

# Together We Can: Increase Couple Functioning for Low-SES Families

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## Abstract

This study reviews how parenting efficacy and the coparenting relationship are influenced by a shortened and adapted Together We Can relationship program. Researchers were interested in determining how socioeconomic status and race impact parenting and coparenting outcomes. Participants included 26 White and African American individuals. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory and the spillover hypothesis assist with understanding how participant's environments have impacted their current relationship and parenting practices. Statistically significant differences were found between pre- and posttests on both parenting and coparenting outcomes; further analyses showed racial and socioeconomic differences within these outcomes. As society continues to form increased romantic relationships and parenting systems, relationship education programs should be evaluated with varied populations.

## Keywords

relationship, parenting, coparenting, socioeconomic status, parenting efficacy, minority, Together We Can, ecological theory, spillover hypothesis

Evidence indicates that couple relationship education (CRE) can be effective for both typical and at-risk couples; however, higher risk participants have shown to benefit most (Dupree et al., 2016; McGill et al., 2016). One aspect of CRE is to provide skills to individuals and couples so that negative stressors do not spill over into other environments (Bulling et al., 2020). For diverse samples of CRE participants, research indicates a decrease in depression and anxiety and an increase in self-esteem (McGill et al., 2016). McCormick and colleagues (2017) suggest low socioeconomic status (low-SES) and racial or ethnic minority individuals may be at heightened risk for unstable environments and relationships like higher divorce and breakup rates. However, CRE that has a focus on improving communication has positive correlations to relationship satisfaction across ethnicities and SES (Barton et al., 2017; Dupree et al., 2016).

Although research with diverse populations is increasing, more is still needed to understand the effectiveness of CREs; likewise, is the influence of CRE on parenthood. Previous empirical literature demonstrates that when parents exhibit positive parenting behaviors, their children are more likely to have healthy development and display higher well-being (Rowe et al., 2016). Therefore, it is essential that parents learn what positive parenting behaviors are and how to use them. Parent education programs can help foster positive parenting behaviors and increase parent's self-efficacy, leading to confidence in child-rearing situations (Harcourt et al., 2015).

Although helpful, many programs do not encompass the needs of families who are low-SES, minorities, unmarried, or have children older than five; many also do not include aspects of CRE between the parents (Adler-Baeder et al., 2013; Bulling et al., 2020). While the parenting relationship has been shown to affect parenting and child well-being, this correlation has been underinvestigated in low-SES families (Albritton et al., 2014; Carlson & McLanahan, 2006; DuPree et al., 2016). It is suggested that combining parent education and CRE can improve couple relationships by teaching components like communication skills which will lead to increases in the couple's ability to positively parent their children (Albritton et al., 2014).

## Literature Review

### *Low-SES and Racial/Ethnic Minority Families*

Research supports the idea that low-SES and racial or ethnic minority status may impact the couple relationship and parenting behaviors (Adler-Baeder et al., 2013; Baucom et al., 2018;

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Zilberstein, 2016). Low-SES couples experience instability in finances, housing, employment, work hours, transportation, childcare, and generally have less access to resources, which may reduce their overall relationship quality and stability (Bulling et al., 2020; Randles, 2014; Williams & Cheadle, 2016). These increased stressors can lead to unsatisfactory relationships and child outcomes in the form of lower self-efficacy, energy, engagement, and positive interactions (Albritton et al., 2014). Along with SES differences, Clark et al. (2013) found ethnic differences in family structure and parenting behaviors. Of the 36% of children who have unmarried parents, 46% of the African American population and 69% of the Hispanic population have unmarried parents (Hamilton et al., 2005). These numbers suggest that unmarried, racial/ethnic minority, low-SES parents may be at higher risk for relationship and parenting complications.

### *Coparenting*

Although not all couples are married, many are still a part of a coparenting relationship. Coparenting indicates the relationship between people working together to raise a child and divide the parenting responsibilities (Adler-Baeder et al., 2013; Randles, 2014). Regardless of marital status, parents are better equipped to parent when both parents care for the child, value the other's involvement, communicate, and respect each other (Pedro et al., 2012). The parent's ability to positively coparent relies on their willingness to learn new skills within their parenting and relationship (Cox & Shirer, 2009). Specific CREs that focus on strengthening couple relationships have the potential to improve the couple's parenting (Clark et al., 2013; Heyman et al., 2020). Although relationship and parent education are exceedingly crucial for low-SES and racial/ethnic minority families, research indicates that these families may have more difficulty maintaining the positive outcomes due to the adversity low-SES and racial or ethnic minority families experience in everyday life (Heyman et al., 2020; Leijten et al., 2013).

### *Relationship Education*

CREs that focus on parenting have the potential to confront couple and coparenting problems that can result in negative parenting and child outcomes (Adler-Baeder et al., 2013). Along with the environmental stressors that low-SES families juggle, relationship stressors with communication or intimacy have the potential to deduct warmth from the parent-child relationship (Albritton et al., 2014; Baucom et al., 2018). Conflict and decreased relationship quality can alter a couple's parenting by increasing the harshness of discipline, reducing involvement, and increasing the parent-child conflict (Albritton et al., 2014; Heyman et al., 2020); these interactions have the potential to negatively impact children's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development (Adler-Baeder et al., 2013). Both parent's potential is impacted by their

relationship with each other, showing the need for relationship and parent education (Adler-Baeder et al., 2013).

Relationship and parent education programs have the potential to increase parenting self-efficacy, communication skills, listening skills, anger management, and reduce parental stress (Harcourt et al., 2015). For low-SES parents, CREs have also been shown to reduce negative parenting behaviors that are associated with at-risk populations (e.g., corporal punishment, oppression of children, and lack of empathy; Baucom et al., 2018; Clark et al., 2013). Randles (2014) expressed how these education programs positively influence the family's environment by increasing involvement and economic stability. Benefits of relationship and parent education programs have lasting effects on parents and children that improve relationships and outcomes (Adler-Baeder et al., 2013).

### *Together We Can (TWC)*

The TWC program (Shirer et al., 2009) is research-based and comprised of relationship education components that focus on strengthening relationships, for a variety of relationship types, within a low-SES population. The adapted TWC curriculum consists of four modules focused on taking care of the family, self, relationships, and children's future (Duncan et al., 2019). The topics and goals within the modules (see Table 1) include the main concepts from the original version but cuts the required time in half (8 hr instead of 16). Shortening the program will provide participants an opportunity to reap similar benefits of the full program, enticing more people to participate and decreasing dropout rates due to the hectic schedules that many people within a low-SES face. Only introductory research has been conducted with the adapted program thus far.

### *Ecological Theory and Spillover Hypothesis*

Bronfenbrenner (1979) explained ecological theory as the interaction between a person and their environments; this theory is used as a framework to understand the connection between the parent relationship and the parent-child relationship. Ecological theory indicates that when structures within the environment, such as a relationship or education program, are altered, the individual's development and behavior can also be altered. Adler-Baeder and colleagues (2013) applied ecological theory to stress the importance of a positive couple relationship on subsequent child outcomes. Specifically, the nature of the relationship between parents has been shown to affect later adjustment and well-being of children (Carlson & McLanahan, 2006). Pedro and colleagues (2012) found the ecological theory to support the idea that not only does a positive couple relationship lead to positive child outcomes but also leads to more cooperation and respect between parents. On account of their findings that environmental stressors can lead to positive growth and interest in developing stress management skills, McGill and colleagues (2016) suggested ecological theory's continued use in assessing CRE outcomes.

**Table 1.** Together We Can—Adapted 8 hr Module Fundamentals.

Module Name	Lesson Topics	Module Goals
<i>Module I:</i> Taking care of my family	Getting started on your journey and building an intentional family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn about the program</li> <li>• Learn about the importance of record keeping</li> <li>• Reflect on the past</li> <li>• Set overall goals</li> <li>• Understand the basics of a strong family</li> <li>• Make a plan to strengthen family</li> </ul>
<i>Module II:</i> Taking care of myself	Managing stress and parenting together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand stress</li> <li>• Learn about the importance of coparenting</li> <li>• Learn how to maximize parenting time</li> <li>• Reflect on the importance of child support</li> </ul>
<i>Module III:</i> Taking care of my relationships	Building friendships: Positive stroke; avoiding discounting; listening to face, voice, and body; and managing conflict: Escalating and deescalating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significance of praising remarks</li> <li>• Learn to notice and understand nonverbal messages</li> <li>• Learn to handle defensive listening</li> </ul>
<i>Module IV:</i> Taking care of my future for my children	Taking care of my future for my children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn to manage conflict in a coparenting relationship</li> <li>• Experience mindfulness</li> <li>• Understand the challenges of stepfamilies</li> <li>• Take steps toward a positive future for family and child</li> </ul>

Just as ecological theory expects various influences to affect the parent and parent–child relationships, the spillover hypothesis expects positive or negative events within one relationship to affect other relationships (Pedro et al., 2012). A positively correlated spillover effect has been supported between the quality of a relationship and both parent’s parenting behaviors (Carlson & McLanahan, 2006). The spillover hypothesis is exceedingly pertinent to the population of this study with the expectance that a lower SES, racial/ethnic minority families may have multiple stressors that could impact their environments. The current behaviors and practices of participants in their relationship and parenting habits will be assessed through this framework to examine the family process from a multitude of lenses.

## Method

### Present Study

This study evaluates an adapted version of the program, TWC (Shirer et al., 2009), by comparing SES and race on the following questions: (i) Does the adapted version of TWC increase parenting efficacy? (ii) Does the adapted version of TWC positively influence the coparenting relationship? and (iii) How do racial and ethnic minority individuals and White individuals differ in their parenting efficacy and coparenting relationship outcomes? It is hypothesized that after engaging with the program, participants will have improved their parenting self-efficacy and have increased knowledge of communicating within their couple relationship.

### Procedures

After institutional review board approval was granted, participants were recruited through flyers and word of mouth via childcare centers, churches, and other public facilities. To be

eligible for the study, participants had to be at least 18 years of age and pregnant, a parent, or the caregiver of a child and able to speak fluent English. As incentives, gift cards were provided to increase participation in the full length of the program. After signing an informed consent form, participants completed a pretest, and at the end of the last program meeting, participants completed the posttest.

### Sample

Participants ( $N = 26$ ) consisted of 19 (73.1%) females and 7 (26.9%) males. The ethnicity of the sample was evenly dispersed with (50%) White and (50%) African American. The largest portion of participants had a high school degree (26.9%), followed by some college credit with no degree (23.1%), a community college degree (19.2%), a bachelor’s degree (15.4%), a master’s degree (11.5%), and a doctoral degree (3.8%). A majority of the sample was employed full time (73.1%), 7.7% were employed part-time, 15.4% were retired, and 3.8% were homemakers. The SES of the sample included 18 (69.2%) participants with an annual income of less than US\$40,000 and eight (30.8%) participants with an annual income greater than US\$40,000. The majority of the sample was in a married relationship (65.4%), 19.2% were single, and 15.4% were divorced (see Table 2). The mean age of participants was 54.88 years,  $SD = 13.73$ . The majority of the population was caring for two children (23.1%). All participants who initiated pretests were retained throughout the duration of the study.

### Measures

**Relationship quality.** An adapted version of the Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education study evaluation was used to determine relationship quality and parenting efficacy (Duncan et al., 2019). The scales that assess relationship quality are comprised

**Table 2.** Demographic Characteristics of Participants.

	N (%)
Gender	
Female	19 (73.1%)
Male	7 (26.9%)
Ethnicity	
African American	13 (50%)
White	13 (50%)
Education	
High school degree	7 (26.9%)
Some college, no degree	6 (23.1%)
Community college degree	5 (19.2%)
Bachelor's degree	4 (15.4%)
Master's degree	3 (11.5%)
Doctoral degree	1 (3.8%)
Employment	
Full time	19 (73.1%)
Part time	2 (7.7%)
Retired	4 (15.4%)
Homemaker	1 (3.8%)
Annual income	
<US\$40,000	18 (69.2%)
>US\$40,000	8 (30.8%)
Relationship status	
Married	17 (65.4%)
Single	5 (19.2%)
Divorced	4 (15.4%)

Note.  $N = 26$ .

of 11 different scales measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from *very strongly disagree* to *very strongly agree*.

The six-question choose scale ( $\alpha = .90$ ) assesses partner commitment through statements like, "My relationship with my partner is more important to me than almost anything else in my life" (Duncan et al., 2019; Stanley & Markman, 1992). The five-question share scale ( $\alpha = .97$ ) assesses partner communication through statements like, "make time to touch base with each other" (Busby et al., 1995; Duncan et al., 2019). The eight-question know scale ( $\alpha = .97$ ) assesses mutual partner knowledge through statements like "I know my partner's current life stresses" (Gottman & Silver, 1999). The four-question connect scale ( $\alpha = .88$ ) assesses couple network or support through statements like, "many of our friends are friends of both of us" (Stanley & Markman, 2007). The 16-question manage scale ( $\alpha = .88$ ) assesses conflict behavior through statements like, "I can easily forgive my partner" (Buhrmester et al., 1988; Christensen & Sullaway, 1984; Stanley et al., 2002). The 10-question care scale ( $\alpha = .97$ ) assesses expressions of love through statements like, "initiate physical affection with your partner" (Huston & Vangelisti, 1991). The three-question couple quality scale ( $\alpha = .98$ ) assesses the strength of the current relationship through statements like, "our relationship is strong" (Norton, 1983). The three-question family harmony scale ( $\alpha = .50$ ) assesses household harmony through statements like, "generally there is a feeling of contentment and happiness in my house" (Banker & Gaertner, 1998). The three-question confidence/dedication scale ( $\alpha = .92$ ) assesses positive couple thoughts through statements like, "I feel very confident when I

think about our future together" (Stanley & Markman, 1992). The two-question positive/negative partner feelings scale ( $\alpha = .68$ ) assesses feelings toward a partner through questions like, "how positive are your feelings toward your partner" (Fincham & Linfield, 1997). The nine-question relationship efficacy scale ( $\alpha = .73$ ) assesses individual assessment of romantic relationship ability through statements like, "I feel insecure about my ability to be a good romantic partner" (Riggio et al., 2011).

**Parenting efficacy.** The six-question parenting efficacy scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ) assesses parenting efficacy through statements like, "I understand how my actions affect my child" (Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978). The 19-question parenting behavior 0–23 months scale ( $\alpha = .73$ ) assesses parenting behaviors through statements like, "I encourage my baby to develop skills such as walking or talking" (Arnott & Brown, 2013). The 19-question parenting behavior 2–5 years scale ( $\alpha = .86$ ) assesses parenting behaviors through statements like, "I have pleasant conversations with my child" (Lovejoy et al., 1999). The 22-question parenting behavior 6–18 years scale ( $\alpha = .86$ ) assesses parenting behaviors through statements like, "I teach my child to follow rules" (Van Leeuwen & Vermulst, 2004). The 12-question coparenting scale ( $\alpha = .79$ ) assesses coparenting through statements like, "works with me to solve problems specific to our child" (Cherry & Orme, 2011). The 10-question parenting stress scale ( $\alpha = .88$ ) assesses stress through statements like "works with me to solve problems specific to our child" (Berry & Jones, 1995).

### Data Analysis

Data were entered into SPSS Version 23 (IBM, 2015), and variables were appropriately recoded before analyzing. Data from pre- and posttests were then analyzed using paired samples  $t$  tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) statistical tests, and regressions to assess outcomes over time. A correlational analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between variables.

### Results

Statistically significant correlations were found between parenting efficacy and the coparenting relationship (specifically the coparenting scale and couple quality scale). The most significant relationships were pre- and posttest relationship and parenting scales of share ( $p < .000$ ), manage-self ( $p < .000$ ), care-self ( $p < .000$ ), care-partner ( $p < .000$ ), couple quality ( $p < .000$ ), confidence/dedication ( $p < .000$ ), relationship efficacy ( $p < .000$ ), parenting efficacy ( $p < .000$ ), parenting behaviors 2–5 years ( $p < .000$ ), and coparenting ( $p < .000$ ). For all correlations, refer to Tables 3 and 4.

Paired samples  $t$  tests were conducted to evaluate the pre- and postsurvey scales of the adapted TWC program. Although no statistically significant results were found using paired samples  $t$  tests, means from pre- to posttest positively

**Table 3.** Correlations for Pre- and Postrelationship Scales.

Variable	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.	21.	22.	23.	24.	
1. Choose pre	—																								
2. Choose post	.547*	—																							
3. Share pre	.554*	.496*	—																						
4. Share post	.357	.764*	.679*	—																					
5. Know-partner pre	.640*	.591*	.672*	.411*	—																				
6. Know-partner post	.354	.811*	.459*	.713*	.503*	—																			
7. Connect pre	.800*	.529*	.588*	.333	.782*	.264	—																		
8. Connect post	.396*	.791*	.421*	.645*	.377	.812*	.397	—																	
9. Manage-self pre	.422*	.608*	.640*	.677*	.391	.411*	.380	.437*	—																
10. Manage-self post	.080	.444*	.534*	.649*	.153	.454*	.006	.369	.769*	—															
11. Manage-partner pre	.448*	.525*	.692*	.596*	.440*	.381	.414*	.332	.891*	.702*	—														
12. Manage-partner post	-.013	.479*	.359	.631*	-.007	.580*	-.084	.500*	.511*	.784*	.503*	—													
13. Care-self pre	.589*	.710*	.831*	.715*	.818*	.616*	.687*	.537*	.521*	.413*	.584*	.328	—												
14. Care-self post	.370	.809*	.632*	.841*	.613*	.806*	.413*	.714*	.515*	.449*	.487*	.455*	.827*	—											
15. Care-partner pre	.605*	.641*	.823*	.661*	.811*	.457*	.734*	.413*	.574*	.424*	.675*	.285	.921*	.673*	—										
16. Care-partner post	.473*	.767*	.579*	.777*	.603*	.685*	.505*	.635*	.518*	.395	.593*	.435*	.785*	.876*	.773*	—									
17. Couple quality pre	.518*	.684*	.801*	.598*	.842*	.641*	.712*	.557*	.491*	.349	.499*	.313	.866*	.716*	.802*	.628*	—								
18. Couple quality post	.255	.787*	.473*	.740*	.481*	.824*	.299	.741*	.406*	.371	.380	.474*	.688*	.905*	.551*	.809*	.673*	—							
19. Family harmony pre	.510*	.666*	.862*	.652*	.660*	.573*	.558*	.491*	.686*	.537*	.747*	.457*	.793*	.654*	.800*	.619*	.864*	.631*	—						
20. Family harmony post	.046	.449*	.458*	.592*	.106	.496*	.015	.486*	.368	.591*	.290	.704*	.392	.547*	.327	.452*	.464	.634*	.583*	—					
21. Confidence/ dedication pre	.316	.590*	.758*	.574*	.690*	.405*	.630*	.440*	.496*	.354	.500*	.236	.772*	.598*	.803*	.569*	.861*	.527*	.759*	.337	—				
22. Confidence/ dedication post	.267	.747*	.584*	.785*	.514*	.703*	.449*	.742*	.492*	.392	.450*	.469*	.719*	.852*	.677*	.840*	.724*	.893*	.669*	.593*	.713*	—			
23. Relationship efficacy pre	.274	.540*	.562*	.522*	.308	.506*	.141	.497*	.811*	.702*	.789*	.564*	.491*	.526*	.485*	.477*	.429*	.509*	.712*	.488*	.341	.461*	—		
24. Relationship efficacy post	.134	.402	.458	.516*	.182	.430*	-.020	.342	.621*	.875*	.535*	.693*	.417*	.385	.367	.328	.319	.315	.489*	.597*	.211	.286	.672*	—	

\*p &lt; .05.

**Table 4.** Correlations for Pre- and Postparenting Scales.

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Parenting efficacy pre	—											
2. Parenting efficacy post	.812*	—										
3. Parenting behaviors 0–23 months pre	.210	.139	—									
4. Parenting behaviors 0–23months post	.110	-.042	.648*	—								
5. Parenting behaviors 2–5 years pre	.432	.408	.506*	.660*	—							
6. Parenting behaviors 2–5 years post	.359	.253	.277	.546*	.753*	—						
7. Parenting behaviors 6–18 years pre	.439*	.420*	.482*	.486*	.692*	.455*	—					
8. Parenting behaviors 6–18 years post	.322	.624*	.286	.230	.543*	.370	.651*	—				
9. Coparenting pre	.110	.186	-.095	.182	.411	.494*	.314	.459*	—			
10. Coparenting post	.162	.416*	.007	.068	.338	.461*	.234	.627*	.774*	—		
11. Parenting stress pre	.023	.079	.164	-.074	-.096	-.351	.323	.010	-.426*	-.3	—	
12. Parenting stress post	.103	.082	.090	-.113	-.638*	-.349	.167	-.112	-.473*	-.234	.500*	—

\* $p < .05$ .

**Table 5.** ANOVA for the Regression Equation Preparenting Scales and Race on Postparenting Scales.

Predictor	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
1 Regression	15.015	2	7.508	25.941***
Residual	3.762	13	0.289	
Total	18.778	15		
2 Regression	3.738	2	1.869	6.211*
Residual	3.009	10	0.301	
Total	6.748	12		
3 Regression	2.220	2	1.110	6.782*
Residual	1.473	9	0.164	
Total	3.692	11		
4 Regression	7.832	2	3.916	15.146***
Residual	3.361	13	0.259	
Total	11.193	15		
5 Regression	8.632	2	4.316	26.871***
Residual	1.928	12	0.161	
Total	10.560	14		
6 Regression	11.285	2	5.643	5.918*
Residual	5.721	6	0.953	
Total	17.006	8		
7 Regression	6.770	1	6.770	7.618*
Residual	4.443	5	0.889	
Total	11.213	6		

Note. ANOVA = analysis of variance. 1. Predictors for dating participants: (Constant), Parenting efficacy, race. 2. Predictors for dating participants: (Constant), Parenting behaviors 0–23 months, race. 3. Predictors for dating participants: (Constant), Parenting behaviors 2–5 years, race. 4. Predictors for dating participants: (Constant), Coparenting, race. 5. Predictors for dating participants: (Constant), Parenting stress, race. 6. Predictors for non-dating participants: (Constant), Parenting efficacy, race. 7. Predictors for non-dating participants: (Constant), Parenting behaviors 2–5 years, race. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

increased. Due to finding no statistically significant results, researchers further divided the data into grouping categories of relationship status, income (Group 1: <US\$39,999; Group 2: >US\$40,000), and race (Group 1: White; Group 2: African American). Significant results were found when categorizing participants based on these demographic factors; results are discussed based on parenting and relationship measures.

### Parenting Efficacy

**Relationship status.** One-way between-groups ANOVA was conducted to explore the influence of relationship status. For those in a relationship, there was a statistically significant difference in postparenting efficacy for race:  $F(1, 14) = 16.59, p = .001$ , with an  $R^2$  of .54, with African American participants reporting higher postparenting efficacy. For those not in a relationship, no statistically significant differences were found. Simple linear regressions were calculated to predict posttest parenting outcomes based on pretest parenting scales and race (see Table 5). For those in a relationship, significant regression equations were found for pretests for race and parenting efficacy, parenting behaviors, coparenting, and parenting stress. For those not in a relationship, significant regression equations were found for pretest for race and parenting efficacy and parenting behaviors with White participants reporting higher pre-parenting efficacy and parenting behaviors.

**Income.** Simple linear regressions were calculated to predict posttest outcomes for parenting scales based on pretests for parenting scales and income. Statistically significant differences were found for the following scales: parenting efficacy:  $F(2, 22) = 23.78, p = .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .68; parenting behaviors 0–23 months:  $F(2, 17) = 8.02, p = .004$ , with an  $R^2$  of .48; parenting behaviors 2–5 years:  $F(2, 16) = 10.48, p = .001$ , with an  $R^2$  of .56; parenting behaviors 6–18 years:  $F(2, 21) = 8.033, p = .003$ , with an  $R^2$  of .43; coparenting:  $F(2, 21) = 15.72, p = .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .60; and parenting stress:  $F(2, 19) = 3.70, p = .044$ , with an  $R^2$  of .28. Higher income participants reported higher pretest scores on parenting efficacy, parenting behaviors, and coparenting, while lower income participants reported higher pretest scores on parenting stress.

### Coparenting Relationship

**Relationship status.** One-way between-group ANOVAs were conducted to explore the influence of relationship status on

relationship scales. For those in a relationship, there was a statistically significant difference for race on the measures: care-self:  $F(1, 14) = 7.84, p = .014$ , with an  $R^2$  of .35 and couple quality:  $F(1, 14) = 5.22, p = .038$  with an  $R^2$  of .27. African American participants reported higher levels of care for self, and White participants reported higher couple quality.

Simple linear regressions were calculated for participants in a dating relationship to predict posttest outcomes for relationship scales based on pretests relationship scales and race. There was a statistically significant difference for the following measures: share:  $F(2, 13) = 5.75, p = .016$ , with an  $R^2$  of .47; manage-self:  $F(2, 13) = 19.50, p = .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .075; care-self:  $F(2, 13) = 11.34, p = .001$ , with an  $R^2$  of .63; care-partner:  $F(2, 13) = 7.46, p = .007$ , with an  $R^2$  of .53; couple quality:  $F(2, 13) = 16.30, p = .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .71; family harmony:  $F(2, 13) = 8.07, p = .005$ , with an  $R^2$  of .55; confidence/dedication:  $F(2, 13) = 6.46, p = .010$ , with an  $R^2$  of .49; and relationship efficacy:  $F(2, 13) = 18.88, p = .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .74. African American participants reported higher post levels of manage-self, care-self, family harmony, confidence/dedication, and relationship efficacy, while White participants reported higher post levels of care-partner and couple quality.

One-way between-groups ANOVAs were conducted to explore the influence of relationship status, specifically not being in a dating relationship, on relationship scales. For those not in a dating relationship, there was a statistically significant difference of race on the following measures: family harmony:  $F(1, 7) = 9.55, p = .018$  with an  $R^2$  of .57; and relationship efficacy:  $F(1, 6) = 16.15, p = .007$ , with an  $R^2$  of .72. African American participants reported higher levels of family harmony and relationship efficacy.

Simple linear regressions were calculated to predict posttest relationship outcomes based on pretest relationship scales and race. Significant regression equations were found for the following measures: care-self based on pretests for care-self and race:  $F(2, 6) = 13.73, p = .006$ , with an  $R^2$  of .82; care-partner based on pretests for care-partner and race:  $F(2, 6) = 8.35, p = .018$ , with an  $R^2$  of .73; family harmony based on pretests for family harmony and race:  $F(2, 6) = 5.79, p = .040$ , with an  $R^2$  of .65; and relationship efficacy based on pretests for relationship efficacy and race:  $F(2, 5) = 7.08, p = .035$ , with an  $R^2$  of .73. African American participants had significant increases pre- to posttest on care-self, family harmony, and relationship efficacy. White participants had significant increases pre- to posttest on care-partner.

**Income.** Simple linear regressions were calculated to predict posttests for relationship scales based on pretests for relationship scales and income. Posttests for the following relationship scales were significant: choose:  $F(2, 22) = 5.09, p = .015$ , with an  $R^2$  of .31; share:  $F(2, 22) = 9.51, p = .001$ , with an  $R^2$  of .46; know-partner:  $F(2, 22) = 4.55, p = .022$ , with an  $R^2$  of .29; manage-self:  $F(2, 22) = 17.39, p = .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .61; manage-partner:  $F(2, 22) = 4.01, p = .033$ , with an  $R^2$  of .26; care-self:  $F(2, 22) = 23.90, p = .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .68;

care-partner:  $F(2, 22) = 16.49, p = .000$ , with an  $R^2$  of .60; couple quality:  $F(2, 22) = 9.38, p = .001$ , with an  $R^2$  of .46; family harmony:  $F(2, 22) = 5.69, p = .010$ , with an  $R^2$  of .34; and relationship efficacy:  $F(2, 21) = 8.86, p = .002$ , with an  $R^2$  of .45. Higher income participants reported higher posttest scores on know-partner, manage-partner, and relationship efficacy, while lower income participants reported higher posttest scores on choose, share, manage-self, care-self, care-partner, couple quality, and family harmony.

## Discussion

Education programs like TWC that focus on coparents are becoming increasingly important for varying family structures. The coparenting relationship has a significant impact on the relationship between parent and child as well as the child's outcomes (Clark et al., 2013). As such, this study evaluated parenting efficacy and couple relationship outcomes for the adapted TWC program.

### Parenting Efficacy and Coparenting

Positive correlations were found between parenting and relationship scales. Researchers anticipated this correlation as coparenting has been empirically shown to impact the parent-child relationship and child outcomes (Clark et al., 2013). A positive coparenting relationship spills over into parenting, allowing the parent to feel more secure and confident in their abilities (Kirkland et al., 2011). Hamilton and colleagues (2005) reported racial and ethnic minority individuals have higher rates of not being married to their child's parent. Therefore, racial differences in parenting efficacy may be partially due to coparenting conflict causing the parent to have lower parental efficacy. Correlations were also found between income and parenting stress. As low-SES families experience specific stressors due to their SES (Baucom et al., 2018), they may also have fewer resources in times of stress. These differences could be due to the influence of varying contextual factors as an ecological theory suggests individuals come from different social, cultural, and economical backgrounds that influence their relationship and parenting behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These results prompted researchers to further classify participants into relationship status and SES to group participants with those who have similar environmental factors to gain better insight into the results.

**Parenting.** Statistically significant differences based on race were found between individuals who were in a relationship and parenting efficacy. For participants who were not in a dating relationship, statistically significant differences based on race were found for the parenting scales: parenting efficacy and parenting behaviors 2-5 years. It is likely that regardless of relationship status, the race was influential on parenting efficacy because of the discrepancy research has found between race and childhood development (Rowe et al., 2016). Rowe and colleagues (2016) found African American parents,

specifically mothers, to have less initial parenting knowledge than White parents, possibly causing less confidence in their parenting behaviors. A nondating parent may also feel unequipped to positively parent their child, due to not having a partner support. Research suggests single parents, especially mothers, have fewer resources, increased daily stressors, and increased parental disruptions that may influence their parenting efficacy (Albritton et al., 2014). Coparenting is easier when both parents value the other parent's involvement, communicate, and respect each other (Pedro et al., 2012). As discussed previously, it is not surprising to find significant differences in both parenting efficacy and parenting behaviors, as they are empirically correlated (Rowe et al., 2016).

Differences were also found based on SES. Researchers suspect differences in parenting behavior may be attributed to less accurate sources of parenting information. Low-SES parents may be more likely to use parenting information from popular press, or media, rather than empirical or evidence-based information (Berkule-Silberman et al., 2010). Similarly, low-SES parents may be more likely to have parenting stress due to fewer financial and supportive resources (Albritton et al., 2014).

**Coparenting relationship.** Similar to parenting efficacy, statistically significant differences were found between participants who were in a dating relationship and race. Barton and colleagues (2017) suggested CRE focusing on communication skills may be more salient for African American participants. They also found African American couples had increased positive CRE outcomes over any other race, possibly accounting for the racial differences found for participants who were in a dating relationship.

Participants who were not in a dating relationship had less statistically significant differences based on race. Research suggests African Americans and Latinx may have lower expectations for their romantic partners regarding stability and faithfulness, in turn potentially causing unhealthy relationships and relationship dissolution (Varga & Gee, 2017). This could explain the racial influence on nondating parent's sense of family harmony and relationship efficacy if they are already unhappy with their coparent. These differences are partially accounted for by relationship status. Participants who were not in a dating relationship with their child's other parent may have shown differences in family harmony due to differences in involvement. Unmarried mothers are less likely to favor father involvement because they are at increased risk for adverse partner outcomes such as relationship termination, changes, or violence (Albritton et al., 2014). In general, CREs are more effective for individuals who are more susceptible to relationship adversity (DuPree et al., 2016). As these individuals were not in a secure, dating relationship with their child's parent, they are at higher risk for relationship problems within the coparenting relationship and may benefit more from CRE.

SES was also found to play a significant role in the relationship. Low-SES, especially for parents with young children, is associated with decreased couple quality between partners (Williams & Cheadle, 2016). Randles (2014) argued couples

who are not married and low-SES might have a harder time adapting to the skills learned in CRE. Due to decreased resources and increased stressors, low-SES individuals may report a particularly difficult time using the learned skills as frequently.

## Implication for Practice

Albritton and colleagues (2014) reiterated the idea that low-SES and racial or ethnic minority populations are at higher risk and prosper from programs that strengthen their relationships and parenting behaviors. Strengths differ depending on the contextual factors of the population. It is imperative to understand how these strengths are fostered and how they continue to evolve. CRE must provide appropriate examples, skills, and resources that correlate to the targeted population, especially with regard to SES, race, and relationship status. For family life educators who experience issues with retention, the abbreviated version of TWC shows promising outcomes with less time commitment from participants. This could also allow family life educators to reach more individuals with less time and financial resources.

Findings within this study are also important for marriage and family therapists when working with parents. As a positive coparenting relationship was found to influence parenting, marriage and family therapists should continue to work with families to encourage this positive relationship regardless of the couple relationship. Therapists working with racial or ethnic minority clients may need to be sensitive to feelings of inadequate parenting efficacy that may surface as a result from stigmas or higher rates of nonmarital relationships (Hamilton et al., 2005; Kirkland et al., 2011).

## Limitations and Future Research

Additional research is needed to decipher the impact of the condensed material on participant outcomes, as the newly adapted version of TWC is shortened to require less time from the participants in hopes of increased retention. Although this program is geared toward coparents, it has influential general parenting themes and should continue to be evaluated with varied populations. More research is needed to explore how race, SES, and family structure modify the effectiveness of CRE. Additional studies should assess these moderators in the TWC program. Qualitative research should also be conducted to assess the needs and desired changes of low-SES and racial/ethnic minority individuals within parenting and relationship education.

A small sample size from limited locations may not be a representative sample of the program outcomes. Participants in this study also had a wide age range, as well as a high mean age, which could skew the data since parenting changes over time. Younger parents are likely to feel lower parenting efficacy than older parents, which can influence their positive or negative parenting behaviors. Another limitation of this study lies in survey implementation. Surveys were dispersed to participants



at the beginning and end of the four sessions, which may not have provided a large enough gap in time to adequately assess outcomes. The survey was also unclear on how to respond to the relationship questions as participants may have been responding to their past relationship instead of their current one.

## Conclusion

CREs such as TWC that target parents have the potential to address both couple and coparenting situations that may spill over into parenting and child outcomes (Adler-Baeder et al., 2013). TWC targets individuals who are low-SES and may not be in a marital relationship to focus on how these factors influence parenting and coparenting. Results indicate that contextual factors such as SES, race, and relationship status should be considered in future program development, evaluation, and research.


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