they were collected following the procedures outlined.

#### *Participants*

The participants in this study were 89 parents of Caribbean origin whose children attended a parochial school in Brooklyn, New York. The school served 385 students from kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade and was located in a predominantly Caribbean neighborhood, which was reflected in the student body. According to school records, 92% of the students were Black, and almost all of them were of Caribbean origin. Five percent of the students were Hispanic, and 3% were Asian or Pacific Islander. The students' SES ranged from low to middle; 55% of the students received free lunch and an additional 21% received reduced-price lunch. The school received Title I funds from the federal government, the goal of which was to provide instructional services and activities to meet the needs of disadvantaged, educationally deprived, and at-risk children.

The study survey was sent to all the parents in the school, but it was specified in the letter that accompanied the survey that only parents of Caribbean origin should complete the survey, if they volunteered to do so. Out of 385 students in the school, 354 were of Caribbean origin. Out of 354 surveys that reached families of Caribbean origin in this school, 89 were returned to the researcher. This translates to a return rate of 25 %.

The respondents were predominantly the mothers of the students; only eight surveys were completed by fathers. The gender distribution of students whose parents completed the survey was even, with 45 male and 44 female students. Forty-eight percent of the respondents were married, 37 % single, and the rest separated or divorced. The mean age of respondents was 39.5, and the mean age of their children was 8.6 (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations of Child Age, Parent Age and Years in the U.S.*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Child Age	4	14	8.6	2.56
Parent Age	25	63	39.5	7.56
Years in the U.S.	2	45	20.1	7.91

The majority of the respondents (39.3 %) were of Haitian origin, followed by Trinidad, Jamaica, and Grenada. Almost 80 % of the sample had their origin in one of these four countries (see Table 2). Nineteen percent of the respondents were born in the United States; 14.6 % were 1<sup>st</sup> generation, 3.4 % were 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, and 1.1 % was third generation. The majority of the sample (80.9 %) immigrated to this country. Their mean length of time in the U.S. was 20 years (see Table 1). Seventy-three percent of the sample reported that they lived in an ethnic neighborhood in contrast to 10 % who lived in non-ethnic neighborhoods. The rest did not specify type of neighborhood.

Table 2

*Distribution of Parents by Country of Origin.*

Country of origin	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Haiti	35	39.3	39.3
Trinidad	14	15.7	55
Jamaica	12	13.5	68.5
Grenada	9	10.1	78.6
Barbados	6	6.7	85.3
St. Lucia	5	5.6	90.9
Other	8	8.9	100

*Measures*

This study employed an anonymous survey (see Appendix B) as the method of data collection. The survey consisted of various questionnaires, checklists, and scales that will be described in detail below (see Table 3 at the end of this section for a quick view of study variables and measures). The anonymous survey was selected as the preferred method of data collection due to the controversial nature of the study topic, namely parental use of physical punishment and parents' potential fears concerning the legal issues involved. It was believed that parents would not disclose such sensitive and private information, especially to a stranger and an outsider to the institution with whom they did not have any connection, if the survey was not anonymous. The anonymous survey format provided a safe and secure environment for parents in which they could disclose

such information with the least possible amount of fear attached. The pilot interviews with parents confirmed this view.

In addition, research has shown that parents are the most reliable and useful informants of children's externalizing problems. Loeber, Green, and Lahey (1990) found that the perceived relative usefulness of information provided by children, mothers, and teachers varied as a function of the behavioral domain being assessed. Mental health professionals rated parents as more useful informants than teachers and children in assessing antisocial behavior and aggression. In another study, Loeber, Green, Lahey, and Stouthamer-Loeber (1991) tested the correlations between parent, child, and teacher reports of disruptive behaviors and several important impairment criteria (e.g., school suspensions, police contacts, grade retention, special education placement) assessed one year later. Supporting common clinical practice, parental reports of conduct problem behaviors were the best predictors of impairment one year later.

*Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) 4-18.* The CBCL (Achenbach, 1991) is designed to record in a standardized format children's competencies and problems as reported by their parents or parent surrogates. It reflects the author's belief that (1) parents are important sources of data about children's competencies and problems; (2) they are usually the most knowledgeable about their child's behavior across time and situations; and (3) their views are often crucial in determining what will be done about the behavior. Today, the CBCL is one of the most widely used child assessment instruments, both in research and in clinical practice.

The CBCL/4-18 contains a 113-item behavior problems checklist that covers a wide range of behavior problems in children. Eight syndrome scales were derived

empirically from this checklist: Withdrawn, Somatic Complaints, Anxious/Depressed, Social Problems, Thought Problems, Attention Problems, Delinquent Behavior, and Aggressive Behavior. There is a three-option response scale for each problem item: 0 = not true of the child; 1 = somewhat or sometimes true; 2 = very true or often true. The instructions for the CBCL/4-18 state that the parents should respond to the items based on their child's behavior "now or within the past 6 months."

In addition to the syndrome scale scores, the CBCL yields an Internalizing problem scale score; an Externalizing problem scale score; and a Total problem scale score. Achenbach is the first person who developed the behavior composites called Internalizing and Externalizing. These groupings of behavioral/emotional problems were identified by performing second-order factor analyses of the eight syndrome scales. The Withdrawn, Somatic Complaints, and Anxious/Depressed subscales make up the Internalizing scale. The Delinquent Behavior and Aggressive Behavior subscales make up the Externalizing scale.

The present study employed the Externalizing Behavior Problems scale of the CBCL to measure children's externalizing behaviors, the outcome variable in this study. Two items from the Delinquent Behavior subscale ("thinks about sex too much" and "uses alcohol or drugs for nonmedical purposes") were removed because they were not relevant for the study sample and, thus, might offend the parents. As a result, there were 31 items in the Externalizing scale, and the raw scores could range from 0 to 62 (see Table 3). The items of the Withdrawn and Anxious/Depressed subscales were interspersed throughout the Externalizing scale items to prevent any response sets that

might happen as a result of answering similar types of questions one after the other (see Appendix B for the complete survey).

The CBCL is a highly reliable and stable instrument. As Achenbach (1991) reports in the manual for CBCL, the internal consistency of the Externalizing Problems scale is .93 across all age/gender groups. Among the syndrome scales, the internal consistency of the Aggressive Behavior scale is the strongest (.92 for all age/gender groups), and the internal consistency of the Delinquent Behavior scale is .79. One-week test-retest reliabilities are .93 for Externalizing, .91 for Aggressive Behavior, and .86 for Delinquent Behavior. Stability of scale scores over one year (from age 6 to age 7) are .87 for Externalizing, .84 for Aggressive Behavior, and .76 for Delinquent Behavior. Stability of scale scores over two years (from age 6 to age 8) are .86, .87, and .69 for Externalizing, Aggressive Behavior, and Delinquent Behavior scales, respectively. Inter-parent correlations across sex/age groups are .80 for Externalizing, .79 for Aggressive Behavior, and .78 for Delinquent Behavior. The manual also reports high concurrent correlations with related instruments such as Conners Parent Questionnaire (.86 between CBCL's Externalizing and Conners' Conduct Problem scales; Conners, 1978) and the Quay-Peterson Revised Behavior Problem Checklist (.88 between CBCL's Externalizing and Quay-Peterson's Conduct Disorder scales; Quay & Peterson, 1982).

The CBCL has a long clinical history and a large research base (Kamphaus & Frick, 1996). Over 1,700 empirical studies have employed the CBCL. It has gained international recognition, was translated into 50 languages, and has been used in national evaluation studies. It became a standard against which the validity of other instruments is often measured (Furlong & Wood, 1998).

*Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales (CTSPC)*. The CTSPC measures the extent to which a parent has carried out specific acts of physical and psychological aggression towards the child (Straus et al., 1998). The instrument includes the presentation of discipline behaviors, ranging from a discussion of issues to physical and verbal violence. The CTSPC comprises three scales: Nonviolent Discipline, Psychological Aggression, and Physical Assault. The Physical Assault scale has three subscales that represent different ranges of severity and legality: Minor Assault (Corporal Punishment), Severe Assault (Physical Maltreatment), and Very Severe Assault (Severe Physical Maltreatment). The respondent reports on a six-category scale (0 = never, 6 = more than 20 times in the past year) how frequently she/he used each discipline strategy over the past year. The CTSPC also includes four supplemental questions on discipline in the previous week to measure parental behaviors that are often so frequent that the usual referent period of the previous 12 months is not meaningful.

The CTSPC includes six items that fall within the range of legal corporal punishment. In the current study, these items were used to measure parental physical punishment. Items from Nonviolent Discipline and Psychological Aggression scales were interspersed throughout the physical punishment items to prevent any response sets. Supplemental questions were included to measure parental spanking and slapping in the past week. The Severe Assault and the Very Severe Assault subscales were left out because, as stated before, this study is not concerned with the abusive range of physical punishment, but rather with nonabusive punishment used by parents for disciplinary purposes.

Straus et al. (1998) report that the internal consistency reliability coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) are .55 for the Overall Physical Assault scale, .60 for Psychological Aggression, and .70 for Nonviolent Discipline. Unfortunately, the coefficients for the subscales of the Physical Assault scale are not available. However, the internal consistency of the Corporal Punishment subscale is expected to be much higher than .55, since the overall scale represents behaviors from a much wider range of severity and prevalence than the subscales. Although test-retest reliability data are not yet available for the CTSPC (Straus et al., 1998), they are available for the parent-child physical assault scale of the original CTS that is the basis of CTSPC. Amato (1991) reports a test-retest reliability coefficient of .80 for the parent-child physical assault scale of the original CTS.

There is some evidence for the construct validity of CTSPC. Consistent with Connelly and Straus's (1992) finding that older parents are less inclined to use corporal punishment, Straus et al. (1998) found a correlation of -.33 between parent's age and the Corporal Punishment subscale. They also found a correlation of -.34 between child's age and corporal punishment, consistent with the finding that the prevalence and the chronicity of corporal punishment decline rapidly from about age five on (Straus, 1994).

The CTSPC is scored by adding the midpoints for the response categories chosen by the participant. The midpoints are the same as the response category numbers for categories 0, 1, and 2. For category 3 (3-5 times) the midpoint is 4, for category 4 (6-10 times) it is 8, for category 5 (11-20 times) it is 15, and for category 6 (more than 20 times in the past year) Straus et al. (1998) suggest using 25 as the midpoint.

*Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS).* The SMAS is the first acculturation scale developed to measure the process of acculturation across ethnic

groups (Stephenson, 2000). It conceptualizes acculturation as bidimensional and defines it as degree of immersion in dominant and ethnic societies. It is a 32-item scale with two independent dimensions: a 15-item dominant society immersion (DSI) and a 17-item ethnic society immersion (ESI) dimension. Within each dimension, items measure the domains of language, interaction, media, and food. For each item, respondents have to choose one of four response options: 0 = false, 1 = partly false, 2 = partly true, and 3 = true. The SMAS was selected for use in the current study because there were no acculturation scales developed specifically for Caribbean groups. Both scales of the SMAS were used in this study: DSI was used to measure immersion in the dominant European American culture and ESI was used to measure immersion in the Caribbean culture. The response options were changed to false, mostly false, mostly true, and true, because the responses of partly false and partly true were considered equivalent and, therefore, confusing for the participants. The language items were not included in the analyses, since more than half of the participants came from countries where English was the native language.

SMAS has high internal consistency. Coefficient alphas are .86 for the entire scale, .97 for ESI, and .90 for DSI. Item total correlations range from .51 to .87 on ESI and .57 to .83 on DSI. With regard to validity, Stephenson (2000) found a consistent pattern that supported previous research findings. Research suggests that, with successive generations, certain customs of the dominant society are acquired, while certain ethnic customs are relinquished (Magana, de la Rocha, Amsel, Magana, Fernandez, & Rulnick, 1996). Consistent with previous research, Stephenson (2000) found a relationship

between generational status and performance on the DSI and ESI scales. With each of the first three successive generations, DSI increased and ESI decreased.

In addition, Stephenson (2000) examined the relation between the two SMAS subscales and those of two other acculturation instruments: the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (ARSMA-II; Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995) and the Bidimensional Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (BAS; Marin & Gamba, 1996). Both the ARSMA-II and the BAS are widely used and reliable instruments that measure acculturation through a bidimensional approach. Both scales were modified for use with diverse ethnic groups. The ESI was strongly correlated with the Mexican Orientation scale (MOS) of the ARSMA-II ( $r = .87$ ) and negatively correlated with the Anglo Orientation scale (AOS;  $r = -.28$ ). It was positively correlated with the Hispanic Domain scale (HDS) of the BAS ( $r = .83$ ) and negatively correlated with the Non-Hispanic Domain scale (NHDS;  $r = -.25$ ). All correlations were significant at the  $p < .01$  level. The DSI was positively correlated with the AOS ( $r = .49, p < .01$ ) and negatively correlated, although not significantly, with the MOS ( $r = -.15$ ). It was positively correlated with the NHDS of the BAS ( $r = .48, p < .01$ ) and negatively correlated, although not significantly, with the HDS ( $r = -.17$ ).

*Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status.* Socioeconomic status was measured by the Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status (Hollingshead, 1975). In this measure, the status score of a person or family is determined by integrating information on sex, marital status, education, and occupation. If only one spouse is gainfully employed, the computed score is based on this spouse's educational level and occupation. If both spouses are employed, the average of their individual scores is

computed. Computed scores range from 8 to 66. Higher scores reflect higher socioeconomic status. Hollingshead Four Factor Index of Social Status is widely used in psychological research to assess socioeconomic status. In the present study, SES was controlled for so that the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors could be tested more directly.

*Infant Characteristics Questionnaire (ICQ).* The Infant Characteristics Questionnaire (ICQ; Bates, Freeland, & Lounsbury, 1979) was used to assess early child temperament characteristics. ICQ was developed primarily to assess the construct of “difficult” temperament. There are separate forms for infants aged about 6, 13, and 24 months, respectively, containing 24, 32, and 32 7-point rating items. The rating of 1 describes an optimal temperamental trait and 7 a difficult temperament. The psychometric properties of the ICQ have been most completely explored for the 6-month version. The 13- and 24-month versions have not been as extensively developed as the 6-month version and are currently regarded as experimental. Thus, the 6-month version was used in the current study. This version of the ICQ contains four subscales: Fussy-Difficult, Unadaptable, Dull, and Unpredictable. The most clear-cut and valid factor is the first: Fussy-Difficult. The meaning of the other factors is not as clear (see Bates et al., 1979). Therefore, this study employed only the retrospective version of the Fussy-Difficult subscale. This subscale contains 9 items, and the scores can range from 9 to 63.

As detailed by Bates et al. (1979), the factor structure, internal consistency, and test-retest reliabilities of the instrument are adequate, and there is a modest, but replicated, correlation between the parent perception of fussiness-difficultness on the main ICQ factor and the independent impressions of trained observers. For the Fussy-

Difficult subscale, internal consistency was .79, test-retest reliability was .70, and mother-father convergence was .61. The observer-mother convergence on ICQ ratings was .34, and observer-father convergence was .40. All correlations are significant beyond the  $p < .001$  level. Convergence between mother ICQ ratings and more objective observation data was .22 ( $p < .05$ ).

There is also some convergence between ICQ factors and comparable variables in other parent-report temperament instruments such as the Carey Questionnaire (Bates et al., 1979). In addition, significant cross-age correlations exist between 6- and 24-month and between 13- and 24-month versions of ICQ. For example, on the largest factor, fussiness-difficultness, the 13-24-month continuity  $r$  was .71 and the 6-24-month continuity  $r$  was .57. Furthermore, the retrospective version that is used in the current study has been found to correlate significantly with ratings made 8-10 years previously when participants were infants or toddlers (Bates, Ridge, Marvinney, & Shroff, 1991); the correlation for the Fussy-Difficult subscale was .58.

On the basis of his work on temperament, J. E. Bates (personal communication, February 26, 2004) concludes that “early perceptions of difficult temperament predict both observer-noted and parentally perceived behavior problems during the preschool and early grade school years, although only modest portions of the variance are accounted for and the linkage is fading by about age 8.” This study controlled for early child temperament so that the effect of parental physical discipline on later child externalizing behaviors could be tested more directly. Like the Weiss et al. (1992) study, the current study controlled for SES and early child temperament that potentially could be confounded with parental physical discipline.

*Other Questionnaire Items.* Besides SES (education and occupation), the survey included questions to assess other demographic characteristics, such as age, sex, marital status, generational status, country of origin, and date of arrival in the U.S. The survey also included some exploratory supplemental questions to measure parents' perceptions regarding the normativity, social acceptance, and functions of physical discipline and parental warmth. To assess the amount of warmth and affection parents show their children, five questions from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics - Child Development Supplement (PSID-CDS; Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, n.d.) were used.

Questions on the social validity of the study were also included at the end of the survey to get a sense of parents' perceptions regarding the significance of the study and the appropriateness of the survey questions. The survey was pilot tested with four parents of Caribbean origin, and necessary changes and modifications were made based on their answers, the questions they raised, and their recommendations.

Table 3 presents the study variables and the measures used to assess these variables. For each variable and measure, the number of items, the response scale, and the possible range of scores are also provided in the table.

Table 3

*Study Variables and Measures.*

Variable	Measure	# of Items	Scale	Score
				Range
Externalizing Behaviors	CBCL-Externalizing	31	0-2	0-62
Physical Discipline (PD)	CTSPC-Corporal			
	Punishment	6	0-6	0-150 *
Acculturation to European-				
American culture	SMAS-DSI	10	0-3	0-30
Acculturation to Caribbean				
culture	SMAS-ESI	7	0-3	0-21
Generational Status		1	n/a	0-3
Normativity / Social				
Acceptance of PD		3	0-4	0-12
Parental Warmth	PSID-CDS	5	1-5	5-25
Early Temperament	ICQ-Fussy/Difficult	9	1-7	9-63
SES	Hollingshead	2		8-66
Education			1-7	3-21
Occupation			1-9	5-45

\* CTSPC is scored by adding the midpoints for the response categories

*Procedure*

The school where the study was conducted organizes a parent meeting every year in September, a couple of weeks after school opens. This is the first parent meeting in the school year and attracts the highest number of parents, both new and continuing. Written announcements regarding the meeting are sent to the parents through the students in the beginning of September.

The study survey and a letter describing the study (see Appendices A and B) were sent to all the parents in a sealed envelope along with the announcement for the meeting in September 2004. The letter addressed to the parents stated that the study was about parent-child interactions and child development in families of Caribbean origin. It also mentioned that, since there were not many scientific studies conducted with this population living in the United States, this study would serve an important purpose by shedding light on the developmental processes in this population and, thereby, help us better understand their needs. One parent (preferably the mother, if both parents were available) from each family of Caribbean origin was asked to complete the survey at home and bring it to the parent meeting.

The letter noted that participation was voluntary and that there were no risks in taking part, because the survey was anonymous and no one would know who filled out the survey. It also stated that all information gathered would be kept strictly confidential, and no one except the researcher and her advisor would have access to it. The letter also informed the parents that the survey took about 30-45 minutes to finish and that they would receive \$10 as compensation for their time when they returned the completed survey to the researcher.

Parents who volunteered to participate in the study completed the self-administered survey at home and returned it to the researcher during the last hour before the parent meeting in the room at the school lobby. For parents who could not make it to the parent meeting, the researcher was at the school another day the following week, for an hour before dismissal time. When parents returned the completed survey, they received \$10 in cash for their participation in the study.

### *Design*

This was a quantitative study that had a correlational design. This design allowed me to determine (1) whether parental physical discipline predicted externalizing behaviors after socioeconomic status and early temperament were controlled for; and (2) whether a number of factors, such as acculturation, generational status, normativity and social acceptance of physical discipline, and warmth in parent-child relationship moderated the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors.

### *Data Analysis*

A regression analysis was used to test whether parental physical discipline predicted child externalizing problems and whether a number of factors moderated this relationship. The variables were entered in three blocks into the regression equation. Socioeconomic status and early child temperament were controlled for so that the discipline-child behavior link could be tested more directly. These two control variables were entered in the first block of the regression equation. The main variables, i.e., physical discipline, generational status, acculturation to European American culture, acculturation to Caribbean culture, normativity/social acceptance of physical discipline, and warmth in the parent-child relationship were entered in the second block of the

equation. Finally, the interaction terms between physical discipline and the other main variables were entered in the third block of the equation.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results

This chapter will review the data analyses performed and the results obtained in these analyses. It will cover, in order, descriptive analyses, transformation of variables, preliminary analyses, and regression analyses.

#### *Descriptive Analyses*

First, the descriptive statistics for the main variables were computed. Table 4 provides a summary of the means, standard deviations, and ranges of the main study variables.

Table 4

#### *Means, Standard Deviations and Ranges of Study Variables*

Variable	Mean	SD	Range
Externalizing Behaviors	8.75	6.45	0-35
Physical Discipline (PD)	10.49	18.23	0-83
Acculturation to European-American culture	24.60	4.37	14-30
Acculturation to Caribbean culture	17.40	3.04	8-21
Generational Status	.25	.57	0-3
Normativity / Social Acceptance of PD	8.34	2.67	2-12
Parental Warmth	21.24	3.66	8-25
Early Temperament	22.24	7.62	9-38
SES	40.94	10.09	13-61.5

As seen in the table above, physical discipline scores ranged from 0 to 83 with a mean of 10.49 ( $SD = 18.23$ ). This indicated that parents in this sample used physical discipline an average of about 10 times during the past year. While parents of children ages 5-7 years used it about 12 times, this number decreased to 8 and 9 for children ages 8-10 and 11-13, respectively. (These figures include the parents who did not use any physical discipline in the past year.) This finding is partly consistent with previous findings that showed a decrease in parental use of physical discipline as children get older. However, frequency of physical discipline did not decrease from late elementary to middle school years.

Analysis of prevalence found that 69 % of the study sample reported using at least one physical discipline act in the previous 12 months. The percentage of parents who used physical discipline with their children declined with the age of child (see Figure 1). Whereas 81% of parents of children ages 5-7 used physical discipline at least once in the past year, this rate dropped to 69% for parents of children 8-10 years and to 45% for parents of children 11-13 years. These rates were similar to the rates found by Straus and Stewart (1999).

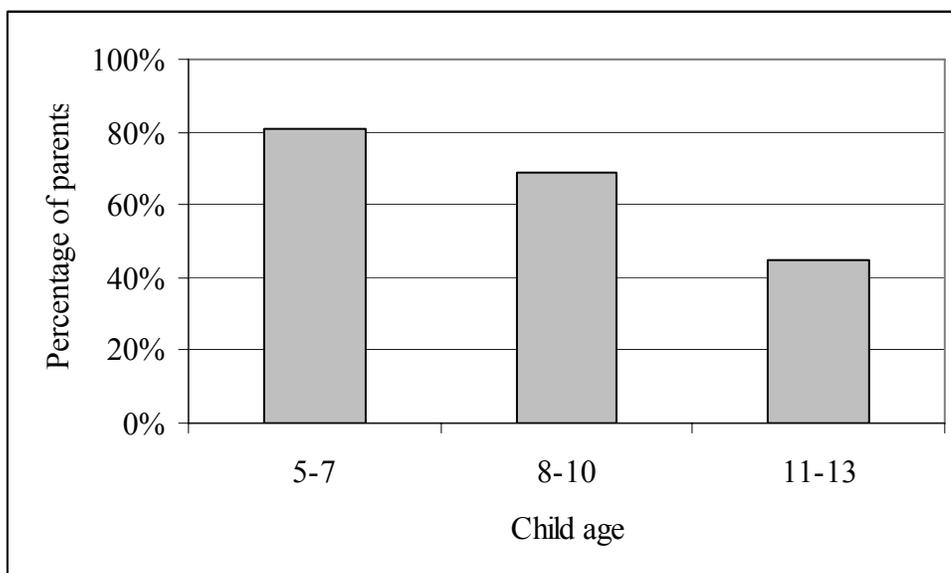


Figure 1. Percentage of parents using physical discipline at least once by child age

Although Figure 1 indicates the percentage of parents who used physical discipline, it does not indicate how often parents who actually used physical discipline did so. This information is given in Figure 2. It refers to those parents who used physical discipline at least once during the previous year and gives the mean number of times they reported using physical discipline. Although the percentage of parents who used physical discipline with their children declined with the age of child, the amount of physical discipline they used did not. The analysis of frequency shows that the number of times parents use physical discipline decreases from an average of about 15 to 11 as children move from early elementary to late elementary years, but dramatically increases to 20 in middle school years. In this Caribbean subculture, parents seem to use physical discipline most with their early adolescent children, a finding not consistent with previous findings obtained in European American samples.

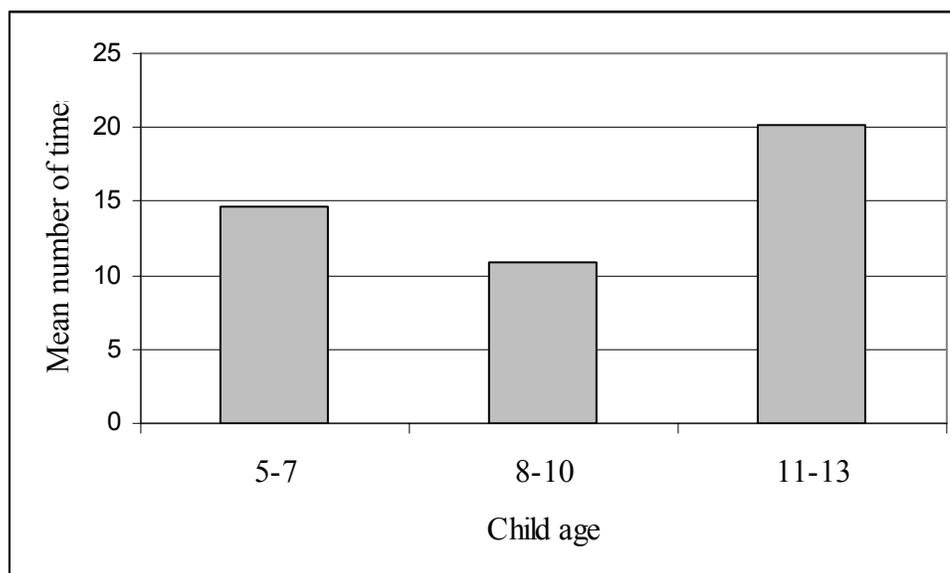


Figure 2. Mean physical discipline by child age for parents who used physical discipline at least once in the past year.

Straus et al. (1998) differentiated types of physical discipline in terms of severity based on a judgment concerning the risk of injury and degree of normative acceptance. Three acts were judged to carry a higher risk and be less widely accepted, and were classified as severe physical discipline (slap on face or head, hit with belt or hard object, pinch) and two as less severe (spank on bottom with hand; slap on hand, arm, or leg). They considered shaking separately because of the extreme danger if done to infants. Table 5 gives the percentage of parents who used specific types of physical discipline at least once in the previous year.

Comparing the results to Straus and Stewart's (1999) findings with a nationally representative sample reveals cultural variations in the prevalence of different types of physical discipline, especially of the more severe and "less culturally approved" forms of

physical discipline. Prevalence of milder forms of physical discipline was similar in the two samples, although spanking on bottom with hand was somewhat more prevalent among 5-7 year-olds in the national sample than in this sample; and slapping on hand, arm or leg was more prevalent among 8-13 year-olds in this sample than in the national sample. However, all forms of more severe physical discipline were more prevalent across all age categories in this sample compared to the national sample, suggesting that they are more culturally approved in the Caribbean subculture. Shaking, interestingly, was more prevalent in this sample than in the national sample, only among 11-13 year-olds.

Table 5

*Percentage of Parents using Specific Acts of Physical Discipline by Child Age*

Type of physical discipline	Child age		
	5-7 (N = 36)	8-10 (N = 29)	11-13 (N = 22)
Spank on bottom with hand	55.6	55.2	22.7
Slap on hand, arm, or leg	52.8	51.7	36.4
Hit on bottom with object	38.9	44.8	22.7
Slap on face, head, or ears	11.1	10.3	18.2
Pinch	27.8	6.9	9.1
Shake	8.3	3.4	18.2

Table 5 also demonstrates a developmental pattern in the prevalence of physical discipline in the Caribbean subculture that is different than what is observed in the

national sample. In the national sample, prevalence of all forms of physical discipline decline as child's age increases. Here, however, the prevalence of most forms of physical discipline stays steady between ages 5-7 and 8-10 and then drop among 11-13 year-olds. More interestingly, the prevalence of two types of physical discipline (slapping on face, head, or ears and shaking) actually increase among 11-13 year-olds.

Child externalizing behaviors ranged from 0 to 35 with a mean of 8.75 ( $SD = 6.45$ ). Achenbach (1991) reported a mean of 9.8 ( $SD = 7.0$ ) in a nationally representative sample of non-referred boys ages 4-11 and a mean of 8.2 ( $SD = 6.1$ ) in non-referred girls the same age. The means were 8.9 ( $SD = 7.5$ ) in non-referred boys ages 12-18 and 7.4 ( $SD = 6.7$ ) in non-referred girls the same age. These figures are very similar to the figures obtained in this sample.

This sample predominantly consisted of immigrant generation individuals (81 %). First-generation parents made up 14.6 % of the sample, and 3.4% were second-generation. Thus, the mean generational status was .25 ( $SD = .57$ ). The mean acculturation to European-American culture was 24.60 ( $SD = 4.37$ ) that translates to a mean score of 2.46 on a 0-3 scale, considering there were 10 items on the scale. The mean acculturation to Caribbean culture was 17.40 ( $SD = 3.04$ ) that translates to a mean score of 2.49 on a 0-3 scale, considering there were 7 items on the scale. The transformation of scores to a 0-3 scale makes it easier to compare the two acculturation scores to each other and to the scale norms. Table 6 gives mean acculturation scores on a 0-3 scale by generational status.

Table 6

*Mean Acculturation Scores on a 0-3 Scale by Generational Status*

	Generational Status		
	0	1	2
Acculturation to European American culture	2.42	2.57	2.80
Acculturation to Caribbean culture	2.50	2.44	2.33

As seen in Table 6, this sample is highly acculturated to both cultures across all generational statuses. There are no norms available on the immigrant generation, but the mean scores of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation individuals in the sample were higher than the scale norms for these generations. The mean dominant society acculturation was 2.05 and 2.60 for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, respectively, in the normative sample that consisted of African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, people of African descent, and European Americans. The mean ethnic society acculturation was 2.21 and 1.89 for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation, respectively.

The mean normativity/social acceptability of physical discipline was 8.34 ( $SD = 2.67$ ) on a range of possible scores from 0 to 12, indicating that physical discipline was quite normal, common, and socially accepted in the Caribbean subculture as perceived by the parents in the sample. The mean warmth in the parent-child relationship was 21.24 ( $SD = 3.66$ ) on a range of possible scores from 5 to 25, indicating that the parents in this sample were fairly affectionate and warm towards their children.

The mean socioeconomic status was 40.94 ( $SD = 10.09$ ) on a range of possible scores from 13 to 61.5. Hollingshead (1975) divides the continuum of scores into five groups that encompass the major strata symbolic of social standing in American society. According to his system, scores between 40 and 54 fall into the social stratum of “medium business, minor professional, technical,” and scores between 30 and 39 fall into the social stratum of “skilled craftsmen, clerical, sales workers” (Hollingshead, 1975). The majority of the parents in this study seem to fall into these two social strata.

The mean early temperament score in this sample was 22.24 ( $SD = 7.62$ ), slightly lower than 25.02 that was reported by Bates et al. (1979) in their normative sample. This translates to a score of 2.47 (compared to 2.78 in the normative sample) on a 1-7 scale where 1 refers to ‘very easy’ temperament and 7 to ‘difficult’ temperament. The children of parents in this sample seemed to have relatively easy temperaments.

#### *Transformation of Variables*

After the analysis of the descriptives, the transformation of the two main variables was deemed necessary. The distributions of both externalizing behaviors and physical discipline variables were positively skewed. The square root and normal logarithmic transformations were applied to both distributions, and their effect on the skewness and kurtosis of the distribution was observed. The transformation that led to lower skewness and kurtosis values was selected for each variable. As a result, a square root transformation was used for the externalizing behaviors variable [ $\text{new} = \sqrt{\text{old}}$ ], and a normal logarithmic transformation was preferred for the physical discipline variable [ $\text{new} = \ln(\text{old}+1)$ ]. These transformed variables were used in all the subsequent analyses. In

addition, four low extreme cases in the parental warmth variable were replaced with the next lowest value to prevent their extreme effect on the mean.

### *Preliminary Analyses*

Next, preliminary analyses were conducted to explore the relationships between the variables. First, the relationships between categorical demographic variables and the two main study variables, namely externalizing behaviors and physical discipline, were examined using *t*-tests and analysis of variance. These were followed by correlational analyses to explore the relationships between continuous variables in the study.

*T-tests and analysis of variance.* Independent samples *t*-tests and an analysis of variance were performed to examine whether child's gender, parent's gender, being born in the U.S. vs. other countries, living in an ethnic neighborhood, and marital status were related to physical discipline and externalizing behaviors. The *p*-values obtained in these analyses are provided in Table 7. None of these variables were found to be significantly related, except the near-significant ( $p = .062$ ) relationship between physical discipline and being born in the U.S. vs. other countries. According to this finding, parents who immigrated to this country from Caribbean countries tended to use more physical discipline than parents who had their origins in Caribbean countries but were born in the U.S.

Table 7

*P-values for Relationships between Categorical Demographic Variables and Externalizing Behaviors and Physical Discipline*

	Externalizing Behaviors	Physical Discipline
Child's gender	.697	.344
Parent's gender	.618	.141
Country of birth (U.S. vs. other)	.693	.062
Neighborhood (ethnic vs. not)	.140	.688
Marital status	.496	.323

*Correlational Analyses.* Analysis of correlational data revealed a significant relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors ( $r = .407, p < .001$ ). On closer examination of this finding, it was seen that physical discipline was significantly related to both aggressive behavior ( $r = .416, p < .001$ ) and delinquent behavior ( $r = .293, p = .005$ ), the two subcategories of externalizing behavior. This finding indicates that as parental physical discipline increases, child externalizing behaviors, including both aggressive and delinquent behaviors, increase. Physical discipline was also significantly related to normativity/social acceptance of physical discipline as perceived by parents ( $r = .294, p = .005$ ). In other words, the more normative and socially accepted parents perceive physical discipline to be in a society, the more they use it. Physical discipline also had near-significant negative relationships with child's age ( $r = -.201, p = .059$ ) and parent's age ( $r = -.201, p = .063$ ). These

findings suggest that physical discipline decreases as children get older and that older parents tend to use less physical discipline, both of which is consistent with previous research.

As expected, time passed since arrival in the U.S. was significantly related to acculturation to European-American culture ( $r = .397, p = .001$ ) and negatively related to acculturation to Caribbean culture ( $r = -.285, p = .015$ ). This suggests that, as parents spend more time in the U.S., they become more acculturated to the European-American culture and their acculturation to their native culture weakens. A near-significant positive relationship between generational status and acculturation to European-American culture ( $r = .194, p = .072$ ) supports this finding. As parent's generational status increases, their acculturation to European-American culture increases as well. Parent's generational status was not significantly related to acculturation to Caribbean culture ( $r = -.019, p = .859$ ). Parents who were born in the U.S. were as much attached to their ethnic cultural roots as parents who immigrated to the U.S.

Parent's age was found to have a significant negative relationship with externalizing behaviors ( $r = -.232, p = .032$ ) and early temperament ( $r = -.236, p = .030$ ). Interestingly, child's age was related neither to early temperament ( $r = .049, p = .649$ ) nor to externalizing behaviors ( $r = -.065, p = .543$ ). These findings indicate that older parents' children tend to display easier early temperament and less externalizing behaviors. The fact that early temperament was related to parent's age but not to child's age ruled out the possibility of inaccurate reporting due to fading of memory related to passage of time. It seems more likely that older parents are better able to attune to their

children's needs and help them regulate their emotions leading to easier early temperament and less externalizing behaviors. This needs to be researched further.

In addition, early temperament was related significantly to delinquent behavior ( $r = .212, p = .047$ ), but not to aggressive behavior ( $r = .125, p = .245$ ). It may be that delinquent behavior is more of a dispositional problem than aggressive behavior that may be related more to environmental influences.

Table 8 below provides a quick view of the significant correlations covered in this section. Please refer to Appendix C for all the correlations among the main study variables.

Table 8

*Summary of Significant Correlations*

Variables	<i>r</i>	<i>p</i>
Physical discipline & Externalizing behaviors	.407	.001
Physical discipline & Normativity / Social acceptability of PD	.294	.005
Physical discipline & Child age	-.201	.059
Physical discipline & Parent age	-.201	.063
Time since arrival & Acculturation to European American culture	.397	.001
Time since arrival & Acculturation to Caribbean culture	-.285	.015
Generational status & Acculturation to European-American culture	.194	.072
Parent's age & Externalizing behaviors	.232	.032
Parent's age & Early temperament	.236	.030
Early temperament & Delinquent behavior	.212	.047

### *Regression Analysis*

A regression analysis was conducted to test the main hypotheses in the study. In this analysis, variables were entered in three blocks into the equation. The dependent variable was externalizing behaviors (EB). Early temperament (T) and socioeconomic status (SES) were entered in the first block as control variables so that the link between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors could be tested more directly. However, neither early temperament nor socioeconomic status were found to be significant predictors of externalizing behaviors.

Then, main effect variables were entered into the analysis in the second block. These variables were physical discipline (PD), generational status (G), acculturation to European American culture (AA), acculturation to Caribbean culture (AC), normativity/social acceptance of physical discipline (N), and warmth in the parent-child relationship (W). Addition of these variables increased the  $R^2$  from .052 to .244, amounting to a significant  $R^2$  change of .192 ( $p = .021$ ; see Table 9). In this model, the correlation between observed externalizing behaviors and predicted externalizing behaviors (R) was .494, and the variance in the independent variables accounted for 24.4% ( $R^2$ ) of the variance in externalizing behaviors.

In this second model, physical discipline appeared as a significant predictor of externalizing behaviors ( $p = .002$ ; see Table 10). None of the other variables significantly predicted externalizing behaviors. The model was significant ( $p = .017$ ) for predicting the dependent variable.

Table 9

*Model Summary*

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Change Statistics	
			R <sup>2</sup> Change	Sig. F Change
1	.228	.052	.052	.155
2	.494	.244	.192	.021
3	.566	.321	.077	.263

Model 1. Predictors: T, SES

Model 2. Predictors: T, SES, PD, G, AA, AC, N, W

Model 3. Predictors: T, SES, PD, G, AA, AC, N, W, PDxG, PDxAA, PDxAC, PDxN,  
PDxW

In order to test the moderating effects of generational status, acculturation to European American culture, acculturation to Caribbean culture, normativity/social acceptance of physical discipline, and warmth in the parent-child relationship on the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors, interaction variables were created. This was done by multiplying physical discipline with each of the other main effect variables. Lastly, these interaction variables were entered into the regression equation in the third block.

The addition of the interaction variables did not improve the model significantly. R<sup>2</sup> change increased from .244 to .321, amounting to an R<sup>2</sup> change of .077 that was not

significant ( $p = .263$ ; see Table 9). In this model, the correlation between observed externalizing behaviors and predicted externalizing behaviors was .566, and the variance in the independent variables accounted for 32.1% of the variance in externalizing behaviors. The model was significant ( $p = .024$ ) for predicting the dependent variable.

Although  $R^2$  change did not improve significantly after the addition of the interaction variables, something very interesting happened. Physical discipline that was significant in the previous model lost its significance ( $p = .937$ ; see Table 10). It was no longer a significant predictor of externalizing behaviors. Instead, parent's generational status became a significant predictor ( $p = .024$ ) along with the interaction between physical discipline and generational status ( $p = .047$ ). None of the other main effect variables and interaction variables was significant.

Table 10

*Regression Coefficients*

Model		Unstandardized		Standardized		
		Coefficients		Coefficients		
		<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta	<i>t</i>	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.336	.791		1.689	.096
	socioeconomic status	1.428E-02	.015	.114	.973	.334
	early temperament	3.378E-02	.019	.208	1.779	.080
2	(Constant)	4.493E-02	1.508		.030	.976
	socioeconomic status	1.428E-02	.014	.114	1.004	.319

Table 10 (continued)

	early temperament	2.864E-02	.018	.176	1.573	.121
	physical discipline	.387	.117	.421	3.298	.002*
	acculturation to EAC	-7.295E-03	.033	-.025	-.219	.828
	acculturation to CC	2.734E-02	.047	.070	.586	.560
	generational status	-.385	.250	-.179	-1.543	.128
	normativity of PD	1.658E-02	.057	.035	.289	.774
	parental warmth	2.275E-02	.045	.057	.509	.613
<hr/>						
3	(Constant)	-.167	2.342		-.071	.943
	socioeconomic status	1.307E-02	.015	.104	.853	.397
	early temperament	2.914E-02	.019	.179	1.510	.136
	physical discipline	9.231E-02	1.168	.100	.079	.937
	acculturation to EAC	-2.904E-02	.057	-.099	-.508	.614
	acculturation to CC	4.080E-02	.079	.104	.516	.608
	generational status	-1.067	.460	-.496	-2.321	.024*
	normativity of PD	-1.274E-02	.075	-.027	-.170	.866
	parental affection	6.378E-02	.068	.161	.931	.356
	PDxAA	2.216E-02	.028	.628	.779	.439
	PDxAC	-1.043E-02	.038	-.194	-.278	.782
	PDxG	.442	.218	.441	2.028	.047*
	PDxN	4.088E-02	.042	.472	.973	.335
	PDxW	-2.590E-02	.033	-.608	-.777	.441

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\* significant at  $p < .05$  level

The significance of the interaction between physical discipline and generational status and the positive *B*-value associated with it indicated that, as predicted, parent's generational status had a positive moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors. In other words, as parent's generational status increased, the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors strengthened.

This moderating effect is demonstrated below in numeric and graphic terms by placing the possible G values into the regression equation that includes all the significant variables and their associated weights (*B*-values) from Table 10 above.

Regression equation:

$$EB = -.167 + .09 PD - 1.067 G + .442 PD \times G$$

When the possible G values (0-3) are placed into the equation above, the following equations are obtained:

$$G = 0 : \quad EB = -.167 + .09 PD$$

$$\begin{aligned} G = 1 : \quad EB &= -.167 + .09 PD - 1.067 + .442 PD \\ &= -.9 + .532 PD \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} G = 2 : \quad EB &= -.167 + .09 PD - 2.134 + .884 PD \\ &= -2.301 + .974 PD \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} G = 3 : \quad EB &= -.167 + .09 PD - 3.201 + 1.326 PD \\ &= -3.368 + 1.416 PD \end{aligned}$$

The four lines in Figure 3 below represent the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors for each generational status.

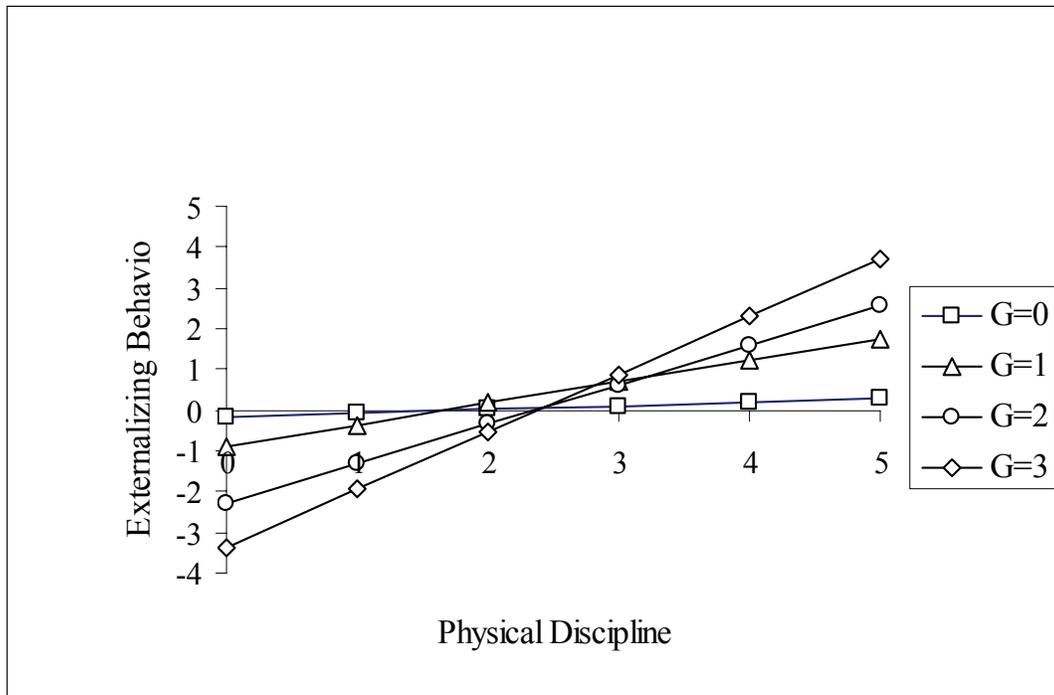


Figure 3. Moderating effect of generational status (G) on the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors

### *Hypothesis Testing*

*HY1: Parental physical discipline is not related significantly to child externalizing behaviors, after controlling for socioeconomic status and early temperament.*

Results of the study partially supported this hypothesis. Although physical discipline was significantly related to externalizing behaviors before the moderating variables and their interactions with physical discipline were taken into account, it lost its significance as a main effect after these variables were entered into the regression analysis.

*HY2: Acculturation to European American culture has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors.*

This hypothesis was not supported by the data. Acculturation to European American culture did not have a moderating effect on the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors.

*HY3: Acculturation to Caribbean culture has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors.*

Results did not support this hypothesis, either. Acculturation to Caribbean culture did not have a moderating effect on the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors.

*HY4: Generational status has a positive moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors.*

Results supported this hypothesis. Generational status had a positive moderating effect on the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors. In other words, the effect of parental physical discipline on child externalizing behaviors varied as a function of parents' generational status. As generational status increased from 0 to 3, the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors strengthened.

*HY5: Normativity/social acceptance of physical discipline in the Caribbean subculture as perceived by the parents has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors.*

This hypothesis was not supported by the data. Normativity/social acceptance of physical discipline in the Caribbean subculture as perceived by the parents did not have a negative moderating effect on the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors.

*HY6: Warmth in the parent-child relationship as perceived by the parents has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors.*

Results did not support this hypothesis, either. Warmth in the parent-child relationship as perceived by the parents did not have a negative moderating effect on the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors.

All together, two out of the six hypotheses stated in the beginning of the study were supported by the data, and four of them were not.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors in the Caribbean subculture living in New York City and to examine whether a number of factors (acculturation to the European American and Caribbean cultures, generational status, normativity of physical discipline, and warmth in the parent-child relationship) moderate this relationship.

Descriptive analyses indicated that parents in this study used physical discipline an average of about 10 times during the past year. This number decreased from early elementary to late elementary years but stayed steady into middle school years, partly contrary to previous findings with European American samples that showed a steady decrease in parental use of physical discipline as children get older. The majority of the parents (69 %) in the sample reported using at least one physical discipline act in the past year, leaving only 31% who did not use any physical discipline. Although, similar to previous findings, the percentage of parents who used at least one physical discipline act in the past year declined as child age increased, the amount of physical discipline surprisingly did not decrease as children got older. In this Caribbean subculture, parents seemed to use physical discipline most with their early adolescent children, a finding not consistent with previous findings obtained in European American samples. It may be speculated that parents use more physical discipline acts to control their early adolescent children who are increasingly becoming more independent in a culture that parents may perceive as foreign, dangerous and morally corrupt. However, it must be noted that these

results are cross-sectional rather than longitudinal and thus may not reflect the disciplinary trajectory for particular children.

Comparing the results to Straus and Stewart's (1999) findings with a nationally representative sample revealed cross-cultural variations in the prevalence of more severe and "less culturally approved" forms of physical discipline (e.g., slap on face, head, or ears, hit with belt or hard object, pinch). Although prevalence of milder forms of physical discipline (e.g., spank on bottom with hand, slap on hand, arm, or leg) was similar in the two samples, all forms of more severe physical discipline were more prevalent across all age categories in this sample compared to the national sample, suggesting that they are more culturally approved in the Caribbean subculture. Results also revealed a different developmental pattern in the prevalence of physical discipline across cultures. Whereas, in the national sample, prevalence of all forms of physical discipline declined as child's age increased, in this study the prevalence of most forms of physical discipline stayed steady from early to late elementary years and then dropped in middle school years. More interestingly, the prevalence of two types of physical discipline (slapping on face, head or ears and shaking) actually increased in middle school years. Again, the reader is cautioned that both studies were cross-sectional in nature. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to reveal the developmental pattern of various types of physical discipline with diverse samples.

Correlational analyses revealed that parental physical discipline tended to decrease as children got older. In addition, older parents tended to use less physical discipline. However, the more normative and socially accepted parents perceived physical discipline to be in their culture, the more they used it.

The major finding of this study was that parents' generational status moderated the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors. In other words, the effect of parental discipline on child externalizing problems was not stable across families with different generational status. Instead, the effect of parental discipline varied as a function of generational status. The earlier parents' families came to the United States, the stronger was the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors. It was the strongest for parents whose great grandparents (or earlier generations) immigrated to this country. For parents who themselves immigrated to this country, parental physical discipline did not predict externalizing behaviors in children.

As stated previously, earlier research conducted with European American families firmly established the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors. This study, however, showed that this finding could not be generalized to the Caribbean subculture living in New York City. When factors such as acculturation and generational status were taken into account, physical discipline used by parents did not predict externalizing behaviors in children. Generational status was found to be a moderating variable. As parents' generational status increased, the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors became stronger, approximating the pattern that was consistently found in European American families. This may suggest that, the more "Americanized" the families were (due to their families' longer history in the United States), the more the developmental outcome of physical discipline resembled that observed in European American families. For recent immigrants to this country, who were yet not fully "Americanized," parental physical discipline was still dissociated from child externalizing behaviors. In short, for Caribbean parents who were more

“Americanized,” the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors was more “Americanized.”

In light of this, it is most surprising to find that acculturation to the European American and Caribbean cultures were not moderating factors in the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors. One would expect a high correlation between and a similar moderating effect of acculturation and generational status, which was not the case in this study. There may be several reasons for this discrepancy. One possible reason is the inadequacy of the acculturation scale used in this study and this will be discussed in more detail in the section on limitations.

The exact mechanisms underlying the cross-cultural variation in the discipline-child behavior link are still far from clear. It was hoped that extrapolations could be made as to why there is cross-cultural variation by looking at the within-group variations in normativity/social acceptance of physical discipline and parental warmth. This part of the data analysis constituted a preliminary exploration of explanatory factors suggested in previous research that might account for cross-cultural differences in the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors. However, results failed to demonstrate any moderating effect of these variables on the relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors.

### *Limitations*

The study had several limitations that might have affected the results and, therefore, must be noted. Further studies on the subject must attempt to overcome these limitations. One major limitation was with regard to the sample size. The study was conducted with 89 parents. A larger sample would be more likely to detect interaction

effects with even small effect sizes that this sample failed to detect. The return rate of 25% was also a limitation. The other 75% of the potential sample might have answered the questionnaire differently, although no such difference was expected. Lack of proficiency in the English language, immigration status, and fear of repercussions by public agencies (e.g., ACS, INS) might have led to the low return rate.

Another limitation of the study was related to the acculturation scale used. Since there were no acculturation scales developed specifically for people of Caribbean origin, this study employed the only multi-group acculturation scale available, namely the Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale. This scale assesses degree of immersion in dominant and ethnic societies by using items that measure the domains of language, interaction, media, and food. Stephenson (2000) admits that her scale measures the superficial and intermediate levels of acculturation but not the deep level. The deep level of acculturation encompasses beliefs, values, and attitudes associated with the culture that are more deeply ingrained (such as those involving child-rearing practices) and more difficult to assess. As a result, this scale appeared not to be sensitive enough to detect the deeper acculturation variations in this sample. The acculturation assessed by this scale seems not to reveal the deeply rooted changes that are associated with moving from one culture to another. The participants might not even be aware of these changes, and the items that measure superficial and intermediate levels of acculturation failed to reflect such changes. This might explain why generational status was a moderating factor and acculturation was not. Future research requires the development of a detailed acculturation scale that includes all three levels of acculturation (i.e., superficial, intermediate, and deep) and assesses parenting beliefs, values, attitudes, and practices

associated with both the dominant and ethnic cultures. Acculturation may be domain-specific, and it is a good idea to assess the degree of acculturation, specifically in the domain of parenting.

This study was conducted using an anonymous survey with parents for reasons explained before. Since the survey was anonymous and there was no identifying information, it was impossible to collect parallel information from the children to link with the parents' reports. There was a conflict between depth and breadth of information in the specific context of this study. Under ideal circumstances, it would obviously make more sense to use both parent and child reports in a study on this subject. Children's perceptions regarding parental use of physical discipline, its normativity and social acceptability, and the warmth in the parent-child relationship as well as the meaning children attach to physical discipline; and their levels of acculturation to both the dominant and ethnic cultures would add valuable information to this inquiry. In addition, teacher reports on child externalizing behaviors should be obtained. Furthermore, children's school disciplinary records and perhaps arrest records can be obtained.

Another limitation of the study was its reliance on cross-sectional data rather than longitudinal data. In order to ascertain whether parental physical discipline leads to further externalizing behaviors in children, future research must be conducted in a longitudinal fashion. In other words, both physical discipline and externalizing behaviors must be assessed at Time 1 and externalizing behaviors alone be assessed at Time 2. Then, it can be seen whether physical discipline at Time 1 predicts externalizing behaviors at Time 2, after externalizing behaviors at Time 1 are controlled for. Cross-sectional data fails to demonstrate directionality in a relationship. Since this study did not

find a relationship between physical discipline and externalizing behaviors after the moderating factors were taken into account, directionality was not a relevant issue in this case. However, a longitudinal examination would have clarified other results of this study, such as the developmental pattern of physical discipline usage, as explained previously. For these reasons, researchers planning further research on the subject must conduct longitudinal studies over several years.

Finally, this study attempted an indirect comparison between findings on a sample of families of Caribbean origin and previous findings obtained from studies conducted with European American samples. A more direct comparison among families with different cultural backgrounds would be desirable in future research. In addition, since the word “Caribbean” refers to a group of islands that are not culturally identical, comparisons among different groups from the Caribbean would also be desirable.

### *Implications*

There are two major current perspectives on the use of parental physical discipline. One is an unconditional anti-physical discipline perspective (Straus et al., 1997) that advocates that physical discipline is invariably and universally detrimental regardless of the context in which it is used (e.g., how it is used, the age of the child, the disciplinary situation, the parent-child context, or the cultural context). Proponents of this perspective generalize findings obtained from studies using European American samples to all the other ethnic and cultural groups and disregard opposing findings obtained in a few studies conducted with non-European American samples.

The other perspective is an evidence-based one that attempts to explore the consequences of physical discipline in different contexts and holds that, in certain

contexts, parental physical discipline may not detract from child outcomes, and may even enhance them (Larzelere, Baumrind, & Polite, 1998). This evidence-based contextual perspective recognizes the cross-cultural variations in the use and outcomes of physical discipline and questions whether the current scientific evidence is adequate for imposing an anti-physical discipline value on all parents. In this section, the implications of this study for these contrasting perspectives will be discussed.

The findings of this study clearly supported the contextual perspective over the unconditional anti-physical discipline perspective by showing that generational status in families of Caribbean origin moderate the relationship between parental physical discipline and child externalizing behaviors. This study challenges the generalization of findings obtained with European American samples to other cultural groups. It also questions the application of an unqualified social learning model to the study of physical discipline in which physical discipline provides a model for aggression under all circumstances for all children. Instead, it supported a contextual model where the effects of physical discipline depended on the context in which it occurred.

It must be explicitly stated that this study was not intended and must not be used as an endorsement of physical discipline for any child. It must be viewed as a call for research employing more varied cultural groups and more complex models and methods. An accurate understanding of the role parental physical discipline plays in children's socialization cannot be gained until researchers leave their personal values and prejudices behind and undertake comprehensive investigations of the effects of physical discipline on a wide variety of outcomes, across many cultural subgroups, and in different contexts.

Further efforts to identify moderators of the effects of physical discipline on children's outcomes are necessary.

The current inadequacy of the social scientific evidence suggests the possibility that unconditional anti-physical discipline advocates are inadvertently imposing one set of values on this very complex issue. Researchers must be sensitive to cultural distinctions before imposing their values on families from other subcultures. For now, Diana Baumrind's (1996) assessment still seems applicable: "A blanket injunction against disciplinary spanking by parents is not scientifically supportable" (p. 828).

This study showed that theoretical principles are, as Gergen (1973) puts it, culturally bound. Psychological concepts cannot be studied independent of the cultural context, because they derive their meaning from it. Thus, psychology as a discipline must incorporate culture and culture-related factors into mainstream research. Advancement of knowledge in the understanding of culture and its role in psychology would also result in interventions that are more sensitive to the reality and cultural diversity of society.

Due to the rapidly changing demographics and increasing numbers of "minority" students in schools, school psychologists, along others, have the important social and ethical responsibility to increase their understanding of ethnicity and culture and the impact these have on the families and students they work with. They must be aware of the cultural differences among families from different cultural origins, recognizing also the cultural heterogeneity and the threat of stereotyping individuals by generalized characteristics. They must read the research critically and remain flexible in thinking about the construct of culture. They must also examine critically their ideologies about cultural diversity and revisit their biases in general and specifically with regard to

parental use of physical discipline. They must carefully evaluate and question prejudices found in our society. In turn, they can assist teachers and administrators in reframing their perspectives if needed. Finally, school psychologists can try to become familiar with the cultural experiences of the children with whom they work and the person-by-environment variables influencing the child's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. By considering and evaluating cultural factors impacting a student, the school psychologist can better understand and work with that individual.

## APPENDIX A

### Letter to Parents

Dear Parents:

My name is Meltem Paker and I am a student in the Educational Psychology Ph.D. Program at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY). For my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting a study on parent-child interactions, disciplinary practices, and child development in families of Caribbean origin. There are not many scientific studies done with this population living in the United States. In this respect, I believe this study will serve an important purpose by shedding some light on the developmental processes in this population and, thereby, help us better understand their needs.

I am asking one parent (preferably, the mother) from each family of Caribbean origin, whose child attends St. Francis Assisi, to fill out the enclosed survey. Participation is voluntary. There are no risks to you in taking part, because I am not asking for any names and no one can know who filled out the survey. All information gathered will be kept strictly confidential, and no one except me and my advisor will have access to it. If you choose not to fill out the survey, there will be no penalty. If you do fill out the survey, you may leave any question blank, but I kindly ask you to answer as many questions as you can. The survey takes about 30-45 minutes to finish. Your participation will contribute to the scientific understanding of the developmental processes in children of Caribbean origin living in the United States. To show my appreciation for your participation, I will give you \$10 as compensation for your time, when you return the completed survey to me. Please come to the room at the school lobby between X pm-X pm before the parent meeting on September X, 2004 to submit the survey and receive your compensation of \$10. If you cannot make it to the parent meeting, you can return the survey the following week on September X, 2004, between X pm-X pm in the same room.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at (201) 985-1442 or [pakerm@hotmail.com](mailto:pakerm@hotmail.com), or my advisor Prof. Tryon at (212) 817-8285 or [gtryon@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:gtryon@gc.cuny.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact Hilry Fisher, Sponsored Research, The Graduate Center/City University of New York, (212) 817-7523, [hfisher@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:hfisher@gc.cuny.edu). Results of the study will be available upon request, and all inquiries may be directed to me.

Thank you for your participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Meltem Paker, M.S.Ed.

## APPENDIX B

### Survey (excluding the scales)

**Please do not put your name anywhere on this form. Please try to answer all questions.**

Child's Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ *(Please answer for your child who attends St. Francis of Assisi)*

Your relationship to child: Mother \_\_\_\_\_ Father \_\_\_\_\_ Other  
(specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Your age: \_\_\_\_\_

Your country of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

If you were not born in USA, when did you arrive here?: month \_\_\_\_\_ year \_\_\_\_\_

If you were born in USA, who in your immediate family first came to USA?: \_\_\_\_\_

Where is your family originally from?: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you live in an ethnic neighborhood with people from your cultural group? yes \_\_\_\_\_  
no \_\_\_\_\_

Your educational level:

- \_\_\_\_\_ less than 7<sup>th</sup> grade  
 \_\_\_\_\_ junior high school (9<sup>th</sup> grade)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ some high school (10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ high school graduate  
 \_\_\_\_\_ some college or specialized training  
 \_\_\_\_\_ college or university graduate  
 \_\_\_\_\_ graduate degree

Your occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Your marital status: married \_\_\_ separated/divorced \_\_\_ single \_\_\_

If married, please answer the following:

Spouse's country of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

If your spouse was not born in USA, when did he/she arrive here?: month \_\_\_\_\_  
year \_\_\_\_\_

If your spouse was born in USA, who in your spouse's immediate family first came to USA?: \_\_\_\_\_

Where is your spouse's family originally from?: \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's educational level:

- \_\_\_\_\_ less than 7<sup>th</sup> grade  
 \_\_\_\_\_ junior high school (9<sup>th</sup> grade)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ some high school (10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ high school graduate  
 \_\_\_\_\_ some college or specialized training  
 \_\_\_\_\_ college or university graduate  
 \_\_\_\_\_ graduate degree

Spouse's occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

The way children are raised, socialized, and disciplined vary across cultures and through time. One way of doing things may be very “normal,” common, and accepted in one culture and not in another, not to say that one is better than the other. It’s just that different cultures have different ways that should be looked at from within the culture rather than be judged by outsiders as wrong or harmful just because its not the way they do things.

Please answer the following questions regarding some childrearing practices.

1. How “normal” is corporal punishment in your cultural group?
  - a) Very normal
  - b) Normal
  - c) Somewhat normal
  - d) Not that normal
  - e) Not normal at all
  
2. How common is corporal punishment in your cultural group?
  - a) Very common
  - b) Common
  - c) Somewhat common
  - d) Not that common/Rare
  - e) Very rare
  
3. To what extent is corporal punishment socially accepted in your cultural group?
  - a) Very much accepted
  - b) Accepted
  - c) Somewhat accepted
  - d) Not that much accepted
  - e) Not accepted at all

For the following statements, please mark one of the five possible answers below

- 1 = not in the past month**  
**2 = 1 or 2 times in the past month**  
**3 = about once a week**  
**4 = several times a week**  
**5 = every day**

About how often in the past month have you:

- a. Told your child that you love him/her? \_\_\_\_\_
- b. Spent time with your child doing one of his/her favorite activities? \_\_\_\_\_
- c. Talked with your child about things he/she is especially interested in? \_\_\_\_\_
- d. Told your child you appreciated something he/she did? \_\_\_\_\_
- h. Shown your child physical affection (kiss, hug, stroke hair, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C

## Correlations Between the Main Study Variables

		Externalizing	Physical Discipline	Child's Age	Parent's Age	Time in USA	Generational Status
Externalizing	<i>r</i>	1					
	<i>p</i>	.					
Physical Discipline	<i>r</i>	.407**	1				
	<i>p</i>	.000	.				
Child's Age	<i>r</i>	.065	-.201	1			
	<i>p</i>	.543	.059	.			
Parent's Age	<i>r</i>	-.211	-.201	.233*	1		
	<i>p</i>	.051	.063	.031	.		
Time in USA	<i>r</i>	.000	-.076	.108	.298*	1	
	<i>p</i>	.998	.525	.367	.013	.	
Generational Status	<i>r</i>	-.084	.170	-.129	-.341**	-.207	1
	<i>p</i>	.433	.112	.226	.001	.080	.
Accltr to EA cultr	<i>r</i>	.018	.085	.041	.013	.397**	.194
	<i>p</i>	.869	.433	.704	.908	.001	.072
Accltr to Carrib cultr	<i>r</i>	-.031	-.213	.007	-.003	-.285*	-.019
	<i>p</i>	.771	.075	.948	.979	.015	.859
SES	<i>r</i>	.109	.068	-.071	-.120	.214	.133
	<i>p</i>	.349	.562	.541	.312	.095	.253
Temperament	<i>r</i>	.176	.000	.049	-.236*	-.190	-.030
	<i>p</i>	.101	.997	.649	.030	.112	.784
Normativity of PD	<i>r</i>	.203	.294**	.041	-.083	.080	-.070
	<i>p</i>	.056	.005	.705	.445	.505	.513
Parental Warmth	<i>r</i>	-.004	-.080	-.164	-.010	-.106	-.054
	<i>P</i>	.970	.455	.125	.928	.376	.617

		Accltr to EA cultr	Accltr to Carrib cultr	SES	Temperament	Normativity of PD	Parental Warmth
Externalizing	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>						
Physical Discipline	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>						
Child's Age	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>						
Parent's Age	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>						
Time in USA	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>						
Generational Status	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>						
Acclt. to EA cultr	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	1 .					
Acclt. to Car. cultr	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	-.035 .745	1 .				
SES	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	.127 .281	.017 .886	1 .			
Temperament	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	-.048 .660	.063 .560	-.094 .424	1 .		
Normativity of PD	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	.081 .458	.036 .736	.059 .613	.114 .290	1 .	
Parental Warmth	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>	.122 .260	.149 .163	.212 .066	-.148 .168	.003 .977	1 .

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

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