



Parental Harsh Discipline, Authoritarian Discipline and Child Ease of Excitation: The Moderating Role of Race

Yayu Du¹, Hannah Swerbenski², Melissa Sturge-Apple²

¹Department of Counseling & Human Development, University of Rochester ²Department of Psychology, University of Rochester



Introduction

- **Ease of excitation (EOE)** is the tendency to become mentally overwhelmed by internal or external stimuli¹
- EOE is associated with neuroticism, negative emotionality, and psychological health complaints²
- Parental **authoritarian discipline** predicts the development of child conduct problems and higher levels of child anxiety³
- Parental **harsh discipline** is linked to aggressive child behaviors, poor school performance, and a range of internalizing symptoms⁴
- The effects of harsh discipline on children may depend on parent gender: Maternal harsh discipline is associated with child rational aggression and negative emotionality, but paternal harsh discipline has no significant effect on child aggression or negative emotionality⁵
- The effects of harsh discipline on children may depend on race and cultural expectations: Paternal harsh discipline is related to poor behavioral and emotional adjustment among White children, while harsh discipline leads to better psychosocial adjustment and fewer suicidal behaviors among Black children⁶

Objective

The present longitudinal study investigated:

- (1) how **parental harsh discipline** influences **child EOE**;
- (2) how **parental authoritarian discipline** influences **child EOE**;
- (3) how **race moderates** the influence of **both paternal and maternal authoritarian and harsh discipline** on child EOE

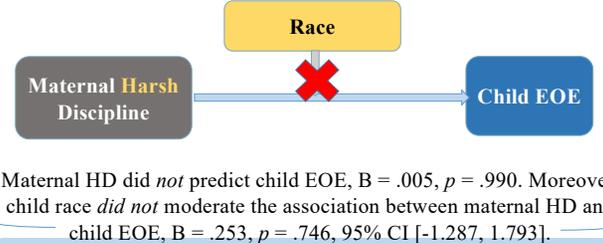
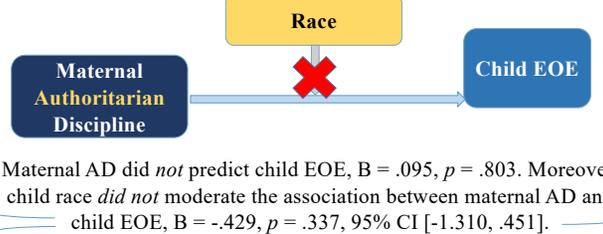
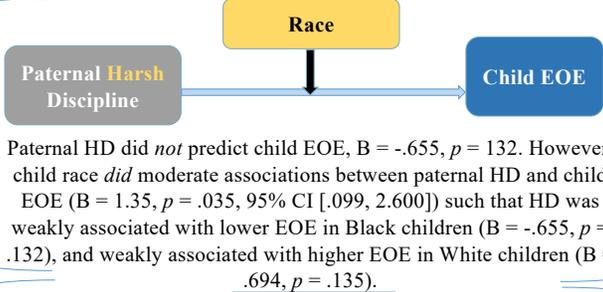
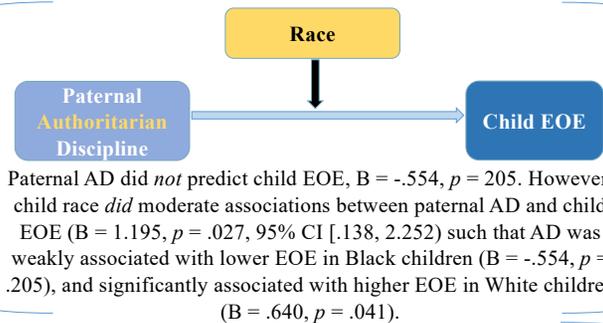
Participants

- 182 families (mothers, fathers, & their 3-year-old child) completed baseline and follow-up visits 2 years later. Families identified as either Black (n = 50) or White (n = 132).
- Families were recruited through school districts, family-centered internet sites, and flyers in the northeastern US

Measures

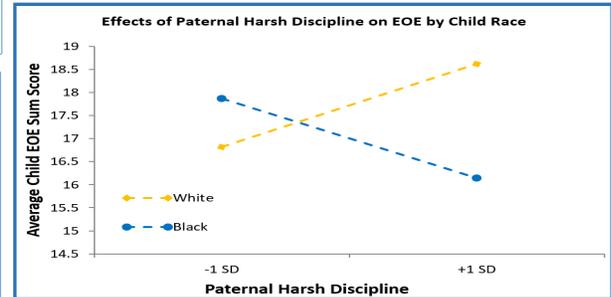
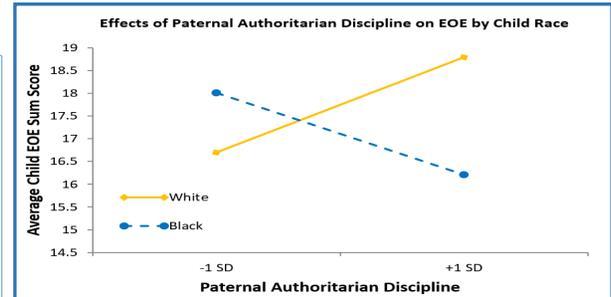
- **Harsh and Authoritarian Discipline:** Maternal and paternal harsh and authoritarian discipline were assessed during the 5-minute Parent-Child Problem-Solving Task at Wave 1. Discipline was behaviorally coded using the Caregiving Around Discipline System, with good reliability (ICCs = .701-.885).
- **Ease of Excitation (EOE):** At Wave 3 (child age 5), mothers, fathers, and trained experimenters rated the child on the 12-item Highly Sensitive Child (HSC) measure.
- **Race (moderator):** Mothers reported the racial identity of their child on a demographic questionnaire, which was coded as a binary variable (Black or White) in analyses.

Moderation Analyses Results



Please contact ydu30@u.Rochester.edu for any questions.

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Discussion

- Findings suggest that child race moderates the effects of *paternal* but *not maternal* harsh and authoritarian discipline on child EOE.
- The overall pattern of findings suggest that paternal harsh and authoritarian discipline may be somewhat protective in Black families, but detrimental in White families.
- The present study has several strengths:
 - The inclusion of both mothers and fathers
 - A longitudinal, multimethod & multi-informant design, including observational measurement of parenting
 - Focus on a novel, culturally-informative research question
- However, this study only examined race but not cultural mechanisms that may explain the moderation and promote the development of specific and culturally informed theories of parenting. This is an important future research direction.

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