

Parenting within Cultural Context:  
Comparisons between African-American and Asian-American Parents<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Using the sub-samples drawn from the National Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Kindergarten (ECLS-K) database, this study examines similarities and differences between African-American and Asian-American parents in their parenting practice (i.e., parental involvement at home, expectations of child, emotional expressiveness, school involvement, and child disciplinary styles). Effects of parent ethnicity on parenting practice have been examined. Results showed significant differences on some parenting variables between African- and Asian-American groups. Similarities have also been found between the two groups of parents. Some parenting variables were found to interact with family demographic variables such as parent education or family social economic status. Family structure did not contribute to any differences found between the two ethnic groups of parents in this study. Educational implications of these findings are briefly discussed.

## **Parenting within Cultural Context:**

### **Comparisons between African-American and Asian-American Parents**

#### **Introduction**

Cultural variations in parenting have been well documented in recent years (e.g., Chao, 2001; Cheah & Rubin, 2003; , Chen, Wu, Chen, Wang, & Cen, 2001; Coll, Akiba, Palacios, Bailey, Silver, DiMartino, & Chin, 2002; Diamond, Reagan, & Bandyk, 2000; Huntsinger, Jose, & Shari, 1998; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Kwok, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Okagaki & Frensch, 1998; Tamis-LeMonda, Wang, Koutsouvanou, & Albright, 2002; and so on). Many cross-cultural research studies were conducted within the framework of the ecological perspective developed by Bronfenbrenner (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990). According to the ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1978), human development can be best understood and explained within its social/cultural contexts, which include the family, the school, the community, the society, the value and belief system of a given culture, as well as the interactions among these immediate and extended social contexts. Family as one of the smallest units in the society is at the center of this ecological system. Consequently, aspects of the extended social/cultural context directly or indirectly affect the everyday experiences of individuals within each family (Harrison, et al., 1990).

Traditionally, cross-cultural studies of parenting conduct comparisons between the European-American and a minority group such as that of Hispanic, African, or Asian cultural origin (Chao, 1996, 2001; Chea & Rubin, 2003; Huntsinger, Jose, & Larson 1998; Knight, Tein, Shell, & Rossa, 1992; Knight, Virdin, & Roosa, 1994; Lin & Fu, 1990). Others compared across several ethnic groups (Diamond, Reagan, & Bandyk, 2000; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994). Many earlier studies, however, excluded Asian-American groups in the picture (Slaughter-Defoe, Kakagawa, Takanishi, & Johnson, 1990). One of the reasons for this exclusion could be attributed to a common cultural stereotype—Asian-Americans have been portrayed as the “model minority” whereas parenting research has typically been focused on minority families with “at risk” children

(Slaughter-Defoe, et al., 1990). The “invisibility” (Spencer, 1990) of the Asian-American group might be another reason for it to be overlooked in many cross-cultural studies.

Multiple research findings indicate that parents of Asian descent have distinctive patterns of belief, attitude, and style in parenting as compared to other ethnic groups especially the European-Americans (Chao, 2001, 2002; Coll, et al., 2002; Julian, McKenry & McKelvey, 1994; Lin & Fu, 1990; Papps, et al., 1994; Tamis-LeMonda, et al., 2002). For example, Asian, specifically Chinese and Japanese, parents were often found to be more authoritarian, directive, or controlling than their western counterparts (Cheah & Rubin, 2003; Chen, et al., 2001; Leung, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Lin & Fu, 1990; Ran, 2001; Slaughter-Defoe, et. al, 1990). In addition, Asian parents were seen as less involved in their children’s school activities (Coll, et al., 2002), were less expressive of their affection to children (Chen, et al., 2001; Hsu, 1981), believed more in “training” their children (Chao, 2001; Cheah & Rubin, 2003; Lin & Fu, 1990), held higher expectations of their children in academics (Ran, 2001; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Lin & Fu, 1990; Tamis-LeMonda, et al., 2002), and expected obedience from their children more (Tamis-LeMonda, et al., 2002) than parents of European descent. Researchers attributed this pattern of parenting to the traditional principles of Confucianism (Chao, 2002; Cheah & Rubin, 2003; Chen, et al., 2001; Leung, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Lin & Fu, 1990) or Buddhism (Chao, 2002; Coll, et al., 2002), among which filial piety and collectivist orientation are strongly emphasized (Chao, 1996; Chen et al., 2001).

Evidences showed that the African-American families share, in multiple ways, similar values and traditions with their Asian-American counterparts (Bradley, 1998; Wu & Qi, 2004)). One can find common characteristics between families of the two ethnic groups, such as extended family ties, respect for the elderly and authority figures, obedience to the parents, high expectations of children, and assertive disciplinary styles, etc. (e.g., Bradley, 1998). However, despite of similarities in values and practices related to parenting between African- and Asian-American, few studies could be found in the cross-cultural literature that specifically compare between these two ethnic groups. In the past

decades, studies on African-American families and children have typically focused on low-SES families with children “at risk,” while studies on Asian-Americans targeted on the middle-class families and children of success (Slaughter-Defoe, et al., 1990). Because of this selective bias, one can sometimes find contradictory interpretations of parenting practices when different groups of parents were considered. For example, assertive disciplinary style would be perceived as an indicator of “dysfunction” of the African-American low-income families and hence considered a “risk” factor to their children (Bradley, 1998; Ferrari, 2002; Slaughter-Defoe et al., 1990), whereas similar practice was considered a possible antecedent of success of Asian-American children (Leung, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Lin & Fu, 1990; Slaughter-Defoe, et. al, 1990).

In this study, we will investigate similarities and differences between African-American and Asian-American parents of all levels of SES background. We will also take into consideration parental education level, family SES, and family structure to explore potential impact of these factors on parenting practices. The research questions we seek to answer are:

1. In which ways do African-American and Asian-American parents differ in their parental involvement with children at home, expectations of their children, emotional expressiveness to children, school involvement, and child disciplinary styles?
2. In which ways is parenting practice affected by parental education level, family socio-economic status, and family structure (i.e., single- vs. two-parent families) within and between the African-American and Asian-American parents?

### **Research Procedures**

#### **Data Source**

The data source of this study is the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study: Kindergarten (ECLS-K) conducted by the U. S. Department of Education (2002), in which family data was obtained through a telephone interview with one parent or guardian of the household who received

the telephone interview. Both fall (P1) and spring (P2) data of the base year (kindergarten year) were used in the present study.

By design, the ECLS-K data represents distribution of ethnic groups in the national population (n=21,189), in which 55.4% (n=11,741) of the children were European-Americans, 17.8% (n=3,762) Hispanic, 15.1% (n=3,210) African-Americans, 6.4% (n=1,363) Asian-Americans, and 5.3% (n=1,113) others. All children in both P1 and P2 sample were enrolled in kindergarten at the time of parent interview.

### **Research Variables**

Five groups of parenting variables have been extracted from the parent ECLS-K base year data. They are: parental involvement with children at home, parental expectations of children, emotional expressiveness to children, school involvement, and child disciplinary styles.

Since significant differences have been found between family demographics of African-American and Asian-American samples, three control variables will be included to exclude possible bias in the analyses of parenting styles. The control variables are family structure (single- or two-parent), SES (quintile), and parent education level.

### **Methods of Analyses**

All variables investigated in this study are categorical variables. Therefore Chi-square tests were used to analyze the data. Logistic and linear regression modeling will be conducted for each variable by parent ethnicity, family structure, SES, and parent education.

### **Data Analyses**

#### **Demographics of the Samples**

Both African-American and Asian-American samples used in the present study were extracted from the ECLS-K base year data (P1 and P2). Children's mean age was 68 months for African-American children and 67.5 months for Asian-American children. T-test showed no significant difference between the mean age levels of the two groups of children. Parent ethnicity was

identified by self-report of the telephone interviewees. Only those families in which both parents were of same ethnic background or single parent families were selected for this study.

Composition of the samples. The un-weighted P1 (fall 1998) sample used in this study consists of 2,300 African-American parents (92.1% mother) and 875 Asian-American parents (75.0% mother). After weighting (relative weight) the sample consists of 2,065 African American parents (92.3% mother) and 281 Asian American parents (73.6% mother). The weighted sample will be used in the analyses of parenting variables.

The un-weighted P2 (spring 1999) sample consists of 2,336 African-American parents (92.2% mother) and 928 Asian-American parents (73.4% mother). The weighted sample consists of 2,340 African American parents (92.5% mother) and 414 Asian American parents (72.2% mother). The weighted sample will be used in the analyses of parenting variables.

Parental age. As Table 1 indicates, significant differences have been found in parent age between African- and Asian-American samples. In both P1 and P2 samples, Asian-American parents were about three to four years older than African-American parents.

Table 1. T-test comparisons of mean age of African- and Asian-American parents.\*\*

	Sample Size (n)	Mean Age (Year)	SD	Significance Level
<u>P1 Samples</u>				
Mother				
African-American	2,021	30.9	6.636	p<.01*
Asian-American	379	34.6	5.607	
Father				
African-American	849	35.4	7.778	p<.01*
Asian-American	332	38.3	6.110	
<u>P2 Samples</u>				
Mother				
African-American	2,289	30.8	6.800	p<.01*
Asian-American	377	34.9	5.577	
Father				
African-American	972	35.3	7.872	p<.01*
Asian-American	361	38.7	6.385	

\*\* Un-weighted sample.

Parental education level. Compared to the African-American group, Asian-American parents have significantly higher level of parental education. As Table 2 indicates below, in both P1 and P2 samples a majority of Asian-American parents obtained a post-secondary degree as opposed to that of African-American parents in the same samples.

Table 2. Chi-square analyses of education level of African- and Asian-American parents.

	Secondary Level	Post-secondary Level	Graduate Level	Total (n)	Chi-Square Value	df	Significance Level
<u>P1 Samples</u>							
Mother							
African-American	1,121 55%	884 43.4%	33 1.6%	2,038 100%	343.699	8	p<.01*
Asian-American	141 37.1%	190 50%	49 12.9%	380 100%			
Father							
African-American	512 54.5%	391 41.7%	35 3.8%	938 100%	219.917	8	p<.01*
Asian-American	94 28.9%	162 48%	78 23.1%	338 100%			
<u>P2 Samples</u>							
Mother							
African-American	1,281 55.6%	984 42.6%	41 1.8%	2,306 100%	384.299	8	p<.01*
Asian-American	160 38.7%	204 49.4%	49 11.9%	413 100%			
Father							
African-American	512 54.5%	391 41.7%	35 3.8%	938 100%	449.138	8	p<.01*
Asian-American	94 28.9%	162 48%	78 23.1%	338 100%			

Family SES status. Further analyses found that family SES is closely related to parental education level (P1:  $X^2=3253.77$ ,  $df=32$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $r=.84$ ; P2:  $X^2=3606.36$ ,  $df=32$ ,  $p<.01$ ,  $r=.84$ ). In this study, SES was determined by the annual income of the household, which was further divided into five quintiles in the original data set. In this study, the top quintile was considered the highest SES and the bottom quintile the lowest. As indicated in Table 3 below, in both P1 and P2 samples there were more than fifty percent of Asian-American families on or above the fourth quintile of the SES distribution than that of African-American families. This trend was reversed at the lower end of the



SES spectrum—there were less than one-third of Asian-American families placed on or below the second quintile of the SES distribution whereas more than 55% of African-American families belonged to the same category.

Table 3. Chi-square test of social-economic status of African- and Asian-American families.

	First Quintile	Second Quintile	Third Quintile	Fourth Quintile	Fifth Quintile	Chi-Square Value	df	p
<u>P1 Samples</u>								
African-American	668 32.3%	472 22.9%	434 21%	320 15.5%	171 8.3%	216.750	4	p<.01*
Asian-American	65 16.9%	49 12.7%	69 17.9%	72 18.7%	130 33.8%			
<u>P2 Samples</u>								
African-American	783 33.5%	534 22.8%	478 20.4%	362 15.5%	183 7.8%	236.183	4	p<.01*
Asian-American	73 17.6%	54 13%	72 17.3%	81 19.5%	135 32.5%			

Family structure. Significant differences in family structures have been also been found between the two ethnic groups. In both P1 and P2 samples, more than 80% of Asian-American families were two-parent families whereas nearly 60% of African-American families were single-parent ones.

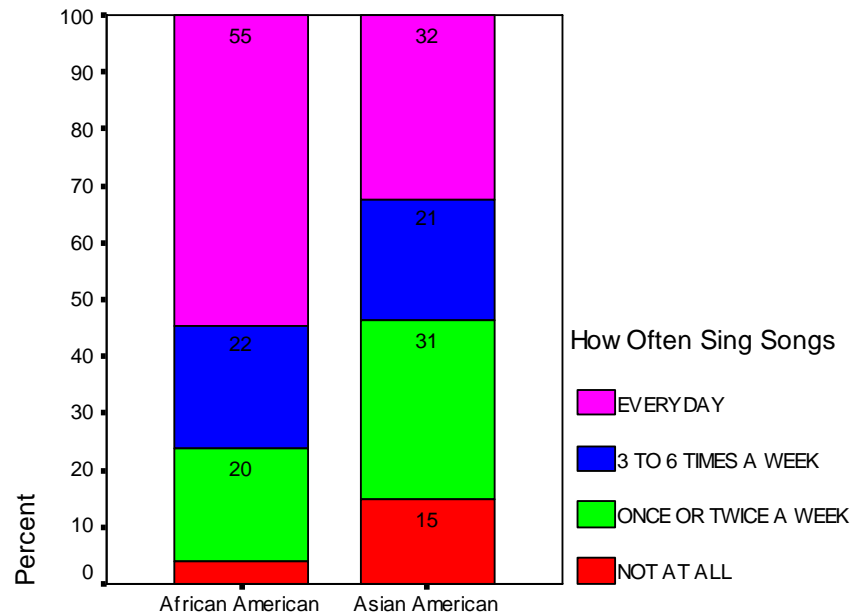
## Results

Chi-square analyses have been conducted to compare and test differences between African-American and Asian-American parents. Because of the large sample size, in this report only differences at p<.01 level will be considered significant.

Parental involvement at home with child. Parental involvement at home with child was measured by questions about weekly frequencies (e.g., everyday, 3 to 6 times a week, once or twice a week, and not at all) that parents participated in various activities with child at home. In general, according to their self-reports both African-American and Asian-American parents were similarly involved in children’s activities such as “tell story,” “do art,” “play games,” “teach nature,” or “build

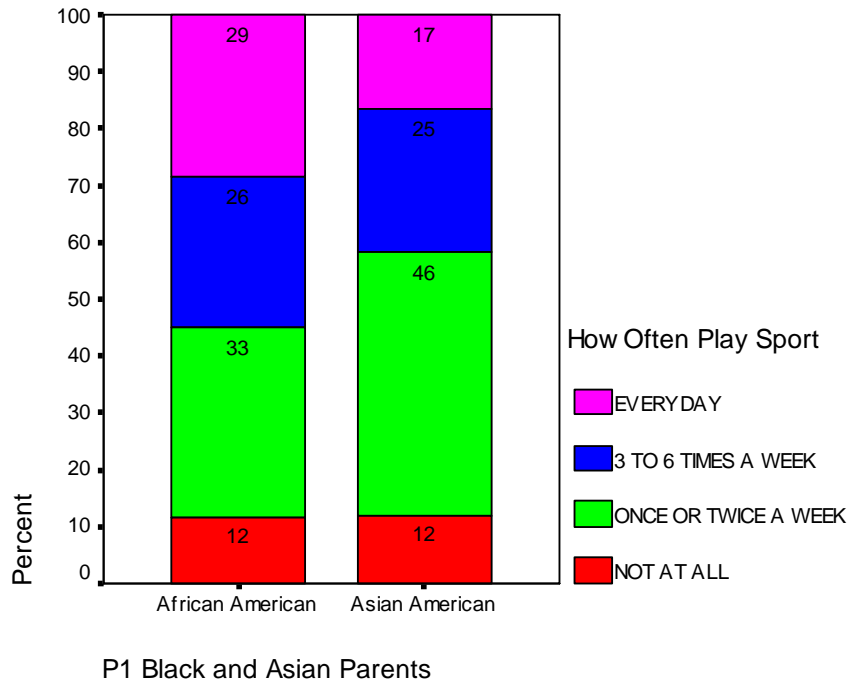
things.” However, Chi-square test indicated that African-American parents significantly involved more in active activities with their children such as “sign songs” ( $X^2=117.420, df=3, p<.001$ ) or “play sports” ( $X^2=32.671, df=3, p<.001$ ) than Asian-American parents did (see figures 1 and 2 below).

Figure 1. Weekly frequencies of African-American and Asian-American parents singing songs with children.



P1 Black and Asian Parents

Figure 2. Weekly frequencies of African-American and Asian-American parents playing sports with children.



Parental expectations of children. This group of variables was measured by questions such as “highest degree expected of child to obtain,” “child does household chores,” and how important for the child to be able to “count,” “share,” draw,” be calm,” “know letters,” and “communicates well” (see Table 4 below).

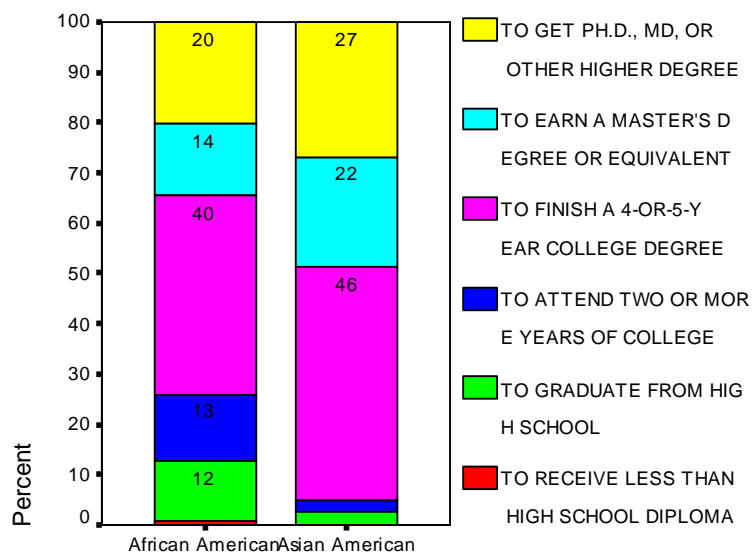
Table 4. Chi-square test of differences in parental expectations of children between African- and Asian-American parents.

Variables	African-American Parents (n)	Asian-American Parents (n)	Chi-Square Value	df	p
Highest degree child to obtain	2052	377	84.87	5	p<.01*
Child does household chores	2061	382	69.83	3	p<.01*
Child counts	2062	383	22.715	4	p<.01*
Child knows letters	2062	382	42.518	4	p<.01*
Child draws	2062	381	20.426	4	p<.01*
Child shares	2061	382	32.445	4	p<.01*
Child is calm	2061	383	38.976	4	p<.01*
Child communicates well	2061	383	80.484	4	p<.01*

Significant differences were found between Asian- and African-American parent's expectations of the highest degree that their children should obtain. Over 46% of Asian-American parents expected their children to obtain a 4-year college degree where as about 40% of African-American parents expected so. In addition, 22% of Asian-American parents expected their children to obtain a Master's degree and about 27% in the same group expected their children to obtain a Ph.D. or M.D. degree as compared to 14.2% and 20.2% for the African-American parents who expected the same. See Figure 3 on page 12 for details.

Significant differences have also been found on the variable "how often the child did household chores each week." As reported by their parents, African-American children did more household chores on a weekly basis than their Asian-American counterpart. For example, about 60% of African-American parents reported that their children did chores everyday, while only 39% of Asian-American parents reported the same. Results indicated that more than 36% of Asian-American children did household chores once or twice each week or did not do chores at all as opposed to only 22% of African-American children did so.

Figure 3. Percentage differences in highest degree African-American and Asian-American parents expected their children to obtain.



P1 Black and Asian Parents

Significant differences were also found between the two ethnic groups of parents on their expectations of child's academic and social skills. It is interesting to note that, contrary to the common belief that Asian-American parents strongly emphasize academic achievement of their children, our analyses of this sample showed that more African-American parents believed that it was essential or very important for the child to count (80%), to draw (80%), and to know letters (87%) as opposed to the Asian-American group (74%, 74.8%, and 77% respectively) on the same variables. Regarding child's social skills or disposition, the results were again in favor of the African-American parents. For example, 94% of African-American parents expected their children to be able to share (88.5% for Asian-American group), 90.4% expected their children to be calm (81.2% for Asian-Americans), and 95.3% expected their children to communicate well (84.6% for Asian-Americans).

Parental emotional expressiveness. This aspect of parenting includes variables such as “too busy to play with child,” “always show child love,” “hard to be warm to child,” “express affection to child,” and “often feel angry with child” (see Table 5 on page 13).

Chi-square analyses showed that more Asian-American parents (21.2%) felt the statement “too busy to play with child” was completely or mostly true as compared to African-American parents (9.6%). Similar trend was found in the comparison of the two groups of parents on the statement “it is hard to be warm to child.” Over 18% of Asian-American parents thought that was completely or mostly true whereas only 7.7% of African-American parents believed the same. Although significant difference has been found on the variable “express affection to child,” about 97% of African-American parents and 93% of Asian-American parents agreed that the statement was completely or mostly true. Moreover, 70% of African-American parents and 53.5% of Asian-American parents agreed that it was completely true that they always showed love to their children. About 20% of Asian-American parents, however, said that it was “somewhat true” or “not at all true” to the same statement as opposed to only 11.7% African-American parents who agreed on

the same. In addition, a very small percentage of parents in both groups often felt angry with their children (1.8% African- and 2.8% Asian-American), which indicates that, in general, both groups of parents held a positive view on their children, although Asian-American parent might not always demonstrate this positive view to their children openly.

Table 5. Chi-square test of differences in parental emotional expressiveness between African- and Asian-American parents.

Variables	African-American Parents (n)	Asian-American Parents (n)	Chi-Square Value	df	P
Too busy to play with child	2271	390	60.723	3	p<.01*
Hard to be warm to child	2271	387	76.716	3	p<.01*
Always show child love	2269	391	45.845	3	p<.01*
Express affection to child	2270	390	62.108	3	p<.01*
Often feel angry with child	2269	390	9.316	3	p<.025

Parental school involvement. This aspect of parenting was measured by frequencies of parents' participation in school events. Variables included how often the parent "contacted school," "attended open house," "attended PTA/PTO meeting," "attended parent advisory meeting," "attended parent-teacher conference," "attended school events," "volunteered at school," and "helped with fundraising." For some unknown reasons during data collection process only a very small number of parents responded to some of these questions (e.g., attended PTA/PTO meeting or parent advisory board meeting). Those items will be eliminated from our analyses for this study (see Table 6).

Table 6. Chi-square test of differences in parental involvement in school events between African- and Asian-American parents.

Variables	African-American Parents (n)	Asian-American Parents (n)	Chi-Square Value	df	p
Contacted school	2340	414	53.305	1	p<.01*
Attended open house	1390	252	9.118	2	p<.01*
Attended P-T conference	1640	331	15.232	2	p<.01*
Attended school events	1146	188	.578	2	p<.749
Helped with fundraising	1107	167	2.186	2	p<.335

Chi-square analyses indicated that Asian-American parents were less involved in their children's school than African-American parents. For example, more than 65% of Asian-American parents never contacted school during the school year as compared to 46% African-American parents who reported the same; about 39% Asian-American parents attended school open house twice or three times during the school year whereas 47.2% African-American parents did the same. More African-American parents (26.8%) attended parent-teacher conference three or more times during the school year as opposed to only 16.6% Asian-American parents who did the same. Some insignificant differences were also found between the two groups of parents on some variables such as volunteer at school or helped with fundraising.

Child disciplinary styles. This aspect of parenting was measured by parents' response to a given case scenario "if your child got so angry that she/he hit you, what would you do?" Possible choices included whether or not the parent would "spank child," "take child's time out," "hit child back," "discuss what did wrong," "ignore it," "make child do chores," "make fun of child," "make child apologize," "take away a privilege," "give a warning," and "yell at child."

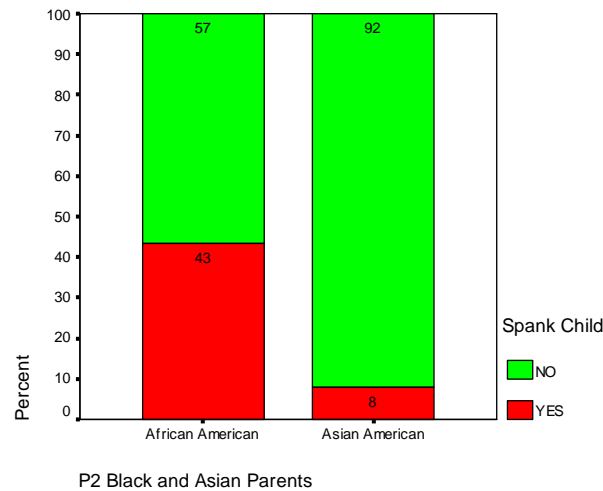
There were no significant differences between African-American and Asian-American parents on several child discipline variables such as "time out," "do house chores," "make fun of child," "give child a warning," or "yell at child" (see Table 7 below).

Table 7. Chi-square test of differences in parental involvement in school events between African- and Asian-American parents.

Variables	African-American Parents (n)	Asian-American Parents (n)	Chi-Square Value	df	p
Spank child	2293	395	179.637	1	p<.01*
Time out	2293	395	.455	1	p<.50
Hit back	2293	395	13.347	1	p<.01*
Discuss what child did wrong	2293	395	18.213	1	p<.01*
Ignore	2292	395	9.149	1	p<.01*
Make child do house chores	2293	395	3.124	1	p<.077
Make fun of child	2292	395	5.127	1	p<.024
Make child apologize	2293	395	11.793	1	p<.01*
Take away privilege	2293	395	37.128	1	p<.01*
Give child a warning	2293	395	4.043	1	p<.044
Yell at child	2293	395	3.475	1	p<.062

However, Chi-square analyses indicated that African-American parents used more authoritarian strategies with their children than Asian-American parents did. For example, 43% African-American parents would “spank the child” (see Figure 4), 7.5% would “hit the child,” and 37.6% would “take away privileges” as opposed to 7.8%, 2.5%, and 21.8% respectively for Asian-American parents to do the same.

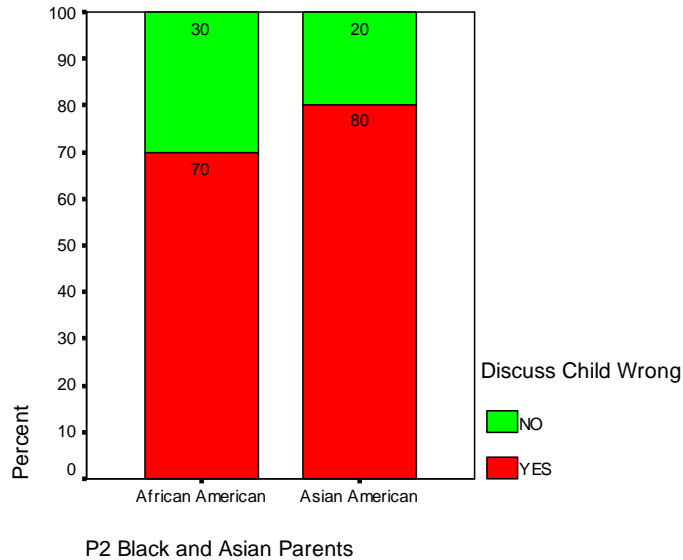
Figure 4. Differences between African-American and Asian-American parents in spanking their children.



On the other hand, more Asian-American parents seemed to resort to more authoritative parenting strategies to discipline their children. For example, 80% Asian-American parents would discuss with the child what he/she did wrong (see Figure 5) and 39.2% would make child apologize, whereas about 70% and 30.5% African-American parents would do the same. Although significant difference has also been found in another child disciplinary variable (“ignore child”), which fell in between authoritarian and authoritative parenting styles, the differences between the two groups was very small (e.g., .8% African-American and 2.5% for Asian-American parents).



Figure 5. Differences between African-American and Asian-American parents in discussing with their children about what they did wrong.



Interaction between parenting and control variables. Linear and logistic regression analyses were used to investigate how parent education, family SES, and family structure contributed to the significant differences found between African-American and Asian-American parents. Table 8 and Table 9 below summarized the findings. Only those parenting variables that showed significant differences between the two ethnic groups were reported in the tables.

As shown in Table 8, the effects of parental ethnicity on parent expectations of children remained significant on all variables. Parent education and family SES factors contributed significantly on some parent expectation variables including “highest degrees expected,” “child shares,” and “child communicates well.” There were no differences on parental expectation variables between single parents and parents from two-parent families.

Table 8. Linear regression analyses of interactions between parent ethnicity, parent education, family structure, and family SES on parenting variables.

Variables	F Value	df	t value of regression coefficient			
			Parent Ethnicity	Parent Education	Family SES	Family Structure
<u>Parent Expectations</u>						
Highest degree expected of child	74.975*	4	2.588*	6.297*	3.781*	n.s.
Child does household chores	17.715*	4	-8.015*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Child counts	5.874*	4	3.909*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Child knows letters	10.295*	4	6.287*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Child draws	5.193*	4	4.000*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Child shares	30.370*	4	7.502*	-2.713*	-3.879*	n.s.
Child is calm	9.401*	4	6.032*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Child communicates well	30.954*	4	8.438*	-3.729*	n.s.	n.s.
<u>Parental Involvement at Home</u>						
Sing songs	34.72*	4	-10.531*	3.347*	n.s.	n.s.
Play sports	5.620*	4	-4.335*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
<u>Parental involvement in school</u>						
Attended open house	4.46*	4	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Attended P-T conference	4.52*	4	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
<u>Parental Emotional Expressiveness</u>						
Too busy to play with child	20.00*	4	-8.272*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Hard to be warm to child	28.20*	4	-9.53*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Always show child love	11.61*	4	6.02*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Express affection to child	16.80*	4	6.95*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

\* p<.01.

Parent education level contributed significantly to how often parents sang songs with children but showed no effect on the frequency of parents playing sports with their children. Family SES and family structure showed no impact at all on parental involvement with child at home. It is interesting to note that, although overall difference between African- and Asian-American parents remained significant, when family demographic variables entered into the equation no single control variable including parent ethnicity had significant effect on parental involvement at school.

As indicated in Table 9 on page 19, regarding child disciplinary style, the impact of parental ethnicity remained significant whereas parental education, family SES, and family structure did not contribute significantly at all to any of the variables in this category. The direction of differences also

remained unchanged. Due to coding (“yes”=1 and “no”=2), a negative B value indicates a behavior is more likely to happen.

Table 9. Logistic regression analyses of interactions between parent ethnicity, parent education, family structure, and family SES on child discipline style variables.

Variables	B Value			
	Parent Ethnicity	Parent Education	Family SES	Family Structure
<u>Child Disciplinary Styles</u>				
Spank child	-2.11*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Hit back	-1.13*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Take away privilege	-.72*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Discuss what child did wrong	.473*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Make child apologize	.317*	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.

\* p<.01.

Conclusion. Based on these analyses we conclude that there were significant differences between African-American and Asian-American parents on multiple aspects of parenting practices such as parental involvement with children at home, parental expectations of children, emotional expressiveness to children, school involvement, and child disciplinary styles. These differences could be attributed mainly to parental ethnicity or cultural background. Other parent demographic variables, i.e., parental education and family SES, had also been found to have significant impact on some differences between the two groups of parents. However, unlike what we expected, family structure did not show any impact on parenting differences between the two ethnic groups of parents.

### Discussion

This study demonstrated that African-American and Asian-American parents have distinctive styles in raising their children. Some of our findings are consistent with findings in previous studies and with general public beliefs. For example, we found that Asian-American parents tended to hold high expectations of their children in their educational attainment but they were not openly passionate with their children. African-American parents, on the other hand, were more outgoing with and more expressive to their children but less likely to expect their children to obtain graduate degrees in education. However, we also found that some of these differences were confounded by other family

variables such as parent education level or family SES. It makes sense to us that those parents who themselves hold graduate degrees would expect their children to do the same as shown in this study, whereas family SES would also contribute to this expectation because higher education is costly to many.

One hard-to-explain finding is that although about 95% Asian-American parents expected their children to obtain post-secondary degrees, a much smaller percentage of them would view the “basics” of primary education (such as knowing the letters or counting) as essential or very important for their children to achieve in kindergarten. Rather, it was the African-American parents who seemed to emphasize more on obtaining the basic skills as their children entered elementary schools. This finding contradicts with Asian-American parents’ high expectation in educational attainment of their children. One possible explanation could be that many Asian-American children entered school with these basic skills already, therefore their parents focused on other aspects of their children’s formal education instead. This assumption could be further tested by comparing these children’s current academic skills and knowledge in kindergarten years and by looking at their academic achievement longitudinally in the subsequent years of ECLS-K study.

The finding that Asian-American parents were less likely to openly show affection to their children was not a surprise to us. As found in other studies (e.g., Chen, et al., 2001; Hsu, 1981) and as commonly observed in our society, in general Asian-Americans were indeed more likely to withhold their affection for others or to avoid displaying their emotions publicly. Modesty as part of shared personality has been emphasized and encouraged in Asian cultures over thousands of years. Even after going through the “acculturation” process as suggested by Lin and Fu (1990), this shared personality might still play an important role in forming parent-child relationship in families of Asian culture origin in the United States. In a recent report Bornstein and Cote (2004) asserted that, regardless of cultures of origin and cultures of destination, families tended to withhold the conventions and beliefs of their original culture. It is so, as Bornstein and Cote explained, because

cultural conventions and beliefs had been established with well-developed schemas in the original culture. These schemas could withstand transformation. Childrearing and socialization within family carried a long tradition therefore was considered among “the most resistant to change” (Bornstein & Cote, 2004). Findings of this study further supported this assumption. It would be interesting to see if there is any difference in parental expressiveness to children between parents in Asian countries and Asian-American parents. If the “acculturation” process suggested by Lin and Fu (1990) is indeed valid then we would see a gradual deviation in parenting styles among Asian-American parents from what was typical in their original culture.

Another interesting finding in this study was the differences in child disciplinary styles between African-American and Asian-American parents. As noted earlier in this report, multiple research studies on Asian parenting style noted that Asian, especially Chinese, parents were often found to be more authoritarian, directive, or controlling than their western counterparts (Cheah & Rubin, 2003; Chen, et al., 2001; Leung, Lau, & Lam, 1998; Lin & Fu, 1990; Ran, 2001). Asian parents also believed more in “training” their children (Chao, 2001; Cheah & Rubin, 2003; Lin & Fu, 1990) and expected obedience from their children more (Tamis-LeMonda, et al., 2002) than parents in western cultures. Our study, however, did not support this notion. Compared to African-American parents, Asian-American parents were found to use more authoritative parenting strategies in dealing with children’s “misbehavior.” Specifically, Asian-American parents tended to use discussion or asking child to apologize instead of removing child’s privilege or spanking the child as a means to discipline. Again, we’d view this discrepancy between our study and previous studies as a possible indication of the “acculturation” process (Lin & Fu, 1990). In other words, compared to Asian parents in other countries, Asian-American parents might have adapted to the democratic system in the U.S. in which authoritative parenting is strongly encouraged both by law and by societal conventions. In our findings, there seems to be an association between the parental disciplinary style and their emotional expressiveness. If Asian American parents were more modest in expressing their

affections toward their children, it is expected that they would be less likely to use extreme disciplinary measures (such as spanking) when their children misbehave. The same could be applied to explain findings on parenting styles of African-American parents. Our study found African-American parents to be more expressive of their love and care to their children. Therefore, it's expected that when they experienced negative feelings caused by their children's misbehaviors, they would be more ready to openly express that as well.

There is one important aspect of our research findings that warrants some attention and calls for further examination. Our analyses indicated that, in general, the differences in parenting styles between African-American and Asian-American parents are more attributable to parental ethnicity than to parent education level or family social economic status. Family structure did not enter in the equation at all in examining the differences in parenting. Apparently, parents of two ethnic groups have distinct ways of fostering their children regardless of their terminal degrees in education or social class. We must emphasize, however, that the differences between parents of two ethnical groups were "caused" by race or ethnicity. Rather, we believe that the sources of these group differences were cultural beliefs, values, and tradition of each ethnic group as reflected in parenting practice. This assumption, of course, needs to be further tested and justified in future research.

### **Educational Implication of the Study**

Paternal involvement in young children's lives is no longer an option but a norm today (Cabrera et al., 2000, US Department of Education, 2001). More and more parents become aware of their important role and are willing to involve in their children's education and care. However, different cultural background may influence parents' beliefs, understanding, and practices as what and how to get involved with their children on a day-to-day basis. Cultural traditions may also implicitly prohibit parents to go beyond what they had known or experienced from their own parents to parent their children. As educators we need to understand parenting styles as influenced by

African-American and Asian-American cultures in order to develop culturally appropriate strategies to educate, assist, and involve parents from these two distinctive ethnic backgrounds.

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