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The Well-Being of Children Living with Interethnic Parents: Are They at a Disadvantage?

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Abstract

An increasing number of U.S. children are living with interethnic parents, yet we know relatively little about how they are faring. Using data from the first wave (1987–1988) of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), this study examines differences in child well-being between children living with interethnic parents and those living with same-ethnic parents. Results provide only limited evidence that child well-being is lower among children living with interethnic parents. Compared with children in same-ethnic families, children living with interethnic parents exhibited higher levels of negative affect, and this difference could not be explained by differences in background or family characteristics, levels of parents relationship stressors, or parenting quality. At the same time, however, no differences were found in global well-being, positive affect, or behavior problems. Children living with interethnic parents may face some greater difficulties that warrant concern, but they do not appear to face pervasive disadvantages.

Keywords

child well-being; interethnic; interracial; multiethnic; multiracial

Rates of racial and ethnic intermarriage in the United States have been increasing considerably. Although the percentage of marriages that are interracial is still relatively low, it has risen from less than 1% in 1970 to over 5% in 2000, with the number of interracial couples increasing tenfold during this time period to more than 3 million in 2000 (Fu & Heaton, 2008; Lee & Edmonston, 2005). These patterns are linked to corresponding changes in children's lives, with 6.4% of all children (over 3 million) living with interracially married parents in 2000, up from 1.5% in 1970 (Lee & Edmonston, 2005). The vast majority of children living with interracially married parents are the biological offspring of both parents, but even where this is not the case, these parents play a key role in shaping children's racial identity, adjustment, and well-being (Lee & Edmonston, 2005). Nevertheless, we know relatively little about how such children are faring. There is some concern that these children face greater difficulties and experience lower levels of well-being than children living with same race/ethnic parents (Cooney & Radina, 2000). Only a few studies have empirically tested this proposition, however, and most suffer from reliance on small, nonrepresentative samples, examine a narrow age range of children, and focus on a limited number of child outcomes (Shih & Sanchez, 2005).

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This study seeks to provide a better understanding of child well-being among children living with married parents who are of different races/ethnicities. In this paper, the term "interethnic" is used to describe marriages in which partners differ in their racial or ethnic identification and "same-ethnic" is used to describe couples who share their racial or ethnic identification, similar to Hohmann-Marriott and Amato (2008) who note that the term interethnic can include both interracial and interethnic marriages. This study considers marriages between major U.S. racial/ethnic groups including whites (non-Hispanic), blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans.

The first aim of this study is to examine whether child well-being differs between children living with interethnic and same-ethnic parents. To go beyond some of the limitations of much existing work, we use nationally representative data from the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). We focus on a broad age range of children, from 5 to 18 years old, and consider four different indicators of child well-being including global well-being, positive affect, negative affect, and behavioral problems.

A second aim of this study is to assess whether other family characteristics and processes that differ by interethnic status explain any differences that are found in child well-being. In addition to controlling for demographic and family characteristics, two potential explanatory factors are considered: level of parents' relationship stressors and parenting quality. Both relationship stressors and poor parenting practices negatively influence child well-being (e.g., Gerard, Krishnakumar, & Buehler, 2006), and some prior research suggests differences exist between interethnic and same-ethnic couples on these factors (e.g., Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008; Shih & Sanchez, 2005), but prior studies have not tested the extent to which differences in relationship stressors or parenting quality can account for differences in child outcomes between interethnic and same-ethnic families. We consider several indicators of relationship stressors (marital conflict, nonshared values, lack of social support) and parenting quality (parental monitoring, having difficult and enjoyable times with children, parental warmth and harsh discipline).

A strength of the current study is that it includes the self-reported racial and ethnic identification of both spouses. This is an improvement over studies that rely on one spouse reporting for both people because an individual's racial-ethnic classification of a spouse may not always match up with that spouse's self-identification (Harris & Sim, 2002). It should be noted, however, that children growing up in a family with parents who self-identify as members of two different racial groups, or alternatively, with parents who identify with the same racial group may or may not hold a consistent self-identification. For example, some children who identify as multiracial may have two parents who identify with the same racial group, and other children who identify with a single race may live with parents who identify with different racial groups (Harris & Sim, 2002). Our study, therefore, addresses the question of whether children who are growing up in a family with parents who self-identify as members of two different racial-ethnic groups experience more negative outcomes than those who are growing up in a family with two parents who identify with the same racial-ethnic group. Our findings may not correspond directly with differences in well-being between children who self-identify as multiracial and those who identify with a single race, although there is likely to be substantial overlap between parent and child self-identification (see Harris & Sim, 2002). Although having data from both parents and their children would be ideal to better address some of this complexity, having parental reports does allow us to examine the implications of differences in their racial-ethnic self-identification for their children. Further, the parent's self-identification is particularly relevant for many of the important mechanisms examined in this study, including relationship stressors such as marital conflict, and parenting quality.

Background

A few early scholars suggested that children in interethnic families were at greater risk of negative outcomes than children in same-ethnic families, but provided little empirical evidence to support their conclusions. Results were often based on nonrepresentative samples (e.g., Gordon, 1964; McDermott & Fukunaga, 1977; Porterfield, 1978), and interethnic families were not always directly compared to same-ethnic families (e.g., Gordon, 1964; Porterfield, 1978). In particular, it was suggested that children in interethnic families were at greater risk for lower levels of self-esteem, trust, and feelings of acceptance (Gordon, 1964; Mann & Waldron, 1977; Porterfield, 1978), and exhibited greater levels of anxiety, restlessness, aggressiveness, and withdrawal (McDermott & Fukunaga, 1977). Even some of these early studies, however, provided mixed findings or suggested no differences. For example, one study using data from the Hawaii Family Study of Cognition found that offspring in interethnic families did not appear to be at greater risk of developing internal or social adjustment problems than offspring in same-ethnic families, and few differences in personality traits existed between the two groups (Johnson & Nagoshi, 1986).

More recent research has focused on adolescent well-being and multiracial offspring in particular, with a few studies based on nationally representative data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (Add Health). Findings from these studies provide some limited evidence for a negative relationship between interethnic status and some adolescent outcomes. Specifically, these studies found some evidence that multiracial adolescents had greater involvement in risky and antisocial behavior (Fryer, Kahn, Levitt, & Spenkuch, 2008), and higher rates of depression, counseling, and academic problems (Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2006; Cheng & Lively, 2009; Cooney & Radina, 2000; Harris & Thomas, 2002; Milan & Keiley, 2000), than monoracial adolescents. A study of middle school students in Seattle found that multiracial students exhibited greater levels of physical violence and were more likely to try cigarettes or alcohol than monoracial students (Choi, Harachi, Gillmore, & Catalano, 2006). One study of university students, however, found no difference between mixed heritage students and same heritage students on levels of self esteem, feelings of alienation, or stress (Stephan & Stephan, 1991).

These studies also suggest, however, that the relationship between interethnic status and youth outcomes depends on several factors including the way multiracial identification was measured, the specific multiracial and monoracial groups included for comparison, and the well-being outcomes examined. For example, Stephan and Stephan (1991) defined mixed heritage as any combination of white, Asian, and Hispanic ancestry, and did not find multiracial offspring to be at greater risk for negative outcomes than monoracial offspring. Fryer and colleagues (2008) compared black-white biracial youth to black monoracial and white monoracial youth, and found black-white youth were involved in more risky and antisocial behavior than both monoracial groups, but their levels of academic achievement fell in between them. Cheng and Lively (2009) compared six different multiracial groups with their associated monoracial counterparts across 13 adolescent outcomes. Results varied by the specific subgroups compared and the outcome examined. They found evidence that multiracial adolescents fared less well than monoracial adolescents on some outcomes, but they were comparable on other outcomes.

In a recent review of the literature on multiracial individuals and psychological well-being, Shih and Sanchez (2005) concluded that the evidence for poorer adjustment among multiracial individuals was decidedly mixed. Overall, the limited and mixed findings of previous research provide no clear or strong pattern regarding whether children in interethnic families are generally fairing more poorly than their peers living in same-ethnic families. The ambiguity of existing studies suggest a need for more research to understand

how child well-being may differ, or not differ, between children in interethnic families and children in same-ethnic families, as well as the family characteristics and processes that may account for any differences in well-being that exist (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008).

Conceptual Model

In this study, the effect of parents' ethnic heterogamy on child well-being is tested as a mediation model based on the spillover hypothesis. Empirical research has shown support for the spillover hypothesis, which suggests that tensions from the marital relationship can carry over into the parent-child relationship (Engfer, 1988; Erel & Burman, 1995). Interethnic couples may experience greater relationship stressors, which stem from experiencing more marital conflict, having fewer shared values, and receiving less social support from others than same-ethnic couples. These negative factors that affect the couple's relationship may lead to poorer quality parenting and weaker parent-child ties. Problematic parenting, in turn, could negatively affect children's well-being and development. A simple conceptual model would take the form:

> parents' interethnic status → parents' relationship stressors → quality of parenting → child well-being

Prior research provides some support for the link between interethnic status and relationship stressors. Greater marital heterogamy, particularly age and racial heterogamy, is associated with reports of lower marital quality and lower marital happiness (Amato, Johnson, Booth, & Rogers, 2003). A recent study found that the lower relationship quality reported by partners in interethnic unions stemmed from these couples receiving less social support, having fewer shared values, and more complex relationship histories than same-ethnic couples (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008). One study focusing on adolescents in married two-parent households, however, found no differences in parental reports of marital quality by whether the adolescent identified as multiracial (Cooney & Radina, 2000).

The presence of relationship stressors has been linked to poorer quality parenting. Marital conflict is associated with harsh and less favorable discipline techniques (Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2000), greater parental withdrawal and less emotional support to children (Lindahl & Malik, 1999), and tenser parent-child relations (Almeida, Wethington, Chandler, 1999). Parents who lack supportive social networks have been found to be less warm and responsive toward their children, and report feeling less effective as parents (Marshall, Noonan, McCartney, Marx, & Keefe, 2001; McGuire-Schwartz, 2007).

Greater relationship stressors in parent's lives have also been linked with negative outcomes for children. Marital conflict has been associated with children's greater externalizing problems (Fauber, Forehand, Thomas, & Wierson, 1990; Gerard et al., 2006; Jenkins, 2000), internalizing problems (Davies & Cummings, 1994; Du Rocher Schudlich & Cummings, 2003; Katz & Gottman, 1996; Schoppe-Sullivan, Schermerhorn, & Cummings, 2007) and overall poorer adjustment (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Erel & Burman, 1995). Holding fewer shared values between partners has been associated with children's withdrawal and mild depression (McDermott & Fukunaga, 1977). Parents' lack of social support has been associated with children having more frequent accidents and injuries (Leininger, Ryan, & Kalil, 2009), as well as more behavior problems and less competence in social situations (Marshall et al., 2001).

Prior research has also demonstrated an association between poor quality parenting and negative child outcomes (Demo & Cox, 2000). Some research has further suggested that poor quality parenting is a mediator in the link between parent's relationship stressors and child internalizing and externalizing problems (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Gerard et al., 2006;

Katz & Gottman, 1996; Marshall et al., 2001). With regard to a direct link between interethnic status and parenting quality, there is some suggestion that parenting quality may be lower in interethnic families, but the evidence is more limited and mixed (Cooney & Radina, 2000; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). One study using nationally representative data from Add Health found no differences in adolescent reports of relationship quality with mothers or fathers by the adolescent's interethnic status (Milan & Keiley, 2000).

Despite some research suggesting that differences exist between interethnic and same-ethnic couples in levels of relationship stressors and parenting quality, and the large body of research linking relationship stressors and parenting quality to child well-being, prior research has not tested the extent to which differences in relationship stressors or parenting quality can account for differences in child outcomes between interethnic and same-ethnic families.

In addition to considering the role of relationship stressors and parenting quality, we also control for several background and family characteristics that may be associated with interethnic status and child well-being. Controls include the parent respondent's gender, race/ethnicity, and education, the child's gender and age, the couple's income, length of the parental marriage, the number of children in the household, and the presence of any blended children in the household. For example, compared to same-ethnic couples, interethnic couples are more likely to be in marriages of shorter duration (and therefore have a younger focal child), have children from prior relationships in their household, and have less education and income (Bratter & King, 2008; Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008). Higher levels of parental education and income tend to be associated with higher levels of child well-being (Bornstein & Bradley, 2003), whereas child well-being may be compromised in families with a large number of children (Blake, 1981) or for children living in blended families (Stewart, 2007). Younger and older children often exhibit different levels of well-being, with problem behaviors tending to increase during adolescence (Kann et al., 2000). Girls are more likely to exhibit internalizing problems and boys are more likely to exhibit externalizing problems (Avison & McAlpine, 1992). Parent's gender is also included because it may be related to their reports of family processes and child outcomes (Thompson & Walker, 1989). The parent respondent's race/ethnicity is included in the analyses to estimate the effects of being in an interethnic family on child well-being separately from the effects of the parent's own race/ethnicity on reports of child well-being (see Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008, for a similar approach).

METHOD

Data

Data come from the first wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a nationally representative probability sample of 13,007 adults in U.S. households in 1987–1988. The response rate was approximately 74%. The sampling design oversampled several groups including minorities, recently married persons, single parents, and cohabiters. A self-administered questionnaire was also given to the spouse (response rate of 83%) or cohabiting partner (response rate of 77%) of the primary respondent (see Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988 for a detailed description of the data). Descriptive results will be presented using the sample weight to allow for national representativeness. Regression results will be presented with unweighted data. Some have argued that using weights in multiple regression analysis is unnecessary or can lead to inaccurate results if independent variables in the models (e.g., race) are similar to variables used to create the sample weight (e.g., Winship & Radbill, 1994). Nevertheless, we tested the regression models with and without sample weights and the results did not yield substantively different conclusions.

Since the focus of the present study is on married couples with children, we selected only married respondents, reducing the original sample of main respondents (n = 13,007) to 6,877. Given that most of the child outcome measures were only available for children five or older, only married couples with a focal child ages five to 18 were included, reducing the sample to 2,446. Next, we eliminated respondents who did not have a completed spousal questionnaire, reducing the sample to 1,986. The spousal questionnaire was crucial for measuring nonshared values and determining the spouse's race/ethnicity. Cases where either the main respondent or spouse did not answer the racial/ethnic identification questions were also excluded, resulting in a final analysis sample of 1,936 families. Of the 1,936 main respondents, 102 were in interethnic marriages.

Measures

Parent's interethnic status—Each parent was asked which of nine categories best described their racial/ethnic identity: White (not of Hispanic origin), Black, Mexican American (or Chicano or Mexicano), Puerto Rican, Cuban, other Hispanic, Asian, American Indian, or other (only one main respondent and two spouses chose this last response). We combined responses of Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, and other Hispanic into a single Hispanic category, reducing the number of categories to six. Parents were defined as being in an interethnic marriage if each partner reported a different racial/ethnic identification (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*) based on this final six category identification. The most common interethnic pairing is White-Hispanic (representing 55 of the 102 couples), followed by White-American Indian (n=15). All other combinations have less than fifteen couples. We realize that broad identifications can mask important subgroup differences, but data limitations and small sample sizes for some subgroups precluded a more detailed analysis of ethnic categories or specific interethnic pairings (see Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008 for a similar strategy and discussion of this issue).

Child well-being—Four measures of child well-being are examined: global well-being, positive affect, negative affect, and behavior problems. All items in these measures come from the main respondent and are in reference to a focal child in the household. Global well-being is a single-item measure rating how well the focal child's life has been going overall (1 = *not well at all*; 4 = *very well*).

Standardized scales were created through factor analyses to signify positive and negative child affect. Positive affect is a six-item scale rating how often the focal child is willing to try new thing, keeps self busy, is cheerful and happy, does what the parent asks, gets along well with others, and carries out responsibilities on own (α = .62). Negative affect is a four-item scale rating how often the focal child is unhappy, sad, or depressed; bullies or is cruel or mean to others; is fearful or anxious; and loses temper easily (α = .55). Responses for each question ranged from 1 = *not true* to 3 = *often true*, and were coded so that the scales measure a high level of positive affect and a high level of negative affect.

Behavior problems is the final measure of child well-being. Respondents were asked if (1=*yes*, 0=*no*) they had to meet with a teacher or principal in the past year due to the child's behavior problems, if the child has ever been suspended or expelled from school, if the child has ever run away from home for one or more nights, if the child has ever been involved with the police, if the child has seen a doctor or therapist about any emotional or behavioral problems, and if the child was particularly difficult to raise. The two questions regarding suspension/expulsion from school, and meeting with a teacher/principal, were not applicable for the few children who were not attending school (n = 92), so we based the behavior problems measure on only the remaining four questions for this subgroup of children. We took the average of the four or six items to make an overall measure of behavior problems

(α = .76), with scores ranging from 0 = *did not experience any of the four or six behavior problems* to 1 = *experienced all four or six of the problems*.

Relationship stressors—Three distinct measures were used to reflect stressors that may negatively impact the couple's relationship quality. The first measure is a three item, standardized scale created through a factor analysis that assesses marital conflict (α = .63). The first item comes from a question asked of the main respondent: taking all things together, how would you describe your marriage? (1 = *very happy*; 7 = *very unhappy*). The second item comes from a question regarding what the respondent thinks the chances are that they will eventually separate or divorce (1 = *very low*; 5 = *very high*). Level of disagreement is the third item, represented as a scale (α = .77) created from seven questions asked of main respondents regarding how often in the last year they had arguments with their spouse about household tasks, money, spending time together, sex, having another child, in-laws, and the current children (1 = *never*; 6 = *almost every day*).

The second measure of relationship stressors is a constructed variable tapping the extent to which the couple has nonshared values. Both the main respondent and spouse were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with ten statements: it is better for everyone if the man earns the main living; it is better for a person to get married than to go through life being single; parents ought to help their children with college expenses; marriage should never be ended except under extreme circumstances; preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed; parents should provide financial help to their adult children when they are having difficulty; it is alright for an unmarried couple to live together even if they have no interest in considering marriage; parents should encourage just as much independence in their daughters as in their sons; children ought to let aging parents live with them; and in successful marriages partners must have freedom to do what they want individually (1 = *strongly agree*; 5 = *strongly disagree*). We computed the absolute difference between the main respondent's and spouse's responses to each item, and then computed the mean absolute difference as an overall measure of nonshared values. A higher score indicates a greater discrepancy between the main respondent and their spouse.

The third measure of relationship stressors is low social support. Main respondents were asked whether or not they had received help from friends/neighbors, sons/daughters, parents, brothers/sisters, other relatives, or "no one" in the past month with regard to five different sources of support: babysitting, transportation, repairs, work around the house, and advice/emotional support. We assigned a score of 1 for each situation that the respondent reported having received help from "no one". By adding across the five items, this measure is a count of the number of domains in which the main respondent received no help from anyone.

Quality of parenting—Quality of parenting taps three general domains: parental monitoring, quality of the parent-child relationship, and warmth/harsh discipline. Parental monitoring is assessed with a single item measure regarding whether the main respondent knows whom the focal child is with when away from home (1 = *hardly ever*; 4 = *all the time*).

The second domain reflects the quality of the parent-child relationship, and is assessed with two measures. Both measures come from single items, one regarding how often the main respondent had enjoyable times with the focal child in the past month, and the second regarding how often the main respondent had difficulty dealing with the focal child in the past month (1 = *never*; 6 = *almost every day*).

The last aspect of parenting quality consists of two measures: a measure of warmth and a measure of harsh discipline. Unlike previous questions that are asked in reference to the

focal child, items used in these measures are asked in reference to all children in the household, and therefore reflect parenting quality at a more general level. Warmth and harsh discipline are both two-item scales. Main respondents were asked how often they praise, hug, yell at, and spank or slap their children (1 = *never*; 4 = *very often*). Praise and hug (α = .58) were used to measure warmth; yell and spank/slap (α = .46) were used to measure harsh discipline.

Controls—Main respondent gender and focal child gender are both dichotomous variables (1 = *female*, 0 = *male*). Race/ethnicity of the main respondent, when used as a control, is measured as a set of dummy variables: White (omitted reference group), Black, Hispanic, and all others. Education of the main respondent is measured as a set of dummy variables: less than high school (omitted reference group), completion of high school or GED, some college but less than a Bachelor's Degree, and received a Bachelor's Degree or beyond. Income reflects the couple's combined income in thousands of dollars. The log of income is used in the regression analysis to minimize skewness. Age of the focal child is a continuous variable ranging from five to 18 years. The number of children in the household under 19 years of age was created from information contained in the household roster. Length of the marriage was constructed by subtracting the date of the marriage from the date of when the interview took place, and is represented in years. The presence of any blended children in the household (i.e. stepchildren) is a dichotomous variable (1 = *yes*, 0 = *no*).[1]

Factor analysis demonstrated that all scales were uni-dimensional. Correlations between control variables were all below .42 except for the correlation between length of marriage and the presence of any blended children ($r = -.61$). Correlations between the relationship stressor measures, and correlations between the parenting quality measures, were all below .34. Fewer than 2% of the cases were missing on the child well-being measures. For the parenting quality measures, fewer than 5% of the cases were missing. Low social support, nonshared values, and marital conflict had approximately 6%, 11%, and 16% missing, respectively. All control variables had 2% or less missing cases, except for income where approximately 11% of the cases were missing. To deal with missing data, multiple imputation (five imputations) was conducted using the ICE program in Stata (Stata Corporation, 2003).

Analytic Strategy

We begin by comparing differences between interethnic and same-ethnic families on all of the study variables. Mean levels are reported for continuous measures, with tests of statistical significance based on t-tests. Percentages are reported for categorical measures, and tests of significance are based on the chi-square test. Then we examine the relationship between parent's interethnic status and child well-being in a bivariate and multivariate ordinary least squares regression framework. We present two models for each of the four child outcomes. The bivariate relationship between parent's interethnic status and child well-being is estimated in the first model. The second model is the full multivariate model that includes parent's interethnic status along with all controls for background and family characteristics (i.e. age of focal child, gender of focal child and respondent, respondent's race/ethnicity, respondent's level of education, income, length of marriage, presence of blended children in the household, and number of children under 19 years old), the three measures of relationship stressors and the five measures of parenting quality. [2]

[1]We also tested substituting a measure of whether the focal child was a blended child (i.e., the stepchild of one of the parents), but results are similar regardless of which measure is used.

RESULTS

The interethnic families in our study differed significantly from same-ethnic families on several background and family characteristics (Table 1). Focal children with interethnic parents were somewhat younger, on average, than those with same-ethnic parents, by about one year. The majority of main respondents (and therefore, couples) in same-ethnic families were White whereas Whites and Hispanics made up the majority of main respondents in the interethnic group (and White-Hispanic marriages were the most common). Interethnic parents had lower income and were in marriages of shorter duration.

With regard to relationship stressors, or factors that could negatively influence the parent's relationship, only one significant difference was apparent. Interethnic parents reported a greater dissimilarity in values than same-ethnic parents, but they did not differ much in levels of marital conflict or in receiving social support from others. There is no evidence that parenting quality differed between interethnic and same-ethnic families, based on the five indicators examined here.

There is only limited evidence that child well-being is lower among children living with interethnic parents. Compared with children in same-ethnic families, children living with interethnic parents exhibited higher levels of negative affect. There were no differences, however, in global well-being, positive affect, or behavior problems. We turn next to further explore differences in child well-being in a multivariate regression framework, but it is worth noting that results thus far suggest rather limited differences between children living with interethnic parents and those living with same-ethnic parents, particularly with regard to levels of parents' relationship stressors, parenting quality, or child well-being.

Results from the regression analysis (Table 2) reinforce previous findings. The bivariate models replicate the findings from Table 1, and the addition of controls and mediating factors had little influence on the effect of interethnic status on child well-being. Negative affect was the only child outcome significantly associated with parents' interethnic status, with a moderate effect size of .24.[3] Children living with interethnic parents exhibited higher levels of negative affect than children in same-ethnic families, and this association was not explained by differences in background or family characteristics, relationship stressors, or parenting quality.

Given that there were few differences in relationship stressors or parenting quality by interethnic status, it is not surprising that these factors did not help explain the association between interethnic status and negative affect. These factors were, however, significantly associated with child well-being. In particular, marital conflict was associated with lower levels of child well-being, whereas parental warmth and a positive parent-child relationship

[2]In preliminary analyses, we estimated four models for each of the child outcomes, corresponding to our conceptual model. The first model was the bivariate model and the second model added in the controls for background and family characteristics. The three measures of relationships stressors were added in a third model, and the five parenting quality measures were added in a fourth model, in order to test whether they mediated the effect of parent's interethnic status on child well-being. Results from the intermediate models, however, did not add any new information and were consistent with the final full model. Controls had little influence on the relationship between parent's interethnic status and child outcomes, and there was little evidence of any mediation of the effect of parent's interethnic status through relationship stressors or parenting quality. Thus, we only report results from the bivariate and final multivariate models in Table 2. The intermediate models are available upon request.

[3]Because the level of behavior problems was skewed, an additional set of analyses were conducted on this dependent variable using Poisson regression. These results also suggested that interethnic status is not associated with child behavior problems. To further check the lack of association between interethnic status and child outcomes, we examined the association between interethnic status and each of the individual items that made up the three outcome scales (global well-being is an individual item). Similar to results in Table 2, none of the individual items from behavior problems or positive affect were associated with interethnic status. With regard to negative affect, interethnic status was most strongly associated with the two items assessing how often the focal child bullies or is cruel or mean to others, and how often the focal child is fearful or anxious.

(more enjoyable and less difficult) were associated with higher levels of child well-being. Many of the background and family characteristics were also associated with child outcomes in expected ways. For example, child well-being tended to be higher for girls and younger children, and in families with higher income, fewer children, and marriages of longer duration.

DISCUSSION

An increasing number of U.S. children are living with interethnic parents, yet we know relatively little about how they are faring. This study examined differences in child well-being between children living with interethnic parents and those living with same-ethnic parents, drawing upon nationally representative data and focusing on a broad age range of children and four indicators of child well-being. Results provide only limited evidence that child well-being is lower among children living with interethnic parents. Compared with children in same-ethnic families, children living with interethnic parents exhibited higher levels of negative affect. At the same time, however, no differences were found in global well-being, positive affect, or behavior problems. We conclude that children living with interethnic parents may face some greater difficulties that warrant concern, but they do not appear to face pervasive disadvantages. We concur with Cooney and Radina's (2000) assessment that prior literature has overstated the extent and range of problems faced by children living in interethnic families, who as a group do not fit the typical portrayal of being fairly troubled youth. Our results are also consistent with more recent research that has examined multiple child outcomes and found that multiracial children fare less well than monoracial children on some outcomes but not others (e.g., Cheng & Lively, 2009).

With a moderate effect size, the finding that children with interethnic parents had higher levels of negative affect than children with same-ethnic parents warrants further research into better understanding the mechanisms that lead to such a difference. Our finding is consistent with recent research on adolescents, which reports higher levels of antisocial behavior and higher rates of depression and counseling among interracial offspring than same-race offspring (Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck; 2006; Cooney & Radina, 2000; Fryer et al., 2008; Harris & Thomas, 2002), as our measure of negative affect taps related domains. Our study also suggests that this difference may start to appear before adolescence.

Our study was unable to account for the difference in negative affect between children living with interethnic and same-ethnic parents, and our initial conceptual model was not supported. Although we found some significant differences between the two groups on background and family characteristics that tend to be associated with child well-being (e.g., income, marital duration), controlling for these factors had little influence. Our study also suggests that the differences in negative affect are not due to differences in relationship stressors or parenting quality. Consistent with much prior research (Demo & Cox, 2000), relationship stressors (particularly marital conflict) and parenting quality (especially parental warmth, and an enjoyable and less difficult parent-child relationship) were themselves associated with child outcomes.

With the exception of nonshared values, we found few differences in levels of relationship stressors or parenting quality between interethnic and same-ethnic families. This was somewhat surprising given some prior research suggesting that interethnic couples experience greater relationship stressors and more problematic parenting (e.g., Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008; Shih & Sanchez, 2005). In particular, many interethnic couples have historically reported at least some level of opposition from others in response to their heterogamous relationship (Killian, 2001; Mills, Daly, Longmore, & Kilbridge, 1995), yet the married interethnic couples in our study did not report receiving less social support than

their same-ethnic counterparts. It should be noted, however, that there are also studies that report few differences between interethnic and same-ethnic couples with regard to relationship stressors and parenting quality (e.g., Cooney & Radina, 2000; Milan & Keiley, 2000). Given the limited and mixed findings of prior research, future research would benefit from greater attention to understanding marital relationships, social support networks, and parenting practices in interethnic families. As with prior research on child well-being, this may be another area where differences between interethnic and same-ethnic families have been overstated.

Alternatively, these mixed findings may result at least in part from differences in the groups studied. For example, differences in marital conflict by interethnic status may be more apparent in samples of couples regardless of whether they have children (e.g., Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008) than in samples of long-term married couples with adolescent offspring (e.g., Cooney & Radina, 2000), as the latter group is likely more selective of higher quality marriages. Our study is also selective in examining families where the parents are married and at least one child in the household is five or older. Thus the focal children may be relatively well-adjusted and have parents with relatively good relationships, social support networks, and parenting skills.

A limitation of the current study is the modest sample size of interethnic families, which can hinder the ability to detect smaller group differences that may exist in the population (i.e., lower statistical power makes rejecting the null hypothesis of no difference less likely). At the same time, however, more confidence can be put in the significant differences that were found. The modest sample of interethnic families also precluded an examination of differences in family processes and child outcomes for specific interethnic pairings. Although our main aim was to compare children living with interethnic parents to children living with same-ethnic parents, there is diversity within these groups as well that may further influence child well-being. For example, there is some suggestion that Black-White couples may experience more challenges and stressors than Hispanic-White couples (Hohmann-Marriott & Amato, 2008), which could lead to corresponding differences in child outcomes. Recent research on adolescents also suggests that certain multiracial subgroups have worse outcomes than others when compared to their monoracial counterparts (e.g., Campbell & Eggerling-Boeck, 2006; Cheng & Lively, 2009). Future research should explore these potential subgroup differences to the extent that data allow to further clarify when children from interethnic families may be at risk for poorer outcomes.

Future research would benefit from considering children of all ages and following them over time. Relatively little is known regarding how family relationships unfold over time in interethnic families, or whether any risks that children in these families face appear early in childhood or manifest themselves during key developmental periods, such as adolescence.

Given that the number of children living in interethnic families is likely to continue to rise, a better understanding of how these children are faring, and the challenges that their families face, is of utmost importance, and a necessary first step on the way to helping such families confront any difficulties they may encounter. Our study suggests that children living with interethnic parents may face greater difficulties in some domains that warrant concern and attention, although they do not appear to face pervasive disadvantages.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for all Study Variables by Interethnic Status: Weighted Means (Standard Errors) or Percentages

	Interethnic (*n* = 102)	Same-ethnic (*n* = 1834)	Difference[a]
Child's age	10.52 (*.40*)	11.62 (*.11*)	*
Child's gender %			
Male	50	51	
Female	50	49	
Parent gender %			
Male	54	53	
Female	46	47	
Parent race/ethnicity %			***
White	49	84	
Black	6	8	
Hispanic	36	7	
Other	9	1	
Parent education %			
Less than high school	18	14	
High school	42	40	
Some college	27	23	
Bachelor's degree or beyond	13	23	
Income	39,209 (*3,450*)	44,832 (*1,420*)	*
Any blended children %			
Yes	22	14	
No	78	86	
Length of marriage	11.65 (*.74*)	15.52 (*.20*)	***
Number of children < 19 years old	2.17 (*.12*)	2.09 (*.03*)	
Relationship stressors			
Marital conflict	.11 (*.11*)	−.02 (*.03*)	
Nonshared values	.94 (*.04*)	.85 (*.01*)	*
Low social support	2.80 (*.18*)	3.05 (*.04*)	
Parenting quality			
Monitoring	3.77 (*.05*)	3.83 (*.01*)	
Enjoyable times with child	4.96 (*.13*)	4.77 (*.04*)	
Difficulty dealing with child	3.05 (*.17*)	2.78 (*.04*)	
Warmth	.02 (*.10*)	−.02 (*.03*)	
Harsh discipline	.02 (*.12*)	−.04 (*.03*)	
Child well-being			
Global well-being	3.48 (*.07*)	3.59 (*.01*)	
Positive affect	−.07 (*.09*)	.04 (*.03*)	
Negative affect	.25 (*.09*)	−.03 (*.03*)	*
Behavior problems	.05 (*.02*)	.04 (*.00*)	

[a] t-test or chi-square test finds a significant difference between interethnic and same-ethnic families at

[*] p<.05 or

[***] p < .001; tests based on unweighted data.

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Table 2

Unstandardized Coefficients from Regressions Predicting Child Well-Being

	Global Well-Being		Positive Affect		Negative Affect		Behavior Problems	
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**
Parent's interethnic status	−.08	−.07	−.07	.01	.24*	.24*	−.01	−.01
Background/family characteristics								
Child's age		−.03***		−.02*		.01		.00**
Female child		.09***		.05		−.00		−.04***
Female parent		.00		−.02		−.11*		.01
Hispanic parent[a]		.03		−.20*		−.22*		.01
Black parent[a]		.06		.17*		−.09		.03*
Other parent[a]		.02		−.24		.03		−.00
High school[b]		.04		−.02		−.05		−.02
Some college[b]		.01		−.04		−.04		−.01
Bachelor's degree or beyond[b]		.06		−.01		−.18*		−.01
Income (log)		.03*		.11***		−.01		−.00
Any blended children		−.04		−.07		.06		.02
Length of marriage		.01***		.01*		−.01		−.00
Number of children <19 years old		−.03*		−.00		.06**		.00
Relationship stressors								
Marital conflict		−.07***		−.06**		.09***		.01
Nonshared values		.03		.11		.07		.02
Low social support		−.01		−.02		−.04*		−.00
Parenting quality								
Monitoring		−.01		.05		−.04		.01
Enjoyable times with child		.07***		.18***		−.13***		−.00
Difficulty dealing with child		−.08***		−.17***		.21***		.01***
Warmth		.08***		.13***		−.05*		−.00

	Global Well-Being		Positive Affect		Negative Affect		Behavior Problems	
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**	**Model 1**	**Model 2**
Harsh discipline		.01		−.03		.13***		.00
_constant	3.58***	3.32***	.00	−1.68***	−.01	.29	.05***	.02

[a] White is reference category.

[b] Less than high school is reference category.

* $p<.05$

** $p<.01$

*** $p<.001$