

European American and African American Mothers' Beliefs About Parenting and Disciplining Infants: A Mixed-Method Analysis

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SYNOPSIS

Objective. Parenting is a response to and supported by parents' cultural and personal beliefs about what they should do to promote their children's development. Our goal was to explore the belief systems that appear to motivate some mothers to be more negative or use physical discipline in infancy and to determine whether those beliefs are related to observed parenting styles. **Design.** Using a mixed-methods approach, we first examined this issue qualitatively ($n = 25$) and then tested the qualitative findings using quantitative analyses ($n = 134$). Participants were mothers and their infants between the ages of 2 and 18 months. **Results.** Ethnographic interviews revealed that mothers primarily held 1 of 2 contrasting beliefs about why children misbehave and how parents should respond to bad behavior. Many mothers said they avoid using physical punishment with their infants because infants are not able to clearly understand right and wrong. In contrast, some mothers believed that infants can misbehave intentionally and need to be punished to stop the bad behavior and learn to respect the mother's authority. Subsequent quantitative analyses supported this finding. Mothers who expressed concerns about bad behavior and spoiling interacted less positively with their infants during free-play interactions at 6 and 12 months of age, but this trend was stronger among European American than among African American mothers. **Conclusions.** Findings suggest possible race differences in beliefs about spoiling and infant intentionality that apparently support the use of physical punishment with young children, and that efficacious parenting education programs might focus on parents' beliefs about whether infants can intentionally misbehave and concerns about spoiling in efforts to reduce physical punishment and increase responsive parenting styles.

INTRODUCTION

Parental beliefs have been widely examined by both psychologists and anthropologists because they are linked to parenting practices, which in turn are linked to child outcomes (Harkness & Super, 2006; Sigel & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2002; Sigel, McGillicuddy-DeLisi, & Goodnow, 1992; Weisner, Matheson, & Bernheimer, 1996). Parenting is a complex phenomenon that is, in part, a response to and supported by parents' cultural and personal beliefs about what they should do to promote their children's development (Harkness & Super, 1996; Keller, 2007; Rubin & Chung, 2006; Sigel & McGillicuddy-DeLisi, 2002). For some mothers and fathers, this means implementing styles of discipline that are defined in some belief systems (e.g., authoritative models of parenting) as being harsh and punitive (Cote & Bornstein, 2001). The goals of this study were, first, to use qualitative methods to explore the constellation of beliefs about parenting and child development that may motivate some mothers to use physical discipline early in

infancy and, second, to use quantitative measures to test the hypothesis that these beliefs are associated with parenting behaviors.

Anthropologists have long been interested in parenting beliefs and practices cross-culturally with a recent focus on parenting in the United States (Harkness & Super, 1996, 2001, 2006). For example, Weisner et al. (1996) examined how the dominant parenting belief system in the United States that emphasizes early stimulation and provision of a nurturing environment may negate the need for early identification of and intervention with children who have developmental delays. Harkness and Super (1992) described U.S. parents' belief systems about child development as including the concepts of *stage* and *independence*, which support the interpretation of problematic child behaviors in a more positive light. A study conducted with U.S. middle-class parents of children 3 to 5 years of age revealed a model of parenting that included justifications for different types of punishment. Parents emphasized the need to teach children how to distinguish right from wrong by being consistent, using praise and rewards to encourage good behavior, and choosing from a range of disciplinary practices to discourage bad behavior. Physical punishment, viewed as inappropriate for infants, was justified for young children who did not listen or for whom reasoning did not work (Reid & Valsiner, 1986). Research has not revealed an in-depth understanding of the beliefs that motivate punitive discipline of infants.

Parents' belief systems or ethnotheories of parenting are interpretive frameworks that guide perceptions and understandings of child development, child rearing, appropriate discipline, and goals and expectations for children (Harkness & Super, 2006; Keller et al., 2006). Parents construct these beliefs from their own personal backgrounds and life experiences, but beliefs may be shaped in part by sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, and location, as well as by broader belief systems (e.g., religion, current popular models of child development). One obvious strategy for assessing parenting beliefs is to derive beliefs from parents' statements and reflections on how and why they parent as they do. Using models of analysis developed in cognitive anthropology (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Holland & Quinn, 1987; Quinn, 2005), parents' discourse can be systematically examined to identify the meanings and assumptions that underlie their statements and the areas in which beliefs in one domain, such as perceptions of infant intentionality, are linked to beliefs in other domains, such as discipline. Examining discourse for explicit beliefs and tacit assumptions also reveals how parenting beliefs are related to larger belief systems such as religion or personal morality (Harkness & Super, 1996, 2001; Holland & Quinn, 1987).

Observational and experimental research on parenting beliefs about infants and how parenting beliefs are related to parenting behaviors often make use of a folk psychological construct labeled *spoiling*, defined as a tendency to impair the character or disposition of an individual as a result of overindulgence, excessive acceptance, and meager discipline. These studies are generally interpreted as applicable to parents, but participants are almost always mothers. Concerns about spoiling young babies have been linked to mothers' beliefs that infants are capable of intentionally behaving in a negative manner (Delgado & Delgado, 2002; Guzell & Vernon-Feagans, 2004). Several studies suggest that between 20% and 50% of parents believe that infants younger than 1 year of age can be spoiled, and that, unless taught to respect authority, these infants are likely to become children who have conduct problems or other negative outcomes (Barton & Ratner, 2001; Socolar & Stein, 1995; Solomon, Martin & Cottingham, 1993). Accordingly, mothers who discipline infants with more directive or punitive parenting

styles justify these practices as a means of teaching the infant to respect the parent's authority and of avoiding spoiling the infant (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997; Field & Widmayer, 1981; Guzell & Vernon-Feagans, 2004; Smyke, Boris, & Alexander, 2002; Solomon, Martin, & Cottingham, 1993). Some quantitative evidence suggests that there are both economic and ethnic differences in beliefs about whether young infants can be spoiled and should be disciplined. Concerns about spoiling infants were related to maternal education and family income in a Miami community sample (Delgado & Delgado, 2002) and among an African American sample (Horn, Cheng, & Joseph, 2004). Evidence suggests that parenting that is viewed as harsh or punitive from the perspective of current U.S. middle-class parenting models is not seen as having the same negative implications for child outcomes in African American families as it does for European American middle-class families (Avenoli, Sessa, & Steinberg, 1999; Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997; Ipsa et al., 2004). Deater-Deckard and Dodge (1997) suggested that outcomes are not compromised when parenting beliefs support punitive or seemingly harsh parenting styles as long as those parenting practices are not abusive. However, their work was with preschoolers so it is not clear whether their conclusions apply to young infants who cannot yet understand why they are being punished. African American mothers who use more punitive parenting styles with infants justify these practices as a means of teaching the child to respect the mother's authority and as a means to avoid spoiling the child (Deater-Deckard & Dodge; Field & Widmayer, 1981; Smyke, Boris, & Alexander, 2002; Solomon, Martin, & Cottingham, 1993).

These parenting practices take place and are understood within this belief system that is shared by others in their social and cultural milieu. Deater-Deckard and Dodge (1997) hypothesized that a long history of racial discrimination led many African American mothers to adopt more authoritarian views regarding the need for children to respect parental authority. Discrimination meant that seemingly innocent behaviors could place an African American child in jeopardy. Thus, it was essential to teach children to obey in order to protect them within a racially divided society. In this study, we explored the extent to which such parenting beliefs regarding the punishment of infants differ between African American and European American mothers to test this hypothesis.

Parents who express authoritarian attitudes about parenting often focus on the need for children, including infants, to learn to respect authority (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997), and such attitudes have been linked to unresponsive and insensitive parenting (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD] Early Child Care Research Network [ECCRN], 1998) for infants as young as 6 months of age. Parents who tend to be highly punitive also tend to express concerns about spoiling the child and tend to be less responsive and sensitive in interactions with their infants (Bugental, Blue, & Cruzcosa, 1989; Bugental & Happaney, 2000, 2004). However, the relation among punitive parenting, concerns about spoiling, and interactive sensitivity has not been extensively studied in infants younger than 1 year of age. Our goal in this study was to use a mixed-methods approach to examine the underlying belief systems that promote different types of parenting styles among African American and European American mothers of infants in one urban area in the Southeast United States. We first analyzed qualitative, semistructured interviews with a subset of mothers to explore how they associated their beliefs about their infants' development and capabilities with their beliefs about parenting and discipline. We specifically examined mothers' talk for how they connected beliefs about spoiling, the infant's ability to intentionally interact negatively with caregivers, and discipline for infants in their first year. This exploratory

analysis was used to generate hypotheses about relations among these beliefs and how these relations may guide parenting practices. We then tested these hypotheses using quantitative data from the larger sample. Specifically, the qualitative analysis led us to hypothesize that a subset of mothers would believe that they should physically discipline their 6-to 12-month-old infants to teach them not to intentionally misbehave and that those who held this belief would exhibit less responsive caregiving toward the infants.

METHOD

We conducted a mixed-method study of parenting beliefs and practices of African American and European American mothers of infants living in a midsize city in the Southeast United States. During 2002–2003, we recruited 207 infants and their families from birth records and advertisements in clinics and local newspapers. Approximately half the sample was African American ($n = 102$), and the other half was European American ($n = 105$). Approximately half of each group was considered as being low income (i.e., having family incomes that were less than twice the national poverty threshold), assessed when the infant was 3 months of age. A subset of 25 mothers participated in a qualitative study, which consisted of a series of semistructured interviews designed to provide in-depth information about mothers' parenting beliefs and practices.

QUALITATIVE STUDY

Participants

Of the 15 African American mothers, 53% were low income, and 40% were married when the infant was 3 months of age; they had an average of 14.3 years ($SD = 1.9$ years) of education. Of the 10 European American mothers, 30% were low income, and 50% were married; they had an average of 15.5 years ($SD = 3.6$ years) of education. The subgroup represented the ethnic and income categories of the larger sample in which the African American families tended to be more disadvantaged in general.

Procedure

We conducted the qualitative analysis of parental beliefs on interview data from the subset of 25 mothers. These mothers participated in a series of semistructured, in-depth interviews aimed at eliciting their beliefs about child rearing and child development, including their perceptions of infant intentionality and disciplinary practices. Specific interview questions were designed to tap into the same domains and constructs as represented in the items on one of the measures administered to the entire quantitative sample, the Infant Intentionality Questionnaire (Feldman & Reznick, 1996; Reznick, 2008). Appendix A provides a sample of the interview questions.

These 25 mothers were first interviewed when their infants were 4 to 6 months of age, and then every 6 months for the first 2 years of the study. The data analyzed here are from the first three interviews, when the child was 4 to 6 months, 10 to 12 months, and 16 to 18 months of age, respectively. All interviews were transcribed verbatim in preparation for data analysis. Two researchers, including the second author, then read

the interview transcripts and created data display matrices (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to summarize the ways in which mothers viewed their young children's development (e.g., at what age they believed the child was capable of understanding various things, doing things intentionally, or being spoiled), their beliefs about how to discipline and reward the child's behaviors, and their reports of how they interacted with the infant. We then examined the data for each mother to assess the relation between her beliefs about child development and infant intentionality and parenting and disciplinary practices. Using analysis techniques standard in cognitive anthropology (D'Andrade, 1995; D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Holland & Quinn, 1987; Quinn, 2005), we looked for both explicit associations that mothers expressed and associations that could be inferred from the mothers' reasoning. For example, a mother speaking about the right way to discipline her 15-month-old son said, "He is not ready for a pop, not yet. He knows but he is not clear of what is wrong." Another mother said she uses "redirection and just reinforcement. No hitting, he is too young for that." These statements point to the belief or proposition that *children must know that they are doing something wrong before physical punishment is warranted*. Another proposition can be extracted from statements such as those given by a mother describing her 11-month-old daughter as "a Taurus and 100% bull. It is her way or the highway." She noted that she and her sisters "don't take no junk" from the child. Statements such as this point to a belief that an infant is capable of misbehaving intentionally and that intervention is needed to prevent the infant from misbehaving. Proceeding in this way through each interview using the constant comparative method and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), we noted the statements and propositions made by each mother, tested each of these against our evolving hypotheses of what constituted a proposition or belief, and compared these across cases to build the models of beliefs operative in this sample (see Harkness & Super, 1996).

Results

We distinguished two different constellations of beliefs that relate to notions of child development, spoiling and discipline, and responsiveness in two different ways. All mothers spoke of their involvement in various activities to guide their child's physical and cognitive development. For example, all but 4 of the African American and European American mothers reported conversing with the child constantly, saying that frequent talk builds children's language skills and stimulates their brains. They reported reading to the child from an early age, buying educational toys, and engaging in play with the child. They described participating in activities with the child to get him or her to crawl and stand up. Most believed their infants could understand and were capable of learning everything, especially by 10 months of age, and they talked about the importance of having bonding time with their baby. Almost all mothers, even those who saw themselves as strict disciplinarians, reported being highly attentive and responsive to the child, engaging their child in ways that promoted physical and cognitive development, and using praise, encouragement, and clapping to reward good behavior.

There was more variation in mothers' beliefs about discipline. Two different models of discipline emerged on the basis of beliefs about children and their development. In the first model, mothers held what have been labeled as more authoritative child-rearing beliefs. These mothers indicated that a baby cannot be spoiled, or at least not be spoiled

in a negative way, saying that babies need all the love and attention they can get. They said that they avoided using physical means to manage their infant's behavior, believing that a child needs to understand clearly what is right and wrong before being punished and that children do not typically understand this concept until they are 2 years of age or older. This belief is reflected in one African American mother's statement, "I don't think you can spoil a baby until they are three years old. Then they know right from wrong and if they're told no they understand." To correct bad behavior, these mothers said they redirected, ignored, took things away, explained, scolded, or removed the child from the situation. Time-out was used by some, but was not seen as effective or appropriate for very young children. Good behavior was encouraged and rewarded with praise, clapping, and sometimes treats. These beliefs were held by the majority of both African American and European American mothers.

In the second model, concerns about spoiling were linked to views of the infant as behaving intentionally in negative ways to test or challenge the mother's authority or power. Infants as young as 6 to 9 months of age were seen as capable of being spoiled in a negative way and doing things "just to try you" or "to get over on you." Mothers who held this model sometimes talked about their children as being rebellious, defiant, stubborn, or demanding. The infant's exploration of the environment was sometimes viewed in negative ways such as testing the limits and seeing what he or she could get away with. Mothers talked about needing to teach the child the rules, to "straighten up," and to "do as I say." Discipline often took the form of *popping*, that is, the mother giving a quick slap with her hand to the child on the legs or bottom, and in a couple of cases, threatening the child with a switch or belt. Of the European American and African American mothers, 9 voiced these beliefs.

Cecilia (all names used in this article are pseudonyms), for example, is a mother who operated more along the lines of the second model. She described her 10-month-old son as "spoiled rotten," understanding everything that went on, and testing how far he could go and how much he could get away with. She said, "He will try you" and related how he would get into a flowerpot and intentionally throw dirt out on the floor. She said he usually listened if she told him "no," but she sometimes had to pop his leg to get his attention. Cecilia described herself as "a corporal punishment mama" and viewed her son as doing things deliberately to provoke her, but she also described how she interacted with him in very loving and warm ways.

Cynthia shared most elements of this same model with Cecilia, viewing her 10-month-old daughter as spoiled and doing things deliberately to manipulate adults around her or to get her way. Cynthia also used corporal punishment, saying she was reared with discipline and "if you don't tell her 'no' now, she'll be worse later." She popped her daughter's hand or mouth if she misbehaved. Unlike Cecilia, however, Cynthia did not describe her interactions with her daughter as being warm or responsive.

Because some mothers said they used popping or other means of corporal punishment on infants as young as 6 months, we examined their statements more closely for their rationale for doing so. Mothers popped or spanked the child to "make them listen." They popped their child while saying "no," with the expectation that the child will learn what "no" means. They popped their infant's hand so the infant would not put objects in his or her mouth, and they popped or spanked their infant when the infant was doing something dangerous. One mother popped her 9-month-old son's leg when he "messes with" her things and to get his attention because, as she explained, "It's gonna be my way or no way." When her son was 14 months old, she spanked him when he was disobedient.

To summarize, the majority of mothers held the first model that is composed of the following beliefs or propositions: infants cannot be spoiled, infants need love and attention, and physical discipline should not be used on infants because they do not understand right from wrong. The second model reflects contrasting beliefs: infants can be spoiled, infants can be defiant intentionally and challenge the mother's authority, spoiling an infant increases these deliberate behaviors, and physical punishment is warranted to curtail this bad behavior.

Self-described responsivity seems to operate independently from other components of the models. Mothers who were strict and rather punitive disciplinarians and who viewed their infants as doing things deliberately to provoke them could also report being highly responsive and warm in their interactions; mothers who did not view their children as acting deliberately or who did not mete out physical punishment could describe low responsivity. Some of these mothers talked explicitly about their lack of responsivity, saying that they thought that being too responsive caused a child to become too dependent. One mother stated, "I'm not really an attachment parent. I don't carry him as much as he likes. I want him to learn to be independent." Another mother said, "I come from a family of very nonresponsive parents. I think it's just more my personality. My husband's brother's wife is the most responsive person I've ever seen, you know, to a fault. I think I tend to want children to be independent because that's just kind of my personality."

QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Sample

Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and proportions for demographic characteristics, measures of attitudes about child rearing, and positive engaged parenting

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics on Demographic, Attitudes, and Parenting Measures

Variable	African American (<i>n</i> = 68)			European American (<i>n</i> = 66)		
	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	%	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Annual income (\$)		43,744	35,376		65,133	53,896
Low-income family	57			38		
Married parents	49			77		
Maternal education (years)		13.65	2.61		15.58	2.36
Child gender						
Male	50			55		
Female	50			45		
Attitudes about child rearing						
PEI – Traditional beliefs		84.93	15.73		69.08	15.27
POS – Spoiling and discipline		3.22	0.84		2.47	0.81
IIQ – Infant negative intentionality		1.50	0.66		1.17	0.28
Positive Engaged Parenting						
6 months		3.20	0.82		3.64	0.79
12 months		2.94	0.73		3.56	0.64

Note. PEI = Parent as Educator Interview; POS = Parents' Opinion Survey; IIQ = Infant Intentionality Questionnaire.

at 6 and 12 months. The families varied widely in income, but about 57% of the African American and 38% of the European American mothers met the criteria for low-income status at recruitment. About half of the African American and about three-fourths of the European American mothers were married and on average had attended some college. Of the 207 families recruited, 134 had complete demographic, parenting, and questionnaire data at 6- and 12-month assessments and were included in the quantitative analyses. Failure to locate or successfully schedule the 6- or 12-month visits accounted for most of the missing data. Only two attempts were made to contact each participant at these ages, resulting in a much smaller participation rate than at older ages when many more attempts were made for each family. No differences emerged between included and excluded families on any study variable.

Procedure

At each visit, mothers were asked about their income, marital status, and education. At the 6-month visit, they were asked to complete three instruments about child-rearing attitudes (described in detail in the following paragraphs). At 6 and 12 months, the mothers and infants participated in a semistructured free-play laboratory session.

Maternal attitudes about the importance of responsive parenting and providing educational experiences were assessed at 6 months with the Parent as Educator Interview (PEI; Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985). The PEI total score reflected less progressive/democratic beliefs and more traditional/authoritarian beliefs about rearing children. Schaefer and Edgerton (1985) reported that the PEI was negatively associated with child intelligence, and the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development reported that the PEI was negatively related to responsive and stimulating parenting practices and children's early cognitive and social skills (NICHD ECCRN, 1998, 1999). Internal consistency according to Cronbach's alpha for the PEI in this study was excellent ($\alpha = .90$).

We assessed maternal beliefs about infant intentionality at 6 months using the Infant Intentionality Questionnaire (IIQ, Version 5.1; Feldman & Reznick, 1996; Reznick, 2008). The IIQ contains 23 specific questions about intentionality designed to determine the mother's view of the infant's awareness of needs, desires, and goals, and efforts to cause the environment to respond (e.g., "Does your infant choose appropriate ways to reach his or her goals?" "Does your infant recognize when you are disappointed?" "Can your infant feel sadness?"). Each item had 5 response options ranging from *never* to *often*. The present analysis focuses on the IIQ Negative Intentionality Scale, which was constructed from seven questions indicating a belief that the infant is intentional in a negative sense (i.e., is deliberately annoying, defiant, or mean spirited). In the present data, Cronbach's α was .81 for the negative intentionality scale.

We measured maternal concerns about spoiling and attitudes about discipline using the Parents' Opinion Survey (POS; Luster, Rhoades, & Haas, 1989; adapted by Hogan & Tudge, 1994). The 59 items on the POS assess parental beliefs about appropriate child rearing, with questions about the importance of giving children freedom in and around the home, the need for controlling and disciplining them, and the possibility of spoiling them by giving them too much attention. Mothers were asked questions such as whether "responding to cries spoils babies," "a lot of attention spoils children," "it is important to be strict with a one-year-old," and "discipline is the most important parental task." Each item is scored from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 6 (*strongly disagree*). Hogan and Tudge (1994) reported significant relations between POS factors and comparable constructs measured

using the Caldwell and Bradley Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (HOME) in a sample of 65 mothers from diverse socioeconomic status and educational attainment and with a child between 9 and 23 months of age. A factor analysis of the POS items used in the present study revealed three factors. The first factor accounted for about half of the common variance and consisted of 19 items about the importance of discipline and the need to avoid spoiling the infant; the factor had good internal consistency ($\alpha = .88$).

A 10-minute free-play interaction involving mothers and their infants was videotaped at 6 and 12 months following a standardized protocol (Cox, Paley, Burchinal, & Payne, 1999; NICHD ECCRN, 1999). Mothers were given a set of toys and instructed to play with their child as they normally would if they had a little free time during the day. Interactions were later coded to assess levels of mothers' sensitivity, detachment, intrusiveness, positive regard, negative regard, and animation in interacting with the child. Ratings for each code were made on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all characteristic*) to 5 (*highly characteristic*). Two coders independently coded each dyad, and consensus codes were computed. A reliability estimate of $r = .80$ was determined by calculating the intraclass correlation for ratings made by two independent coders.

On the basis of the results of factor analyses conducted with an oblique rotation (i.e., Promax), maternal positive engagement ($\alpha = .89$) was defined as the mean of mothers' scores for four characteristics: detachment (reverse scored; level of emotional uninvolved or disengagement), positive regard (level of positive feelings expressed toward child), animation (level of energy), and stimulation for development (appropriate level of scaffolding of activities with child). These summary scores have been shown to be strong predictors of children's early cognitive and social development (NICHD ECCRN, 2006).

Results

Mothers rated themselves, on average, on the POS as being modestly to moderately concerned about spoiling their infants at 6 months, and on the IIQ as making relatively few attributions that their infants were deliberately misbehaving. Mothers rated themselves, on average, on the PEI as being more traditional than child-centered in their attitudes about child rearing.

Table 2 shows the correlations among the demographic, attitude, and parenting measures. Demographic characteristics tended to be highly correlated, and attitudes about spoiling were clearly related to traditional attitudes about child rearing. Positive engaged parenting was moderately associated with demographic and attitudinal measures.

The first analysis examined the extent to which beliefs about the importance of discipline and need to avoid spoiling an infant at 6 months were related to attributions of negative intentionality and whether those associations were different for European American and African American mothers. An analysis of covariance predicted the POS discipline score from the IIQ score, including the child's gender and mother's education as covariates. The model also included race and crossed each predictor with race to estimate a separate set of coefficients for each predictor for European American and African American mothers. Results are depicted in Table 3, showing whether each predictor was related to beliefs about punishment in the first column and whether those associations differed by race in the second column, and listing the estimated coefficients

TABLE 2
Correlations Among Demographic, Attitudes, and Parenting Measures for
African American and European American Mothers

Variable	Engaged Parenting	Background Characteristics				Maternal Attitudes		
		Gender (male = 1)	Low-Income	Married	Education	PEI Traditional Beliefs	POS Spoiling	IIQ Negative
Engaged parenting		.05	-.33**	.36***	.31***	-.37**	-.40***	-.34**
Gender (male)	.03		-.05	-.01	-.01	-.04	-.10	.06
Low-income family	-.39**	.02		-.71***	-.66***	.58***	.66***	.22
Mother married	.32**	-.03	-.44***		.45***	-.41**	-.54***	-.34**
Maternal education	.40***	-.06	-.69***	.44***		-.52***	-.57***	-.22
Maternal attitudes								
PEI authoritarian	-.42***	.07	.43***	-.42***	-.54***		.50***	.24*
POS spoiling	-.22	.06	.25*	-.33**	-.40**	.67***		.17
IIQ negative intentions	-.30*	.02	.32**	-.39**	-.33**	.32**	.40***	

Note. Correlations for African American mothers appear above the diagonal, and correlations for European Americans mothers appear below the diagonal. PEI = Parent as Educator Interview; POS = Parents' Opinion Survey; IIQ = Infant Intentionality Questionnaire.

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

TABLE 3
Beliefs About Importance of Punishment and Concern About Spoiling Predicted
From Beliefs About Infant Negative Intentionality

Variable	Main Effect	Race Differences	European American		African American	
			<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept		5.68*	2.76	.10	3.06	.08
Negative intentionality	7.07**	1.96*	.80*	.32	.12	.13
Covariate						
Gender	.86	.35	-.04	.17	-.17	.16
Maternal education	32.51***	1.19	-.11**	.04	-.17***	.03

Note. For main effects and race differences, $F(1, 146)$.

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

and standard errors for European American and African American mothers in the third and fourth columns, respectively. Effect sizes were computed using the difference between adjusted means divided by the pooled standard deviation of the outcome variable for categorical variables and the predictor's coefficient times the predictor's standard deviation divided by the pooled standard deviation for the outcome measure (NICHD ECCRN, 2006). The analysis indicated that the African American mothers, on average, reported a significantly stronger belief in discipline for infants ($d = .43$), but that European American mothers were significantly more likely to endorse discipline when they believed their infant was intentionally misbehaving ($d = .28$) than were African American mothers ($d = .09$).

Next, we examined the extent to which parent–infant interactions were related to the key dimensions of parenting beliefs that emerged from the qualitative analyses. Based

on this analysis, we expected that observed parenting styles would reflect whether mothers held a set of beliefs that young infants can be spoiled and that infants are capable of deliberately being negative, and that this belief system would differentiate parenting styles better than the more widely held beliefs about the importance of being responsive and providing cognitive stimulation. A hierarchical linear model examined positive engaged parenting from 6 to 12 months. An intercept for each mother was estimated to account for dependencies in the repeated assessments. Parenting was predicted from measures of responsive education-oriented child rearing, concerns about discipline and spoiling, and beliefs about the infant's negative intentions. The analysis included gender, race, and maternal education as covariates. Analyses included interactions between each predictor and race as well as interactions among each predictor with race and age to test whether background characteristics and attitudes predicted engaged parenting differently for African American and European American mothers. We computed effect sizes in the same manner as previously described.

Results are shown in Table 4. Analyses revealed a main effect for traditional child-rearing attitudes and negative infant intentions. The Time \times Race interaction indicated that the European American and African American mothers showed different patterns of change over time in responsive parenting. African American, but not European American, mothers were rated as being somewhat less positively engaged with their infants at 12 months than they had been at 6 months (for African American mothers, slope $B = -.10$, $d = .12$; for European American mothers, $B = .04$, $d = .05$). Mothers were rated as significantly more positive or engaged with their infants when they expressed fewer traditional child-rearing attitudes (for both groups, $B = -.01$, $d = -.19$) or when they were less likely to attribute negative intentions to their infant (for European American mothers, $B = -.34$, $d = -.28$; for African American mothers, $B = -.29$, $d = -.10$) regardless of race. In contrast, African American mothers tended to be more engaged with their infants when they expressed fewer concerns about spoiling infants ($B = -.25$, $d = -.26$, $p < .05$), but this was not true for European American mothers ($B = .07$, $d = .07$). Neither gender nor maternal education was significantly related to parenting sensitivity when maternal attitudes were considered. No evidence emerged suggesting that either the demographic or the parental attitudes predicted change in parenting between 6 and 12 months.

In summary, these analyses suggest that mothers who expressed more traditional attitudes about child rearing and attributed more negative intentions to their infants tended to be less responsive and engaged during interactions with their infants regardless of race. African American mothers showed more decline in sensitive parenting over time than did European American mothers, and their concerns about spoiling were more strongly related to lower levels of responsive parenting than among European American mothers.

DISCUSSION

We explored the role of parenting beliefs in African American and European American mothers' styles of discipline with young infants using qualitative interviews, and we examined the relation between parenting beliefs and parenting sensitivity using quantitative methods. In line with previous quantitative research (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997), semistructured interviews revealed two different sets of beliefs regarding disciplining infants. Mothers who believed that infants were capable of intentional

TABLE 4
 Longitudinal Regression: Engaged Parenting Predicted From Beliefs About Child Rearing

Variable	Main Effects		Race Interactions		Age Interactions		Race × Age Interactions		European American Intercept		African American Intercept		European American Slope		African American Slope			
	F	SE	F	SE	F	SE	F	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE		
Covariates																		
Race	1.02								3.40	.09	3.28	.08			.05	.10	-.29**	.09*
Time	2.89						6.19*		.12	.15	.00	.14			.04	.17	-.10	.17
Gender	.34		.40		.08		.34		.07	.04	.02	.04			-.01	.04	.05	.04
Maternal education	3.11		.72		.53		.96											
Parenting beliefs																		
Traditional	4.38*		.56		2.35		.32		-.01	.01	-.01	.01			.01	.01	.01	.01
Spoiling	1.27		3.98*		.36		1.31		.07	.12	-.25*	.10			-.17	.15	.05	.12
Intentions	4.23*		.02		.76		.31		-.34	.28	-.29*	.11			.25	.32	.05	.13

Note. For main effects and race interactions, $F(1, 131)$; for age interactions and Race × Age interactions, $F(1, 101)$.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

negative behavior reported using physical punishment to correct this behavior and to demonstrate that they held the power in the relationship. They felt such actions were necessary because they believed that their infant could become "spoiled" if they gave in to his or her demands, and spoiled children would develop long-term behavior problems. The quantitative analysis provided partial support for the hypotheses generated by the qualitative study and extended them by showing that mothers who held this set of beliefs about the importance of discipline to address concerns about spoiling the infant were less likely to demonstrate responsive and stimulating parenting practices with their infants. However, the patterns of association among parenting beliefs and practices were somewhat different for European American and African American mothers.

The qualitative analyses relied on in-depth interviews to identify the relevant dimensions of parenting beliefs regarding the practice and rationale for the use of discipline. The analysis of interview data independently identified the same dimensions cited in other research on why mothers use more negative interaction styles or physical punishment with infants (Bugental & Happaney, 2004). The belief that young infants are capable of being deliberately negative and of seeking to dominate the mother-infant relationship logically justify using more punitive measures to teach the child to obey.

Quantitative analyses partially supported this finding. As reported in previous studies (Avenoli et al., 1999; Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997; Ipsa et al., 2004), the African American mothers expressed stronger beliefs about the use of punishment for, and concerns about, spoiling infants as young as 6 months of age than did European American mothers. In line with our hypotheses, beliefs that young infants can intentionally misbehave predicted higher levels of endorsement of punishment and concerns about spoiling among the European American mothers. However, beliefs about negative infant intentionality were not related to beliefs about punishment among the African American mothers. Thus, for the European American mothers, both the qualitative and quantitative findings indicate that the belief that young infants were capable of being deliberately negative and of seeking to dominate the mother-infant relationship apparently justify more frequent or harsh use of punitive measures to teach the child to obey. In contrast, these findings also appear to support previous findings indicating that African American mothers in the southeastern United States may have a unique belief system regarding the role of punishment in rearing infants (Avenoli et al., 1999; Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997; Ipsa et al., 2004), perhaps linked to the long local history of racial discrimination and the need for unquestioned obedience for survival in the face of discrimination (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997).

Furthermore, the quantitative findings extend the qualitative findings by demonstrating that mothers were least likely to engage in positive interactions with their infants when they expressed traditional child-rearing beliefs, concerns about spoiling their infants, or the belief that their infant was acting in intentionally negative ways. Mothers who expressed more traditional views of child rearing did not necessarily also report that their infants were intentionally negative, but each of these two parenting beliefs was negatively related to responsive parenting practices. Our failure to find differences in the association between authoritarian attitudes and responsive parenting could be seen as a failure to replicate previous findings suggesting that authoritarian attitudes are not related to the warmth and responsiveness in parenting practices among African American mothers in comparison to European American mothers (Avenoli et al., 1999). These results and other work suggest that authoritarian child-rearing beliefs or beliefs about the infant's negative intentions, even in their milder forms, could make it

more difficult for mothers who hold these beliefs to adopt a responsive and sensitive interaction style with their infants (Deater-Deckard & Dodge, 1997; Field & Widmayer, 1981; Guzell & Vernon-Feagans, 2004; Smyke, Boris, & Alexander, 2002; Solomon, Martin, & Cottingham, 1993).

In addition, concerns about spoiling the infant were negatively related to responsive parenting practices for African American mothers but not for European American mothers. This suggests that beliefs about the infant's negative intentionality are positively related to concerns about spoiling and negatively related to parenting practices for European American mothers. In contrast, without being directly related to each other, concerns about both the infant's negative intentions and about spoiling are negatively related to parenting practices for African American mothers. These findings also support the link between certain parenting beliefs and practices among the mothers of young infants and indicate that these links may vary by race.

These findings may suggest that efforts to minimize the use of physical punishment with very young children should focus on the extent to which such behaviors are based in the mother's beliefs that infants can intentionally misbehave and need to learn to respect the mother's authority to avoid long-term behavior problems. There is some evidence that such approaches have been successful among mothers referred for treatment because of having abused their infants (Bugental & Happaney, 2000, 2004). Perhaps such interventions might also be appropriate for mothers who espouse beliefs about infant negative intentionality without using abusive levels of punishment.

There are several limitations to the present research. First, we were unable to equate the two racial groups in terms of socioeconomic status. The African American samples in both studies were more likely to be poor, single, and less educated. It is possible that observed race differences might be masking socioeconomic differences. Future research should more carefully account for this confound. Second, the next step involves looking beyond parenting to child outcomes. Hopefully, the next round of research will also address this concern. Third, we focused on sensitive and responsive parenting in this study, although most previous work has examined the links between beliefs and practices with regard to punishment and harsh or uninvolved parenting. Last, the present study focused exclusively on mothers. Generalizations about parenting will require not only comparable data from fathers but also an examination of how the beliefs of individual parents are affected in a dyadic parenting context.

In conclusion, this study shows the diversity within groups of European American and African American mothers regarding their parenting practices and beliefs. Variability in beliefs about infant negative intentionality and related concerns about spoiling the infant were detected in the qualitative analysis, and these differences in beliefs predicted quality of parenting in the quantitative analysis. Extreme beliefs about negative intentionality and spoiling were related to parenting practices that were less sensitive for both European American and African American mothers. Beliefs that portray an infant as being capable of deliberately trying to dominate the mother-infant relationship and as needing discipline to become obedient were linked to less responsive styles of parenting.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (R40 MC 04293) and the National Science Foundation (Durham Child Health and Development Grant-BCS-0126475). The authors thank Sarah Henderson for her assistance preparing the manuscript; they especially thank the families who let them into their lives.

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APPENDIX A

Sample of Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview conducted at 4-6 months:

- What changes did having [child's name] bring to your life?
- What have you found to be rewarding about raising [child's name]?
- What have been some of the difficulties or challenges of having and caring for a new baby?
- How would you describe [child's name]'s personality/temperament? Please give some examples.
- What do you think a 3-month-old baby can understand? What are they capable of learning at this age?
- [For each specific topic the mother mentions, ask]: How can you tell they understand? How do they show it?
- What are some of the things you do with [child's name] to encourage his/her physical development or learning?
- What do you think are the important interactions that take place between a mother and child?

Interview conducted at 10 to 12 months:

- What is the baby's personality or temperament like now? Is this different than the last time we talked? Please describe.
- What do you think your baby can now understand as compared to 6 months ago?
- What do you think babies are they capable of learning at this age?
- At what age do you think babies are capable of knowing what they want? Please explain.
- At what age do you think they are capable of doing things on purpose? Of manipulating situations or adults? Please explain.
- Do you think your baby deliberately smiles or cries to let you know how he/she feels or to get your attention?
- Do you think that parents can spoil babies? How or why not?
- What would you say are your current challenges/concerns in relation to caring for the baby? Is there anything particular that stresses you out? What do you do when this happens?
- What kinds of things you do now to try to encourage the baby's good behavior? Please describe?
- What are some of the other things you do with [child's name] to encourage his/her physical development or learning? (e.g., play music, sing)

Interview conducted at 16 to 18 months:

- How would you describe his/her personality and temperament now? Have you noticed a change in these since our last interview?
- What do you think your baby can now understand as compared to 6 months ago? How can you tell he/she understands something? How do they show it? Give me an example of something the baby has learned.

- What do you think babies can learn at this age?
- Do you think that he/she has developed a stronger sense for what he/she wants? What makes you say this/how can you tell?
- Have you noticed [baby's name] doing things on purpose? Please describe.
- How do you play with the baby? Has [baby's name] learned to play any games with you? What are they?
- What would you say are your current challenges/concerns in relation to caring for the baby? Is there anything particular that stresses you out? What do you do when this happens?
- Are there things you do now to try to encourage the baby's good behavior? Please describe?
- What are the most positive experiences about caring for a baby his/her/his age?

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