

## Introduction

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that is characterized by impairments in social communication and restricted and repetitive interests and behaviors (CDC, 2015). Given the associated impairments, a diagnosis of ASD may influence the choice of parenting style employed in the household (Sanders, 1996), and ultimately the quality of the parent-child relationship.

There are three main parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive (Baumrind, 1971). Research on the typically developing (TD) population has found that the authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are often related to poorer child outcomes, including higher levels of child behavior problems. Alternatively, the authoritative parenting style is associated with better social and behavioral outcomes for the child (Woolfson, 2006). There is a paucity of literature exploring how parenting styles impact the parent-child relationship for children with autism spectrum disorder.

## Study Objectives

1. Determine which parenting styles mothers and fathers of children with ASD use
2. Examine if parenting styles are associated with the quality of the parent child relationship

## Method

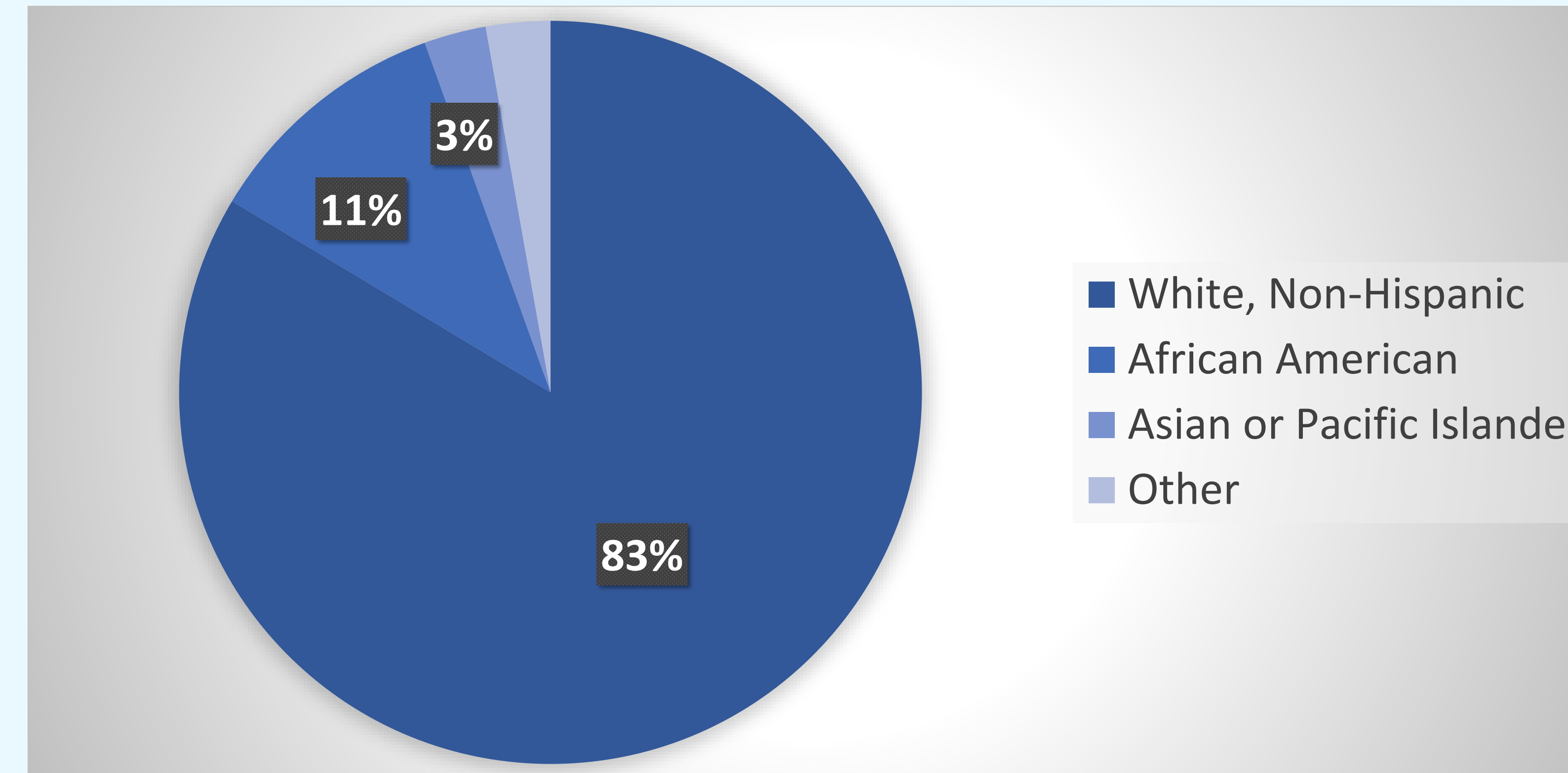
### Sample

- 188 couples (375 parents) with a child with ASD
  - 188 mothers, 187 fathers
- Average Age of Parents (years): Mothers (M = 38.66, SD = 5.542); Fathers (M = 40.76, SD = 6.19)
- Average household income: between \$80,000 - \$89,000
- Children with ASD: Age (M = 7.91, SD = 2.25; 85.64% male)

### Measures

- Bengtson Positive Affect Index (PAI; Roberts and Bengtson, 1991)
- Parenting Style and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ; Robinson, Mandlco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001)
  - Scaled from 1-5 (1=never, 2=once in a while, 3=about half of the time, 4=very often, 5=always)

Chart 1: Parent Ethnicity Distribution



## Results

Table 1: Parenting Style Mean Scores and Paired Sample *t* Scores for Mothers and Fathers

| Parenting Style | Parent | Mean (SD)   | <i>t</i> | <i>p</i> |
|-----------------|--------|-------------|----------|----------|
| Authoritative   | Mom    | 3.96 (.486) | 3.919    | <.001    |
|                 | Dad    | 3.77 (.561) |          |          |
| Authoritarian   | Mom    | 1.84 (.374) | -4.672   | <.001    |
|                 | Dad    | 2.02 (.484) |          |          |
| Permissive      | Mom    | 2.38 (.333) | 2.813    | <.01     |
|                 | Dad    | 2.29 (.321) |          |          |

Authoritative = high control, high responsiveness

Authoritarian = high control, low responsiveness

Permissive = low control, high responsiveness

Table 3: Association Between Parenting Style and Parent-Child Relationship Quality

| Parenting Style | Bengtson Score           |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Authoritative   | $r = .494$<br>$p < .001$ |
| Authoritarian   | $r = .302$<br>$p < .001$ |
| Permissive      | $r = -.140$<br>$p < .01$ |

## Findings

- Authoritative parenting was the most common parenting style employed by our sample.
- Paired sample *t*-tests indicate significant differences between mothers and fathers for all three parenting styles:
  - Mothers appear to be more authoritative than fathers  $t(186) = 3.919$ ,  $p = <.001$ , as well as more permissive  $t(186) = 2.813$ ,  $p = <.01$ .
  - Fathers appear to be more authoritarian than mothers  $t(186) = -4.672$ ,  $p = <.001$ .
- Pearson correlations indicated significant associations between parent-child relationship quality and all three parenting styles.
- Findings indicate that the more authoritative the parenting style, the higher the parent-child relationship quality.

## Discussion

- Our sample most commonly employs an authoritative parenting style, which is significantly positively correlated with higher parent-child relationship quality.
- Authoritative and permissive parenting is correlated with lower parent-child relationship quality.
- Future research should:
  - Investigate the potential bidirectional relationship between parenting style and parent-child relationship for the ASD population.
  - Examine the reason why the authoritative parenting style results in better parent-child relationship quality in families with children with ASD as opposed to other parenting styles
  - Explore possible reasons as to why mothers and fathers may employ different parenting styles within the same household.

## References

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