Racial and Ethnic Differences In Parent-Child Relationships:

Does Mixed Race Matter?

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INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement is an important resource for children as they grow into adolescence and adulthood. The racial differences in parent child interactions are well documented (King, Harris, and Heard 2004; Harris, Heard and King 2001; Toth and Xu 1999) and as such these disparities maintain differential resources for children across racial communities. Research on parental involvement and race presumes such households are racially homogenous. The recent rise of interracial marriages and, consequently mixed race households questions the veracity of this assumption. A resonant theme in literature on interracial marriages and racially mixed children has been answering the question are these children better off, worse off, or faring the same as their racially homogenous counterparts (Daniel 1996; Thornton 1996). Much of these questions have centered on the racial identity development of the multiracial child. Parents in racially mixed households theoretically negotiate the landscape of racial identity, racial difference, and perhaps racial discrimination differently than other families of color. This may produce a different degree of investment on the part of parents as they provide their children with greater resources in the forms of parental involvement.

In this paper, we will explore the role of racial mixture in parent-child interactions by addressing three research questions. First, are there differences in the level of parental involvement between racially mixed households and racially homogenous households? Second, do these differences persist over all types of racial mixture? We explore differences between racial differences on a couple levels (a marriage between two persons of disparate races) as compared to racial difference on an individual level (a family with a racially mixed parent). Finally, do the patterns of parental involvement imply differences in the degree of mother's involvement relative to fathers? This paper will fill an important gap in the literatures of mixed

race families and parental involvement. Although the rising number of interracial marriages and multiracial births has been substantively linked to changes in the patterns of racial and ethnic relationships (Farley 1999), the ways this trend impacts the family has received less attention (Rosenfeld and Kim 2005; Lee and Edmonston 2005).

RACE AND PARENTING IN MULTIRACIAL HOUSEHOLDS

Parent-child interactions, or more commonly referred to as parental involvement, vary across racial groups. There are several avenues through which parents can invest in children; however those that have the most relevance for child outcomes are classified under the umbrella of social capital. One type or form of social capital addresses the relationships between parents and children. It represents how parents "teach, nurture, monitor, and care for children" (King, Harris, and Heard 2004: 2). We can categorize parent-child relationships by both the quantity and quality of parental involvement. Measures of the quantity of parental involvement incorporates parent's time with children, most importantly in direct engagement with activities expected to promote child development (see Amato 1987; Marsiglio 1991). The quality of parental involvement can include an affective dimension, measured by the closeness or bond between parents and children, as well as indicators of parental responsibility or monitoring of children's behavior and relationships (see Lamb et al. 1987). As such, our measures of parental involvement tap two forms of social capital: the social capital inherent in direct relations between parents and children, and the relationship between parents and the community (Coleman 1988).

Due to recent trends in family structure, research on race differences in parent involvement has largely focused on father involvement. Research is mixed on whether there are any differences between African American and White resident fathers in the time spent with children (Cooksey and Fondell 1996; Harris et al. 1998). In addition, Black and Hispanic fathers

are more likely to monitor and supervise children's activities compared to non-Hispanic white fathers (Toth and Xu 1999). In general, research on race differences in parenting styles suggest that African American and Asian parents are more likely to engage in authoritarian parenting, characterized by strict rules and less parental warmth (Dornbusch et al. 1987). One criticism of research on parental involvement is that the assumption that these households are racially homogenous. Parenting and the degree of parent involvement do vary across race, but what about variance *between* races?

Growing numbers of interracial marriages and multiracial children make this assumption questionable. In 1970, 0.7% of all married couples involved persons of different racial / ethnic backgrounds. This figure increased by 7 times in 2000 as 5.4% of all couples are married across racial lines (Lee and Edmonston 2005). Although only 2.4% of U.S. census respondents that indicated multiple racial backgrounds, this represents 1 in 40 Americans (Lee and Bean 2004). Although racial difference within families is still statistically somewhat rare, recent projections indicate that size of the intermarried population and the racially mixed population will continue to grow (Lee, Edmonston, and Passell 2002). While several studies have documented the prevalence of interracial family formation (e.g. Cready and Saenz 1997; Kang Fu 2001; Qian 1997; Rosenfeld 2002), very few studies employing nationally representative data have explored the experiences of living within a racially mixed family.

A basic question, however, is why should we expect the interactions between parents and children to be any different from racially homogenous households? To answer this question, we must first clarify what is meant by "racially mixed household." Racial mixture may vary on the level of the couple (two persons of disparate racial backgrounds) or on the level of the individual (multiracial individual). Both definitions are constrained to what Daniels (1997) calls first-

generation mixed race individuals, or those whose racial mixture is the result of their parents being of disparate races. Multigenerational multiracial persons are excluded from this definition unless they explicitly view and identify themselves as mixed race people. The most common household includes all three-an interracial couple that parent a multiracial child. However, multiracial adults may parent in ways that are distinctive from racial homogenous households. In both types of households, racial identities of children have the potential to vary greatly from the identity of the parents. If racial identity of a child is less of a certainty, parental involvement may provide the mechanism that links parent's racial identity to the child.

A distinguishing feature of the racially mixed family is the development of the identity of multiracial children and adolescents. In such a household, the racial identity of the child may follow a variety of paths—it may reflect the mother's racial background, the father's racial background, an identity that embraces both at once, or rejects race all together (Root 2003; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002; Roth 2005). Parents represent direct and indirect influences on the identities of mixed race offspring. Indirectly, parents provide a context for their child's day-to-day interactions and the racial composition of their social networks through selecting their area of residence and schools they attend (Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002: 59-61). Both of these components reflect parent's social class. Parents also directly influence their identity development by instilling a sense of racial belonging and providing their initial impressions of race. This may result in providing children survival skills to navigate social stigmas of racial mixture and racism in general. Twine (2000)'s study of white mothers of biracial children explored how these mothers learned how to best prepare their children for experiences with racial discrimination.

Living in mixed race circumstances may affects the *kind* of parent-child interactions as well as the *degree* of parental involvement. For example, parents who are explicitly racially different from their children may have to work harder, invest more time, in order to instill a sense of ethnic or racial belonging. Qualitative accounts of racially mixed families describe how parents attempted to instill a sense of cultural understanding for their children (Rosenblatt, Karis, and Powell 1995; Funderberg 1994; Rockquemore and Brunsma 2002). As Dalmage (2000) argues, multiracial families may not perceive community or community membership in the same way as some seek communal sameness with other mixed race families and some look to single race communities. In this case, being in a racially mixed family may coincide with a greater degree of parental involvement meant to compensate for ethnic or racial ambiguity of the identities of the children. Waters (1990)'s work on ethnic identity of European Americans finds that knowledge about ancestors for first and second-generation children of immigrants is directly the result of parental socialization among other factors. Influence from parents are one of the factors that contributes to a child considering him or herself as "ethnically" identified as opposed to simply American (pp. 57-64). Focusing specifically on incidence of racial mixture, parents also expose children to initial messages regarding race, identity, and racial attitudes. For example, Rockquemore and Brunsma (2002) find that children who do not receive explicit messages about race as a salient part of their day-to-day existence or hear that biracial identity is a validated identity option are more likely to identify with singular racial identities. An alternate scenario is that parenting within racially mixed circumstances affords the adult the opportunity express his or her own identity. For example O'Donoghue's (2004) research on white mothers of biracial children explored how the parents' understanding of her own racial identity was impacted by the experience of mothering a multiracial child. Several of Water's (1990)

respondents expressed that they had never thought about ethnic identity until they became parents themselves. In this scenario, racial mixture might inspire a greater degree of parental involvement.

The character of the parent-child interactions also may vary between the mother and the father. Mothers are often the primary care-takers of children, and as such may be expected to ensure transmission of cultural values of ethnic identity. On the other hand, father's ethnic or racial background has also been found to be more powerful in predicting the ethnic or racial identity of the child, reflecting the status of fathers as household heads and as those who carry the surname that is the surname of the child (Xie and Goyette 1997; Qian 2004; Roth 2005). Griswold (1993) suggests that immigrant fathers employ authoritarian parenting strategies in order to instill the cultural memory of the "old country." Twine (2000)'s work on white mothers of multiracial children suggests that these mothers have a heightened sense of the racial discrimination that their children may face. As they attempt to instill a "Black" identity, they are at times more vigilant in directly addressing the potential for racial discrimination than Black mothers of Black children.

On the other hand, parent-child interactions may not differ strongly from parents in racially homogenous circumstances. Socialization from parents is but one of several influences that craft the emergence of racial identity of a racially mixed adolescent. Peers, community, physical appearance, and experiences with discrimination also impact how a multiracial person views themselves and others. As such, the routines of parenting may overwhelm the importance of racial difference. Although parents in mixed race circumstances must navigate specific issues such as racial identity that are not raised in other families, this may not necessarily create a differential in time spent with their biological children.

RESEARCH AIMS

In order to address these issues we propose the following research questions. First we will describe racial differences in the degree of parental involvement across different types of racially mixed households. Second, we look at several types of racial mixture to distinguish between households that are mixed on the level of the couple as opposed to households that include persons mixed on the individual level. Finally, we examine the gendered pattern of parental involvement to see if mothers engage with racial difference differently than fathers.

DATA AND METHODS

Data set

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) is a nationally representative study of adolescents in grades 7 through 12 in the United States in 1995. Add Health was designed to help explain the causes of adolescent health and health behavior, with special emphasis on the effects of multiple contexts of adolescent life. The study used a multistage, stratified, school-based, cluster sampling design.[1] The school-based sample has a pair of schools (high school and junior high/middle school) in each of 80 communities. An in-school questionnaire was administered to every student present in each selected school on a particular day during the period of September 1994 to April 1995. In a second level of sampling adolescents and parents were selected for in-home interviews. A number of special oversamples were also selected for in-home interviews using screeners from the in-school questionnaires, with varying probabilities: physically disabled adolescents; black adolescents from highly educated families; several ethnic samples (Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Chinese adolescents); a genetic sample (identical and fraternal twins, full siblings, half siblings, and unrelated

[1] Udry and Chantala (2002) find that using a school-based sample does not significantly bias estimates of risk behaviors by missing school dropouts.

adolescents in the same household); and saturated samples in 14 schools. The in-home interviews were conducted between April and December 1995, yielding the Wave I data on 20,745 respondents. A resident parent, generally the mother, was also interviewed at Wave I. Harris et al. (2003) provide a detailed description of the Add Health study.

Because of the special ethnic oversamples, detailed race and ethnicity questions, and large sample size, Add Health is in a better position than most surveys to investigate racial and ethnic differences in parent-child relationships. Starting with the Wave I sample, we deleted cases that did not have valid sampling weights (n=1821), had no parent interview attached (n=2821), were not in two biological parent families (n=7685), and in which someone other than the biological mother or biological father completed the parental interview (n=91). Our final analytic sample includes 8,327 adolescents.[2] Although we include information on each parent and the mixed-race status of the parental couple, our unit of analysis is the adolescent respondent.

Measures

Race and Ethnicity Measures

Add Health asks adolescent respondents about their race and ethnicity at the at-home interview. Parental respondents are asked about their own race and ethnicity, and were asked to report on the race and ethnicity of their spouse or partner. The race and ethnicity questions follow the same general format across respondents. Respondents were first asked, "Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin?" They were then asked their race with the question, "What is your race? You may give more than one answer." Respondents were allowed to choose from at least one of the following categories: white, black or African American, American Indian or Native

[2] Missing values were imputed using the "impute" command in STATA [see StataCorp (2003) for more information].

American, Asian or Pacific Islander, or Other. Respondents who selected more than one race then were then asked to choose from the five categories described above with the question, "Which ONE category best describes your racial background?"[3] We separated the parental respondent questions and the spouse/partner questions by parental gender to determine whether they referred to the biological mother or biological father.

One contribution of this study is that we make a distinction between individual-level racial mixture and couple-level racial mixture. At the level of the parental couple, we coded as mixed-race any couple in which one parent reported a different race, or different Hispanic status, from the other parent. We also included all couples in which at least one parent was listed as multiracial, even if the other parent was also multiracial.[4] The couple-level indicator of mixed-race includes four categories:

1. Same-race couples (n=7439): couples in which both parents report the same single race.
2. Interracial couples (n=659): couples in which each parent has a single race that is different from the spouse or partner, as well as couples in which both parents are multiracial.
3. Racially-mixed mother (n=146): couples in which the mother is multiracial and the father is single race.
4. Racially-mixed father (n=83): couples in which the father is multiracial and the mother is single race.

At the individual-level, we coded as multiple race anyone (father, mother, or adolescent) who had more than one racial category selected (1=yes, 0=no). Finally, we created categorical

[3] Since parental respondents reported on the race and ethnicity of their spouse or partner, they were not asked to select a single race category that best described their spouse or partner.
[4] Our reasoning was that the multiracial parents are generally not the same combination of racial categories as the other multiracial parent, and so a difference in racial background should be noted. Additionally, the number of cases (n=29) were too small to include as a separate category.

race/ethnicity measures for the father, mother and adolescent, with the following categories: non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, non-Hispanic Asian, non-Hispanic Native American, non-Hispanic other or multiple races, and Hispanic (any race). This measure provides a distinction between the concepts of race and ethnicity by allowing respondents with different racial identifications to make a common ethnic designation as Hispanic. Those who selected multiple races but reported a single "best" race were assigned to that race/ethnicity category.[5] This allows us to make a distinction between those who think of themselves as having a single "best" racial designation, and those who refuse to select a race (other) or to select a single race (multiracial). Thus, each racial category can include some who selected only one race, and some who selected this race as the single "best" among multiple races reported.

Parent-Child Relationships

We include five types of indicators of the parent-child relationship that are specific to parental gender. The affective dimension is captured by measures of closeness to mother and closeness to father. The closeness measures are constructed from five items from the adolescent interview ("How close do you feel to your mother [father]," "How much do you think she [he] cares about you," "Most of the time your mother [father] is warm and loving to you," "You are satisfied with the way your mother [father] and you communicate with each other," "Overall, you are satisfied with your relationship with your mother [father]"). Responses range from 1 to 5 and are coded so higher values indicate a closer relationship or more agreement with the question.

We also include measures of the time parents and children spend together. Measures of activities with mother and activities with father are counts of whether the adolescent and each

[5] Because there is no single "best" race question referring to the spouse or partner, we were unable to reassign those who were reported as having more than one race to a single race category.

parent spent time in the past four weeks engaged in the following activities: gone shopping; played a sport; gone to a religious service or church-related event; gone to a movie, play, museum, concert, or sports event; and worked on a project for school. Scores range from 0 to 5. We also include a count of communication with mother and communication with father, which is a sum of four topics: talked about someone you're dating, or a party you went to, had a talk about a personal problem you were having, talked about your school work or grades, talked about other things you're doing in school. The variable ranges from 0 to 4. To target specific conversations about school topics, we created a measure of school communication with mother and school communication with father, based on two topics: talked about your school work or grades, talked about other things you're doing in school (range 0 to 2). We also include adolescent's reports of mother's educational aspirations and father's educational aspirations for the adolescent ("How disappointed would your mother [father] be if you did not graduate from college?"). Responses ranged from 1 = low disappointment, to 5 = high disappointment.

Finally, we include two measures that are not parent-specific. One is a measure of parental control. This is constructed from adolescent responses to seven yes-no items asking whether or not parents let respondents make their own decisions about weekend curfew, friends, what clothes to wear, how much TV to watch, which TV programs to watch, bedtime, and what to eat. Scores range from 0 to 7 and are reverse-coded, with higher scores representing more parental control. The last is a measure of social closure, which is an indicator of how aware parents are of their child's social relationships. Two yes/no items measure whether the parental respondent has met the child's best friend, and the best friend's parents. These two items are summed to create a scale that ranges from 0 to 2; higher scores indicate greater social closure.

Control Measures

We will include three categories of control variables. Demographic measures will include: adolescent's age, gender and immigrant status (first, second, or third generation), as well as parental respondent's gender, age at adolescent's birth, and marital status (married or cohabiting). Socioeconomic measures include parental education (less than high school, high school graduate, some college, college graduate), family income, and mother's work status (not employed, employed part time, employed full time). Finally, controls for adolescent characteristics include grade point average (average of grades from English/language arts, mathematics, history/social studies, and science), health status (average of 15 items of how often the adolescent experienced negative health problems), religious attendance ("In the past 12 months, how often did you attend religious services"), and religious importance ("How important is religion to you").

ANALYTIC PLAN

Our plan is to regress our measures of parent-child relationships on the mixed-race couple indicator. We then will add measures of race/ethnicity to determine if the effects of mixed-race couple are explained by individual race/ethnicity indicators, as well as the dichotomous indicator of whether an individual is multiracial. A decision will be made whether to include father's indicators, mother's indicators, or adolescent's indicators. This may depend on the dependent variable. For example, a model predicting closeness with father would include measures of father's race or ethnicity while a model predicting closeness with mother would include mother's information. Our goal is to determine whether mixed-race couples have different levels of father or mother involvement, and whether the specific racial/ethnic background of the parent or adolescent explains these differences.

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Table 1. Means of Measures of Parental Involvement by Racial Composition of Households (n= 8327)

	Racially homogenous households [1]		Racially Mixed households [2]		Interracial Couple [3]		Racially Mixed Mother [4]		Racially Mixed Father [5]	
	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers	Fathers
Closeness	4.48	4.33	4.43	4.25+	4.48	4.29	4.32	4.12	4.33	4.19
Activities	1.72	1.35	1.64	1.3	1.68	1.35	1.67	1.41	1.38	0.85
Communication	1.93	1.44	1.80+	1.31*	1.81	1.28	1.82	1.37	1.75	1.35
School Communication	1.14	1.01	1.07+	.90*	1.11	0.91	1.01	0.89	0.91	0.86
College Aspirations	4.02	4.06	3.93	3.97	3.94	3.97	3.98	4.04	3.81	3.88
Parental Control	1.91		2.09+		2.16		1.94		1.93	
Social Closure	1.81		1.71**		1.66		1.79		1.85	
N	7439		888		659		146		83	

Source: Add Health Survey, Wave 1

Note: t-tests are conducted to test for +p<.10 *p<.05 **p<.01

[1] Parents race-ethnic identities are matching and both parents identify as a single race.

[2] Column represents a combination of responsdents in "interracial couples", "Racially mixed Mother", and "Racially Mixed Father"

[3] Includes couples who are both single race but report different races, and couples who are both multiple race.

[4] Father is single race

[5] Mother is single race

Table 2. Frequencies of Father's Race by Racial Composition of Households (n= 8327)

Father's Race	Same-race couples [1]	Interracial Couple [2]	Racially Mixed Mother [3]	Racially Mixed Father [4]
White non-Hispanic	4985	166	79	2
Black non-Hispanic	990	64	23	0
Asian non-Hispanic	521	49	12	0
Native Am. non-Hispanic	14	12	2	1
Other/ Multiracial non-Hispanic	16	49	3	57
Hispanic (any race)	913	319	27	23
N	7439	659	146	83

Source: Add Health Survey, Wave 1

[1] Parents race-ethnic identities are matching and both parents identify as a single race.

[2] Includes couples who are both single race but report different races, and couples who are both multiple race.

[3] Father is single race

[4] Mother is single race

Table 3. Frequencies of Mother's Race by Racial Composition of Households (n= 8327)

Mother's Race	Same-race couples [1]	Interracial Couple [2]	Racially Mixed Mother [3]	Racially Mixed Father [4]
White non-Hispanic	4985	204	64	49
Black non-Hispanic	990	25	19	5
Asian non-Hispanic	521	66	5	12
Native Am. non-Hispanic	14	24	6	1
Other/ Multiracial non-Hispanic	16	16	20	0
Hispanic (any race)	913	324	32	16
N	7439	659	146	83

Source: Add Health Survey, Wave 1

[1] Parents race-ethnic identities are matching and both parents identify as a single race.

[2] Includes couples who are both single race but report different races, and couples who are both multiple race.

[3] Father is single race

[4] Mother is single race

Table 4. Frequencies of Adolescent's Race by Racial Composition of Households (n= 8327)

Adolescent's Race	Same-race couples [1]	Interracial Couple [2]	Racially Mixed Mother [3]	Racially Mixed Father [4]
White non-Hispanic	4935	113	63	49
Black non-Hispanic	985	52	23	5
Asian non-Hispanic	503	49	12	8
Native Am. non-Hispanic	27	15	7	0
Other/ Multiracial non-Hispanic	49	29	6	1
Hispanic (any race)	940	401	35	20
N	7439	659	146	83

Source: Add Health Survey, Wave 1

[1] Parents race-ethnic identities are matching and both parents identify as a single race.

[2] Includes couples who are both single race but report different races, and couples who are both multiple race.

[3] Father is single race

[4] Mother is single race