Racial Variation in Self-Labeled Child Abuse and Associated Internalizing Symptoms Among Adolescents Who Are High Risk

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One thousand and ten Non-Hispanic White, African American, Hispanic, and Asian Pacific Islander youth who were high risk and receiving public sector services were interviewed regarding history of child emotional and physical abuse and current internalizing symptoms. The study examined whether race moderated the association between adolescents' reports of specific parent behaviors and their self-labeling as victims of abuse. *The study also examined whether reports of parental behaviors or self-labeled abuse better predicted internalizing symptoms, and whether these associations differed by race. When reporting punitive parent behavior, Non-Hispanic White youth were more likely to describe themselves as abused compared to Asian Pacific Islanders. Reported punitive parental behaviors accounted for more variance in internalizing symptoms than did self-labeled abuse. Reports of parent behaviors were more strongly related to concurrent internalizing symptoms among ethnic minority youth than among Non-Hispanic White youth. Results are discussed in the context of cultural competence in identification of child abuse.*

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RACIAL AND/OR ETHNIC VARIATION IN ADOLESCENTS' SELF-IDENTIFICATION OF CHILD ABUSE AND ASSOCIATED DISTRESS

The task of defining *child maltreatment* has long been a vexing problem in child welfare practice, policy, and research (e.g., Barnett, Manly, & Cicchetti, 1993; Zigler & Hall, 1989). This problem becomes all the more complex in an increasingly diverse and pluralistic society, where tension exists in distinguishing culturally normative parenting practices from child maltreatment requiring intervention (Fontes, 2002; Terao, Borrego, & Urquiza, 2001). Some research has suggested that punitive parental discipline strategies may be more common among samples of ethnic minority families[1] compared to Whites (e.g., Ferrari, 2002; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus, Hamby, Finkelhor, Moore, & Runyan, 1998). However, the field has received little guidance on how to understand the implications of such group differences for child pro-

tection. Korbin (1994) observed that "culturally competent definitions of maltreatment must avoid both ethnocentrism and extreme relativism" (p. 186). Ethnocentric models assume the superiority of certain parenting practices, while imposing a single standard across all cultural contexts. A wholly relativistic view regards any culturally grounded parenting practice as adaptive for children. Few professionals would advocate a wholly ethnocentric standard. Adopting a highly relativistic approach seems to run the risk of minimizing actual maltreatment when it is assumed that a parenting practice is culturally normative and thus benign or even appropriate (Abney, 1996; Terao et al., 2001). Maiter, Alaggia, and Trocmé (2004) decried tacit assumptions that abusive parental behavior may be more normative among ethnic minorities and articulated the need for research to evaluate assumptions about cultural groups sanctioning harsh treatment of children.

Culturally competent definitions of *maltreatment* may be guided, in part, by empirical studies assaying the subjective experiences of youth from diverse backgrounds. A beginning point may be the examination of racial variability in the experiences of youth. Guidance is necessary to determine how best to take racial diversity into account in the determination of abuse (Terao et al., 2001), particularly in light of literature that suggests racial and ethnic differences in parenting practices.

Racial Differences in Parenting Practices

Some research indicates that ethnic minority parents including African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Asian Pacific Islanders acknowledge more physically punitive acts toward their children than Whites (Ferrari, 2002; Straus & Gelles, 1990; Straus et al., 1998) and endorse greater acceptance and use of corporal punishment in child rearing (Chen et al., 1998; Corral-Verdugo, Frias-Armenta, Romero, & Munoz, 1995; Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1996; Ferrari, 2002; Hong & Hong, 1991; Jambunathan, Burts, & Pierce, 2000; Kelley & Tseng, 1992; Pinderhughes, Dodge, Bates, Pettit, & Zelli, 2000). In addition, there has been speculation that ethnic minority parents may be more likely to engage in child-rearing practices that are emotionally punitive. However, a national survey found no racial differences in rates of parental behaviors considered psychologically aggressive, including yelling, shouting, threatening, name calling (Straus & Field, 2003). Other research has indicated that verbal and emotional tactics including criticism, scolding, shaming, and hostile control have been found to be more widely used among African American, Hispanic American and Asian American parents compared to non-Hispanic White parents (Ferrari, 2002; Hill, Bush, & Roosa, 2003; Lin & Fu, 1990; Meston, Heiman, Trapnell, & Carlin, 1999).

Although some data has suggested greater use of socialization practices that emphasize physical and emotional control in families of color, it is important to refrain from adopting a deficit perspective of ethnic minority parenting. Baumrind (1997) argued that the meaning of *parental discipline strategies* can vary by culture, with harsh physical discipline being associated with positive parental attributes in minority groups. Among African American families, firm parental control involving physical restraint and punishment occurs in the context of an affectively warm parent-child relationship promoting social competence and self-regulation (Brody & Flor, 1998). Likewise, firm parental control in Asian American groups is coupled with warmth and closeness (Chao, 1994), rather than dominance or hostility (Stewart et al., 1998). Similarly, parenting in Hispanic American groups emphasizes *respeto* to foster proper child demeanor (Harwood, Miller, & Irizarry, 1995), and physical control is tied to sensitivity (Carlson & Harwood, 2003). Studies relying on ethnocentric definitions of *parenting* emerging from decades of research on White majority families may not capture experiences of families of color. From a social information–processing perspective, ethnic minority youth raised in culturally distinct familial contexts may view these parental behaviors differently than majority group youth.

Because there may be different cultural meanings of parental discipline across groups, some have also argued that the developmental outcomes of so-called harsh parenting may also differ across groups. For example, although some studies have supported the connection between corporal punishment and child maladjustment in African American families (e.g., Barnett, Kidwell, & Leung, 1998; McCabe, Clark, & Barnett, 1999), other longitudinal studies have indicated that harsh physical discipline is associated with child behavior problems among White families but not among African American families (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997; Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997; Lansford, Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 2004; McLeod, Kruttschnitt, & Dornfeld, 1994; Spieker, Larson, Lewis, Keller, & Gilchrist, 1999). These longitudinal data have cast doubt on the notion that physical punishment causes behavior problems in minority families (Gershoff, 2002; Whaley, 2000).

The field is increasingly attending to the need to take a more culturally informed view of parenting

behaviors and their consequences across diverse populations (e.g., Stewart & Bond, 2002). There is growing acceptance of the notion that the effects of parenting behaviors depend, in large part, on the interpersonal, social, and cultural system of meanings in which parenting occurs. Because parenting styles involving physical and emotional disciplinary practices may differ across cultural groups, it is conceivable that judgments about the abusive nature of parental actions could vary by group (Meston et al., 1999).

Racial Differences in Perceptions of Abuse

Consistent with this idea, some investigators have used vignette studies to determine whether racial background influences whether respondents deem certain parental actions as abusive (Ferrari, 2002; Giovannoni & Becerra, 1979; Hong & Hong, 1991). Findings of racial differences in severity of abuse judgments have been largely negative. In a representative community sample, Giovannoni and Becerra (1979) reported that Hispanics and Blacks judged maltreatment vignettes more seriously than non-Hispanic Whites. Similarly, other investigators have reported that ethnic minority parents perceive some forms of child neglect as more serious than do their White counterparts (Dubowitz, Klockner, Starr, & Black, 1998; Rose & Meezan, 1996). Yet Hong and Hong (1991) found that Chinese Americans displayed increased tolerance for physical beating as a disciplinary strategy compared to Whites and Hispanics. Ferrari (2002) found that neither race nor cultural values was systematically associated with parents' ratings of the seriousness of maltreatment vignettes. Yet race was related to parents' self-reported use of physically and emotionally abusive child-rearing tactics, with Hispanic and African American parents endorsing greater use than non-Hispanic White parents. These findings suggest that attitudes captured in vignette studies may tell us little about actual parental behavior. In fact, parents who have problems refraining from certain behaviors may actually express more intense values admonishing those actions (Garbarino & Ebata, 1983).

Little research has examined the extent to which youth perceptions of parenting vary by racial background. In the only published report on this topic, Meston et al. (1999) examined whether race influenced self-perceptions of abuse among college students of European and Asian descent. Given the greater emphasis on firm physical discipline in Asian cultures, they hypothesized that students of Asian ancestry would be more likely to have experienced specific physically punitive acts but would be less likely to label themselves as *having been abused*. Findings revealed that Asians indeed reported more physical and emotional abusive acts; however, contrary to expectations, they were also more likely to label themselves as *having been abused* compared to students of European ancestry. Meston et al. (1999) concluded that even though punitive acts are routine in parenting among some cultural groups, youngsters may nonetheless perceive these acts as abusive.

In sum, there is some evidence that physically and emotionally punitive parenting practices may be more normative and more likely to be paired with positive relationship qualities among ethnic minority families. There is some emerging evidence that behavior problems associated with harsh discipline may differ by race. However, there is little indication of racial differences in the judgments about the abusive nature of harsh parenting. An important next step is to determine how youth from diverse backgrounds subjectively experience punitive parenting practices—whether they similarly self-label their experiences as *abusive*, and whether they similarly experience symptoms of distress as a result. This research has significant implications for definitional issues in child abuse.

Current Study

In a high-risk sample, we examined two questions to help guide the consideration of racial[2] differences in parenting practices that may be regarded by some to be abusive. First, do youngsters across racial groups similarly experience, perceive, and label parental actions as *abusive*? Second, is there racial variation in child emotional distress associated with these parental behaviors and the self-labeling of *abuse*? We attempted to focus on emotionally and physically punitive parental actions that may be definitionally ambiguous, as not clearly injurious but also not clearly acceptable by consensus. It is in this "grey area" where guidance is most needed to determine how best to take racial and/or ethnic diversity into account (Terao et al., 2001). A more relativistic approach to *maltreatment* definition would be supported by evidence that a youngster's racial background strongly influences the extent to which she or he perceives harsh parental treatment to be abusive and the extent to which this treatment is associated with distress.

Therefore, we tested the hypothesis that minority youth who were high risk would be less likely to subjectively identify themselves as being victims of physical or emotional abuse given the same exposure to harsh parental behaviors compared to majority group youth. We evaluated this hypothesis among youth in contact with public sector services, a high-risk sample

permitting the examination of families that are arguably most vulnerable to relationship problems and associated distress. Thus, we examined whether race moderated the association between adolescents' reports of specific parental behaviors and their self-labeling as *victims of abuse*.

We also tested the hypothesis that among youth from diverse backgrounds, the self-labeling of *abuse victimization* may be important in understanding associated distress over and above the experience of specific forms of harsh parental behavior. From a social information–processing perspective, the youngster's interpretation of parental actions as mistreatment is likely to be more closely tied to affective responses than actions that are not so labeled. Some previous findings suggest that the specific childhood experiences are associated with greater depression when the individual labels those experiences as *abusive* (Carlin et al., 1994). Given our interest in subjective distress, we chose to examine internalizing problems as our criterion variable of distress. In general, emotional and physical maltreatment are frequently associated with internalizing symptoms, such as depression and anxiety (Kaplan, Pelcovitz, & Labruna, 1999). Although externalizing behaviors are more disconcerting to parents, adolescents report that internalizing symptoms are the source of greater personal distress (Phares & Compas, 1990). Therefore, we examined the relative impact of self-labeled abuse and reports of specific parental behaviors on youth-reported internalizing symptoms. Furthermore, we explored whether the associations between reports of parental behavior, self-labeled abuse, and youth internalizing distress were moderated by race.

Arguments for adopting a more relativistic perspective on the definition of *abuse* would be bolstered by findings that race influenced (a) the labeling of specific parental behaviors as *abusive* or (b) the symptomatic distress associated with reports of parental behavior and self-labeled abuse. Findings of this type would have significant potential to inform social service practice, including treatment and intervention efforts for youth and families from diverse cultural heritages and racial backgrounds.

METHOD

The Patterns of Care Study (POC)

The POC study surveyed a representative sample (N = 1715) of youth aged 6 to 17 years who were active in one or more public sectors of care in San Diego County (alcohol and/or drug treatment, child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, and public school services for youth with serious emotional disturbance [SED]) during the second half of fiscal year 1996-1997. In juvenile justice, only delinquents who were adjudicated were included, and in child welfare, only dependents who were court ordered were included. The final sample of 1,715 youth was selected by simple random sampling techniques and was stratified by race and level of restrictiveness of placement. A poststratification weighting procedure (Henry, 1990) was used to ensure that the data reflect the characteristics of the total population of service users. Garland et al. (2001) provide a full description of the sampling process and results.

Sample

Youth from the POC sample were included in the current study if they met inclusion criteria for age, race, and completion of the study measures. Therefore, 1,275 of the 1,715 were adolescents in the age range of interest. Of these, 1,160 were members of the four racial groups of interest. One hundred and fifty were excluded because of missing youth self-report data (12.9% of eligible youth). Analyses suggested that nonresponse on the measures of interest was not associated with race, gender, family income, or the type of service sector involvement. However, youth nonresponders were older (mean age nonresponders = 15.9 years vs. mean age responders = 15.6 years; $F[1, 1159] = 5.44$, $p = .02$).

The 1,010 youth participants in the current study included 39.9% non-Hispanic Whites (NHW; n = 403), 19.5% African Americans (n = 197), 31.6% Hispanic (n = 319), and 9.1% Asian Pacific Islanders (API; n = 91). Among the API group, youth-reported ethnicity indicated that the sample comprised 15.4% Pacific Islander (n = 14), 8.8% East Asian (2 Chinese, 3 Japanese, 3 Korean), 38.5% Filipino (n = 35), 36.3% South East Asian (15 Cambodian, 7 Laotian, 11 Vietnamese). More-specific information on ethnicity was available from parent reports in 77% of the Hispanic families (n = 244); of these 93.9% indicated Mexican descent (n = 229), 2.0% indicated Puerto Rican descent (n = 5), 4.1% specified Other Hispanic (n = 10). According to parent and youth report, 13.8% of the Hispanic youth and 44.0% of API youth were immigrants born outside the United States (n = 44 and 40, respectively). The mean age of youth in the sample was 15.6 years. The sample comprised 69.2% males (n = 699) and 30.8% females (n = 311). The parent-reported median household income for the sample at large was between U.S. $19,000 and $19,999 per year.

Procedures

Interviews were completed between September 1997 and February 1999. Adolescents reported on their emotional and/or behavioral problems, parenting behaviors and support in the last year, and maltreatment history. All measures used in the current study were interviewer administered. Youth were paid between $10.00 and $40.00 (depending on age) for their participation.

Measures

Demographic variables. Demographic variables including age, gender, family income, and race were obtained in face-to-face interviews with youth and in separate interviews with adult caregivers.

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, Short Form (CTQ; Bernstein & Fink, 1998). The CTQ was administered to elicit retrospective youth self-report of maltreatment history. The CTQ short form used here differed slightly from the published instrument, as the final version was not yet available at the time of data collection. This scale included 34 items assessing different types of child maltreatment. Youth responded with a 5-point Likert-type scale indicating that the statement was *never true* to *very often true* when they were growing up. The CTQ yields scales for physical abuse, physical neglect, emotional abuse, emotional neglect, sexual abuse, and total maltreatment. In the current study, we assessed subjective self-identification of abuse with the single items "I believe that I was physically abused" from the Physical Abuse scale, and "I believe that I was emotionally abused" from the emotional abuse scale. These variables are, hereafter, referred to as self-labeled emotional abuse (EA), and self-labeled physical abuse (PA), respectively.

Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale (CTSPC; Straus et al., 1998). The CTSPC was administered to assess parental physically punitive behaviors in the past year. The nine items from the CTSPC Minor and Severe Assault scales were used as an indicator of youth-reported harsh physical discipline (e.g., slapped me on the face, head, or ears). The internal consistency of this composite was adequate overall (alpha = .85), with little variability across racial groups (ranging from .91 for APIs to .83 for NHWs). This scale is, hereafter, referred to as youth report of physical parental behavior.

Mother/Father Support (Use, Needs, Outcomes, and Costs in Child and Adolescent Populations [UNOCCAP] Workgroup, 1996). The Mother/Father Support questionnaire is a 10-item measure developed by the UNOCCAP Workgroup to assess youth perceptions of parental behaviors (UNOCCAP Work Group, 1996). In the current study, we used the six items tapping emotionally punitive maternal and paternal behaviors from (e.g., How often did your mom and/or dad shout or yell at you because she or he was mad at you?). Youth indicated the frequency with which their mother and father displayed each behavior by responding on a 7-point scale where 1 = *never* and 7 = *always*. The internal consistency of this scale was adequate (mother alpha = .83, father alpha = .89), and varied little across racial and/or ethnic groups (ranging from .81 to .90). To arrive at a single summary score indicating level of emotionally punitive parenting behavior, we used the highest of the two scores where mother and father behavior was rated, or the single score when only report of mother or father was available (single-parent families). This scale is, hereafter, referred to as youth report of emotional parental behavior.

Youth Self-Report (YSR; Achenbach & Edelbrock, 1991). The widely used YSR was administered to indicate youth emotional and behavioral distress. Adolescents indicated the degree to which each of the 113 items described them now or within the past 6 months. Youth responded on a 3-point scale, with 0 indicating *not true*, to 2 indicating *very true or often true*. In the current study, the internalizing broadband scale score was used as an indicator of emotional distress. These problems include symptoms of depression, anxiety, social withdrawal, and somatic complaints. The internal consistency of this scale was good (alpha = .91), with little racial variability (ranging from .91 to .93).

RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

We are addressing the question of racial differences in perceptions of abuse among youth sampled from public sector agencies where race may covary with the likelihood of receipt of certain health and human services. For example, compared to NHW youth, minority youth are more likely to be involved in coercive sectors such as juvenile justice and child welfare (e.g., McCabe, Yeh, et al., 1999) and are less likely to receive mental health services given the same level of need as NHW youth (e.g., Garland et al., 2005). Preliminary analyses were undertaken to examine potential racial differences in demographic variables, reports of parent behavior, and self-labeled abuse in the current sample.

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 indicate that there were racial differences in family-income level with NHW youth having higher median income than

TABLE 1: Sample Characteristics by Race

	Race				
	Non-Hispanic White (n = *403*)	*African American* (n = *197*)	*Hispanic American* (n = *319*)	*Asian Pacific Islander* (n = *91*)	F*(3, 1007) or* χ^2*(3)*
Demographics					
Mean age (*SD*)	15.4 (1.8)	15.3 (1.8)	15.8 (1.7)	16.2 (1.6)	9.04***
Gender (% male)	66.1	67.5	65.0	74.5	3.35
Family income (median)	$25-35K	$18-19K	$14-15K	$17-18K	16.26***
Service sector involvement					
ADM[a] (%)	78.0	69.7	65.9	62.7	16.87**
Parent behavior reports					
Emotional mean score[b] (*SD*)	2.76 (1.3)	2.67 (1.5)	2.70 (1.3)	2.92 (1.3)	.902
Any minor assault[c] (%)	90.1	80.3	88.9	85.1	13.86**
Any severe assault[c] (%)	58.8	48.3	61.1	63.4	11.46**
Self-labeled abuse					
Emotional abuse[d] (%)	32.9	22.2	25.3	29.4	9.85*
Physical abuse[d] (%)	24.8	19.7	22.7	24.5	2.35

NOTE: ADM = alcohol drug and mental health SED = serious emotional disturbance; CTSPC = Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scale; CTQ = Childhood Trauma Questionnaire, Short Form.

a. In service sector affiliation, ADM includes any youth recruited from alcohol-drug treatment, mental health or school-based SED service sectors.

b. Emotional parent behavior reported by youth on a 1 to 7 Likert-type scale.

c. Endorsement of the past year occurrence of any CTSPC item on minor or severe physical assault scales.

d. Dichotomized responses on the CTQ contrasting response of *never true* to responses of *rarely true, sometimes true, often true,* or *very often true* in response to self-labeling item "I believe I was physically/emotionally abused."

*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

the minority youth. NHW youth were more likely than minority youth to be involved in sectors providing mental health–focused services (alcohol drug, mental health, and special education for SED)—the ADM sectors, as opposed to the coercive services of juvenile justice and child welfare. There were no significant racial differences in youth ratings of emotional parent behaviors; however, NHWs more often self-labeled as *emotionally abused* compared to African American and Hispanic youth. There were significant but inconsistent racial differences in the endorsement of physical parental behaviors on the CTSPC (depending on whether minor or severe assault was examined). However, there were no significant racial differences in self-labeled physical abuse. On the whole, these rates support the idea that youth in this public service sector sample represents a population at high risk for maltreatment, with past year reports of severe assault ranging from 48.3% among African Americans to 63.4% among API youth. These estimates may be contrasted with past year severe assault rates ranging from 5% to 15% by parent report (Straus & Hamby, 1997; Straus et al., 1998) and 5% by youth report (Finkelhor & Dzuiba-Leatherman, 1994) in nationally representative samples.

We also conducted preliminary bivariate analysis to explore the associations between parental behaviors and self-labeling of abuse experiences by racial group. Table 2 includes these correlations, which are differentiated by minor and severe assault subscales of the CTSPC. Bivariate findings were suggestive of some racial differences in the magnitude of the association between the indices of punitive parental behaviors and perceived abuse. For example, minor assault is not significantly correlated with self-labeled physical abuse among API and African American youth. Next, we statistically tested for racial moderation in multivariate analyses.

Racial Moderation of the Association Between Youth Reports of Parent Behaviors and Subjective Identification of Abuse

We conducted multiple regression analyses to predict adolescents' self-labeled abuse victimization. Two separate models were run to examine predictors of self-labeled EA and PA. In each model, we included the demographic control variables: age, gender, and family-income level. In terms of variables of interest, we included three dummy variables contrasting each minority group with the NHW reference group. In addition, we entered the respondents' reports of parent behaviors and the interaction terms between the race dummy variables and reports of parent behaviors.

Table 3 presents the results of each model. Older adolescents (beta = .08, $p < .05$), females (beta = .18,

TABLE 2: Bivariate Correlations of Parent Behavior Variables and Self-Labeled Abuse by Race

	Non-Hispanic White (n = *403*)		*African American* (n = *197*)		*Hispanic American* (n = *319*)		*Asian Pacific Islander* (n = *91*)	
	Self-Labeled EA	*Self-Labeled PA*	*Self-Labeled EA*	*Self-Labeled PA*	*Self-Labeled EA*	*Self-Labeled PA*	*Self-Labeled EA*	*Self-Labeled PA*
Emotional parent behavior	.33***	.17**	.22***	.19**	.27***	.23***	.20	.19
Minor physical parent behavior	.22***	.23***	.08	.16*	.24***	.33***	.19	.14
Severe physical parent behavior	.38***	.45***	.41***	.53***	.37***	.49***	.36***	.29**

NOTE: EA = emotional abuse; PA = physical abuse.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

TABLE 3: Regression Predicting Self-Labeled Abuse From Reports of Parent Behaviors

	Self-Labeled PA Regressed on Physical Parent Behaviors			*Self-Labeled EA Regressed on Emotional Parent Behaviors*		
Variable	b	SE b	β	b	SE b	β
Youth's age	.04	.02	.08*	.05	.02	.08*
Youth's gender[a]	.42	.07	.18***	.62	.08	.26***
Total household income	–.01	.01	–.07*	–.01	.00	–.08*
African American[b]	–.07	.12	–.03	.07	.21	.03
Hispanic American [b]	–.16	.11	–.07	.03	.19	.03
Asian Pacific Islander[b]	.03	.16	.01	.26	.31	.07
Reports of Parent Behavior	.88	.11	.47***	.06	.01	.42***
African American × Parent Behavior	–.009	.16	–.003	–.02	.01	–.13
Hispanic American × Parent Behavior	–.08	.15	–.03	–.02	.01	–.16+
Asian and Pacific Islander × Parent Behavior	.56	.18	–.15**	–.03	.02	–.17*
Adjusted R^2 = .23						
Adjusted R^2 = .19						

NOTE: PA = physical abuse; EA = emotional abuse.
a. Male = 1, female = 2.
b. Reference group = non-Hispanic White.
+$p < .08$, *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$. (two-tailed)

$p < .001$), and youth from families with lower income (beta = –.07, $p < .05$), were more likely to self-label as *victims of physical abuse*. Race was not associated with self-labeled PA. As would be expected, respondents' ratings of physical parent behaviors scores were related to self-labeled PA (beta = .47, $p < .001$). However, there was a significant interaction between API race and physical parent behaviors in predicting self-labeled PA. As illustrated in Figure 1a, the association between physical parent behaviors and self-labeled PA were more strongly related in NHWs compared to APIs (beta = –.15, $p < .01$). The strength of the association did not differ for African Americans and Hispanic Americans compared to NHWs.

Youth self-labeled EA scores were higher among older adolescents (beta = .08, $p < .05$), females (beta = .16, $p < .001$), and youth with lower family incomes (beta = –.08, $p < .05$). Overall, there was a strong association between emotional parent behaviors and self-labeled EA (beta = .42, $p < .001$). However, this association was moderated by race. There was a significant interaction between API race and emotional parent behaviors (beta = –.17, $p < .05$) in predicting self-labeled EA (see Figure 1b). The interaction between Hispanic race and emotional parent behaviors was marginally significant (beta = –.16, $p < .08$). There appeared to be a stronger relationship indicated by the steeper slope in the regression line for the NHW group than for the API group.

Relative Impact of Youth Reports of Parental Behaviors and Subjective Identification of Abuse on Youth-Reported Internalizing Symptoms

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were also conducted to determine the relative contribution of youth reports of parental behaviors and self-labeled abuse on youth internalizing problems. In the first step of the model, control demographic variables of age, gender, and family income were entered. Race dummy variables were entered in the second step. Youth reports of parental behaviors (i.e., emotional or physical) were entered in the third step. In the final step of the model, self-labeled abuse (i.e., EA or PA) was entered. Separate models were conducted with the physical abuse scores and the emotional abuse scores.

Results of the regression for physical abuse–related variables are summarized in Table 4a. Internalizing problems were higher among female adolescents (beta = .12, $p < .001$), and among respondents with higher physical parent behavior scores (beta = .32, $p < .001$). However, the addition of self-labeled PA in the second step of the model did not contribute to predic-

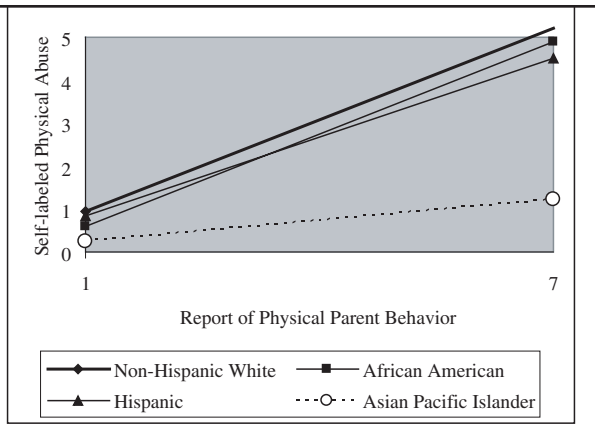

FIGURE 1a: Self-Labeled Physical Abuse as a Function of Race and Report of Physical Parental Behavior

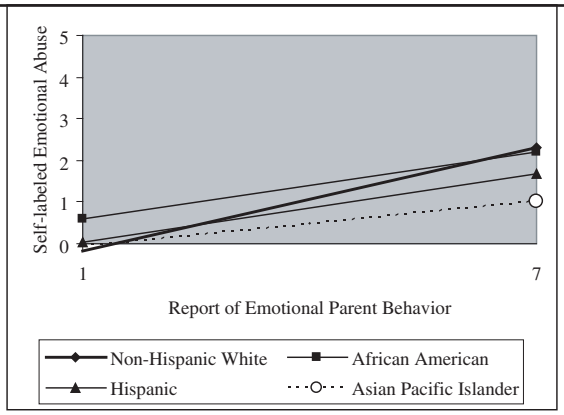

FIGURE 1b: Self-Labeled Emotional Abuse as a Function of Race and Report of Emotional Parental Behavior

tion of internalizing problems beyond the variables previously entered. The same pattern of results held in the model with the emotional abuse–relevant items (see Table 4b). Female gender (beta = .12, $p < .001$), API race (beta = .08, $p < .05$), and emotional parent behaviors (beta = .33, $p < .001$) were associated with internalizing behavior problems. However, the addition of self-labeled EA did not contribute to prediction of internalizing symptoms.

To confirm that the variance in internalizing symptoms was indeed best explained by the unique contribution of the reports of parent behavior, we carried out a parallel hierarchical regression analysis, but with the order of entry of reports of parental behaviors and self-labeled abuse reversed. We evaluated the change in R^2, and the pattern of results suggested that self-labeled abuse was related to internalizing problems prior to the entry of youth reports of parental

TABLE 4a: Predicting Internalizing Symptoms From Self-Labeled Physical Abuse and Reports of Physical Parent Behavior

	Step 1			*Step 2*		
Variable	b	SE b	β	b	SE b	β
Youth's age	.30	.22	.04	.29	.22	.04
Youth's gender[a]	3.21	.88	.12***	3.20	.90	.12***
Total household income	.02	.06	.01	.02	.06	.01
African-American[b]	–.03	1.10	–.001	–.03	1.10	–.001
Hispanic American[b]	1.96	.98	–.08	–1.96	.98	–.08
Asian Pacific Islander[b]	2.17	1.51	.05	2.18	1.52	.05
Physical parent behavior	6.84	.70	.32***	6.82	.77	.32***
Self-labeled physical abuse				.02	.42	.002
Adjusted R^2 = .13						
Adjusted R^2 = .13						

NOTE: a. Male = 1, female = 2.
b. Reference group = Non-Hispanic White.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

TABLE 4b: Predicting Internalizing Symptoms From Self-Labeled Emotional Abuse and Reports of Emotional Parent Behavior

	Step 1			*Step 2*		
Variable	b	SE b	β	b	SE b	β
Youth's age	.03	.22	.004	.001	.22	.00
Youth's gender[a]	2.03	.89	.08*	1.81	.91	.07*
Total household income	.02	.06	.01	.02	.06	.01
African American[b]	.96	1.10	.03	1.01	1.10	.03
Hispanic American[b]	–.94	.98	–.04	–.84	.98	–.03
Asian Pacific Islander[b]	3.43	1.50	.08*	3.52	1.49	.08*
Emotional parent behavior	1.50	.15	.33***	1.36	.19	.30***
Self-labeled emotional abuse				.59	.48	.05
Adjusted R^2 = .16						
Adjusted R^2 = .17						

NOTE: a. Male = 1, female = 2.
b. Reference group = non-Hispanic White.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

behavior but did not account for unique variance over and above that of youth reports of parental behavior in predicting internalizing symptoms. For example, the entry of emotional parent behaviors yielded an ΔR^2 of .11 in internalizing problems; however, there was no incremental variance explained by the addition of self-labeled EA. When self-labeled EA was entered first, ΔR^2 associated with that step of the model was .04. When emotional parent behavior was

added, there was an incremental gain of $\Delta R^2 = .07$, and the regression coefficient for self-labeled EA was no longer significant.

Racial Moderation of the Association Between Reports of Parental Behaviors and Distress

Because the previous analyses showed that self-labeled abuse was not significantly related to internalizing distress above and beyond reports of parenting behavior, we proceeded with an examination of whether race moderated the parent behavior–internalizing distress association. Two additional regression models were conducted to examine whether the abuse-related variables were differentially associated with internalizing symptoms across racial lines. In each model, the dependent variable was youth report of internalizing symptoms. Predictors in the model included demographic control variables (age, gender, family income), race, reports of parent behaviors (emotional or physical), and the interaction term for race by the reports of parent behaviors.

Results, summarized in Table 5, indicated significant race × reported parent behavior interactions in both models. The significant interactions are discussed here. Results indicated that there was a different relationship between physical parent behaviors and youth internalizing problems for African American (beta = .14, $p < .05$), and Hispanic American youth (beta = .14, $p < .05$) compared to NHW youth. This interaction, shown in Figure 2a, suggested that there was a stronger association between physical parent behaviors and internalizing symptoms among these two minority groups compared to NHWs. Similar interactions were noted for emotional parent behaviors. Figure 2b illustrates that there was a stronger positive association between emotional parent behaviors and internalizing symptoms among Hispanic-Americans (beta = .20, $p < .05$), and APIs (beta = .27, $p < .01$) compared to NHWs.

TABLE 5: Regression Predicting Internalizing Symptoms From Reports of Parent Behaviors

	Internalizing Problems Regressed on Physical Parent Behavior			*Internalizing Problems Regressed on Emotional Parent Behavior*		
Variable	b	SE b	β	b	SE b	β
Youth's age	.37	.22	.06	.08	.22	.01
Youth's gender[a]	3.14	.87	.12***	3.72	.87	.14***
Total household income	.02	.06	.01	–.03	.06	–.02
African American[b]	–2.39	1.50	–.08	.09	2.45	.00
Hispanic American[b]	–4.15	1.38	–.16**	–6.34	2.24	–.25**
Asian Pacific Islander[b]	2.11	2.07	.05	–8.63	3.51	–.20*
Parent behavior	4.20	1.37	.20**	.43	.09	.28***
African American × Parent behavior	4.53	1.94	.14*	–.01	.13	–.01
Hispanic American × Parent behavior	4.13	1.81	.14*	.28	.12	.20*
Asian Pacific Islander × Parent behavior	.71	2.23	.02	.58	.18	.27**
Adjusted $R^2 = .14$						
Adjusted $R^2 = .17$						

NOTE: a. Male = 1, female = 2.
b. Reference group = non-Hispanic White.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

It is of pragmatic and theoretical interest to understand whether youth from diverse racial backgrounds similarly classify *harsh parental actions* as forms of maltreatment. Findings of the current study provided some support for the notion that factors associated with race organize youth perceptions of parental behaviors. Physically and emotionally punitive parental acts may be less readily perceived as abusive by youth from certain racial groups. Our results indicate that relative to NHWs, API youth may be less likely to label emotionally and physically punitive parental behaviors as *abusive*. This is consistent with previous literature indicating that physically punitive parental behaviors may be more normative among Asian families and may thus be perceived in a different light by these youth. Alternately, API youth may be less willing to criticize their parents' actions by labeling their experiences as *abuse* because such an action may bring shame and loss of face to the entire family (Cheung, Lee, & Chan, 1994). However, we saw no differential association between punitive parent practices and perceptions of emotional and physical abuse among NHWs, Hispanics, and African Americans.

Furthermore, our findings called into question the importance of racial differences in self-labeled abuse when it comes to predicting symptoms of distress in adolescents. Contrary to our hypothesis, the degree to which adolescents' labeled parental acts as *abusive* did not contribute to the prediction of internalizing symptoms over and above youth reports of specific parental behaviors. These results diverge from those of Carlin et al. (1994) who found that women's self-

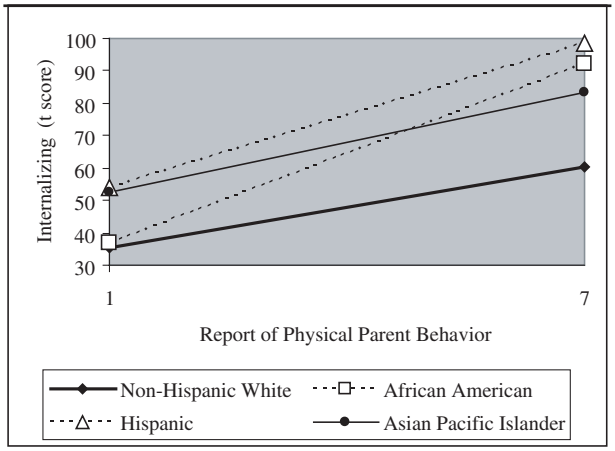

FIGURE 2a: Youth-Reported Internalizing Problems as a Function of Race and Report of Physical Parental Behavior

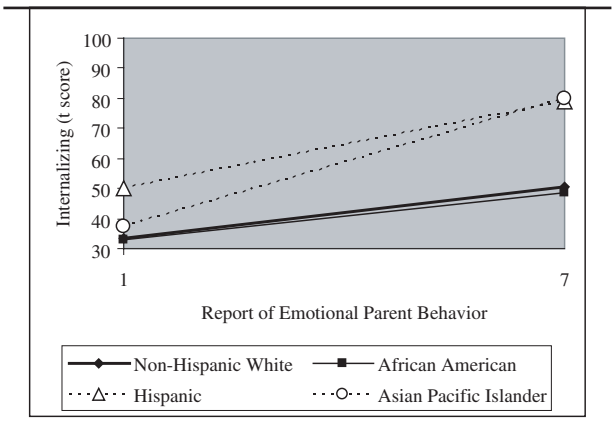

FIGURE 2b: Youth-Reported Internalizing Problems as a Function of Race and Report of Emotional Parental Behavior

labeled physical abuse was associated with more depression than were retrospective reports of parent behaviors alone. Instead, our findings are consistent with relevant research by Gibb, Alloy, and Abramson (2003) who found that global reports of childhood maltreatment were not related to depression scores when reports of specific childhood maltreatment experiences were statistically controlled. Similarly, Harned (2004) found that female college students' labeling of *unwanted sexual experiences* had little to do with associated emotional distress over and above the experiences themselves.

Taken together our findings suggested that although some minority youth may construct the notion of child abuse differently from majority group youngsters, the outcomes of these differentially labeled harsh parental behaviors are nonetheless detrimental across racial lines. Our results highlight the fact that youth reports of emotionally and physically punitive parenting are strongly associated with distress across racial groups. Thus, the general picture reflected uniformity in the negative emotional correlates of punitive parental behavior among African American, NHW, Hispanic, and API youth. There was even evidence suggesting that punitive parental behaviors may be relatively more damaging for minority youth compared to NHW youth when it comes to internalizing symptomatology. African American and Hispanic youth appear even more adversely affected by harsh physical discipline by parents than NHW children. Hispanic and API youth have more distress associated with emotionally punitive parenting than NHWs. These findings make the case against adopting an extremely relativistic perspective on the definition of *child abuse* across racial groups. For example, despite the fact that API youth seemed to be less likely to associate emotionally punitive parent behaviors with emotional abuse victimization, there was a stronger relationship between harsh emotional treatment and internalizing symptoms within this group. Regardless of whether youth describe punitive parental acts as abusive or as normative variants of parenting, emotionally punitive parent behaviors appear to be associated with feelings of sadness and anxiety, inhibition, and withdrawal.

The heritage cultures of many minority families are imbued with traditions that emphasize interdependent, collectivistic, and family-oriented values. For example, *familismo* in Hispanic American cultures reflects an emphasis on positive family relationships, interdependence in the completion of daily activities, and family unity and support. Similar observations are noted of families of Asian descent (Chao & Tseng, 2002). It is possible that within a cultural framework that emphasizes familial interdependence and harmony, punitive parental behaviors may be especially unsettling because these minority youth have had their most valued source of support and security undermined. Furthermore, it is also important to note that minority youth are not only influenced by normative patterns of family relationships in their culture of origin but are also exposed to standards found in the majority or mainstream culture. For example, although they may understand that their parents are using traditional forms of discipline, they may nonetheless feel that they have been mistreated when they make social comparisons to peers or to media images of what family life should be like.

It is important to note that our findings of greater detriment of punitive parent behaviors among minority youth diverge from some previous examinations of

racial differences in the consequences of harsh physical discipline. Most notably, longitudinal studies have demonstrated that harsh physical discipline tends to result in more externalizing or disruptive behavior problems among NHW populations but not among African Americans (e.g., Lansford et al., 2004). We have not found previous studies that examined relative differences in the association between physical discipline and internalizing symptoms across racial and/or ethnic groups. It is possible that studies that have attended to differential effects of harsh discipline do not address the costs associated with less-observable and more-internalized emotional difficulties. We are unaware of other published reports indicating that harsh parental acts convey greater risk for minority youth compared to NHW youth. Clearly more research is needed to clarify the relationship between punitive parenting practices and internalizing problems across families from diverse cultural backgrounds.

It is important to consider our findings in light of the limitations of the current study. First, our examination of these issues would have been bolstered by independent reports of harsh parental behaviors and acts, or observational data. We relied on youth to provide reports of specific physically and emotionally punitive parental acts. Although we used items that were anchored by behavioral descriptors (e.g., "my parent hit me with a hard object"), they were still subject to interpretation by youth (e.g., idiosyncratic definitions of *hard object*). By relying on youth-report data, we cannot escape from the fact that we are studying youth perceptions of parental acts. Therefore, we may have had limited ability to find differential associations between actual parental behaviors and subjective self-identification of abuse victimization because of the shared method variance with all data relying on youth perceptions.

Second, our data were cross-sectional limiting our ability to draw inferences about the directionality of the observed associations. For instance, it is possible that internalizing problems were associated with punitive parental behaviors because youth with more internalizing problems elicit harsh behavior from their parents. With regard to the racial moderation findings, it is possible that minority parents are more negatively reactive to adolescents with internalizing distress than are NHW parents. Clearly, longitudinal research is needed to delineate the temporal association between punitive parental behaviors, subsequent child perceptions of parent behaviors, and emotional and behavioral sequelae.

Third, our sample was a high-risk sample of youth who were involved in one of five public sectors of care for youth. These youngsters were receiving services for emotional and/or behavioral problems, delinquency, substance abuse, or child abuse and/or neglect. As such, these youngsters were more troubled and may have been exposed to higher rates of adverse family circumstances than would be expected in the general community. An additional concern about the sample composition involves the patterns of nonresponse on the current study measures. It is possible that the relationships of interest between race, parental treatment, and self-labeled abuse may have differed among the nonresponders in the survey who were on average older. Finally, we noted race-related demographic differences in the sample that may be an artifact of sampling from public service agencies where race appears systematically associated with involvement in certain sectors of care and the likelihood of receipt of health services. As such, we cannot be confident in generalizing our findings regarding race and youth perceptions of punitive parenting to the general population. At the same time, it is extremely important to understand these associations in our high-risk service–receiving populations. It is arguable that policy and intervention implications about responding to child maltreatment should be driven by research on our most vulnerable populations.

Finally, our measures of the constructs of interest were limited in this large-scale survey. Consistent with previous studies (Carlin et al., 1994; Harned, 2004; Meston et al., 1999), our measures of subjective self-identification of abuse victimization were single-item measures. In addition, our limited sampling of relevant psychosocial constructs precluded a detailed examination of the underlying mechanisms of action driving the study results. For example, our data provide no explanation for why there would be a stronger connection between youth-reported emotional and physical punitive parenting and internalizing psychopathology. We alluded to unmeasured cultural variables such as emphasis on the value of family and parent support that may account for the observed moderation effects. More research is needed to replicate these findings of racial differences in impact of punitive parental behaviors on youth distress, and to extend the work to test explanatory models.

Nevertheless, the results of the current study provide new information relevant to the debate over how to define *child abuse* across diverse groups. Our initial intent was to focus on minority youths' self-labeled experiences of abuse to guide our consideration of definitional issues. We did find some isolated racial differences in how youth perceive punitive parental acts and label experiences as *abusive*. However, con-

sidering all our results together we arrived at the conclusion that racial variability in self-labeling of *abuse* may not be an important factor in shaping culturally competent definitions of *abuse* for policy and practice purposes. Contrary to our expectations, this subjective labeling of *victimization* mattered less than youth reports of punitive parental behaviors. In addition, youth reports of punitive parental behaviors were consistently associated with internalizing distress and even appeared more strongly related to internalizing distress among some minority youth compared to NHW youth. Thus, although some punitive parenting practices may be more normative in certain racial groups and may even be less likely to be called *abusive* by in-group members, these acts may nonetheless exact an emotional toll that is detrimental to children in those groups. Our results suggest that much work is needed to sensitively respond to racial differences in parent practices in ways that buffer children from associated distress.

NOTES

1. By *ethnic minority families* in this article, we are referring to African American, Hispanic, and Asian Pacific Islander families. We recognize that many non-Hispanic White families are also members of ethnic minority groups, and that we are excluding multiracial and Native American groups. Unfortunately our research will not help to clarify the experience of these families.

2. In the current study, we use group classifications that consider racial category and Hispanic ethnicity (i.e., Non-Hispanic White vs. Hispanic). However, for brevity we refer to these classifications as *racial* categories throughout the article.

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