ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: COMPARISON OF STRUCTURAL INTERACTION
                       PATTERNS IN AFRICAN AMERICAN AND CAUCASIAN
                       CLINICAL COUPLES: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF
                       FINANCIAL RESOURCES

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This study focused on degrees to which African American and Caucasian couples who

have sought couple therapy at a community clinic differ on measures of relationship

boundaries and power/hierarchy. Potential effects that financial resources may have on

the relationship between couples' ethnic group membership and their structural patterns

were examined. The sample was 77 couples who previously were assessed and treated at

a university-based clinic. These two ethnic groups were examined in order to explore

potential cultural differences in relationship interaction patterns. Results showed there

were no significant ethnic group differences for the three structural dimensions other than

a trend for Caucasian couples to exhibit more autonomy between partners than African

American couples. There were moderating effects of financial resources in relation to the

boundary between the partners and for power dynamics. No significant gender

differences were found other than males being more likely to perceive their partner as

controlling.

COMPARISON OF STRUCTURAL INTERACTION PATTERNS IN AFRICAN

AMERICAN AND CAUCASIAN CLINICAL COUPLES: THE MODERATING

EFFECT OF FINCANCIAL RESOURCES

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Couples commonly seek therapy because of problematic interactions, such as poor communication, and problematic structure, such as imbalances of power or different degrees of preferred autonomy. It is necessary for clinicians, especially when working with couples from different ethnic groups, to be aware that there may be culturally associated structural differences in relationship patterns. In addition, clinicians need to pay attention to these ethnic group differences in order to fully understand couples' normative patterns as well as possible reasons why a couple's patterns have become problematic for them. A pattern that may be distressing for members of one ethnic group may be acceptable among members of another ethnic group. Miller, Yorgason, Sandberg, and White (2003) explain that although certain core therapist skills and interventions are needed to help couples resolve all types of problems, in order for interventions to be effective, the therapist must understand the structure of a couple's relationship and the presenting problems from the couple's cultural perspective. Although there are significant within-group differences in an ethnic group (e.g., the broad Latino ethnic group is comprised of various Central and South American subcultures), addressing similarities and differences in characteristics among major categories of ethnic groups such as African Americans and Caucasians can be beneficial for understanding general structural themes among them that may have implications for clinical interventions with distressed couples.

In the existing literature, a notable shortcoming is that the studies that compare African American and Caucasian ethnic groups do not focus on group differences in the

structural dynamics of the couple relationship. For example, Ramisetty-Mikler, Caetano, and McGrath's (2007) study on sexual aggression among these two ethnic groups and Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, and Field's (2005) study on unidirectional and bidirectional intimate partner violence among these two ethnic groups did not focus on any culturally associated structural patterns that may potentially underlie factors that trigger intimate partner violence. In contrast, the present study had a primary focus on exploring distinct culturally associated structural patterns of the two ethnic groups.

How Does Ethnicity Define Culture?

There has been much discussion of how to conceptualize the connection between ethnicity and culture. According to Pyburn (2003), ethnicity is social identification based on the presumption of shared history and a common cultural inheritance within an ethnic group. Pyburn (2003) proposes three major approaches to ethnicity: the isolationist/primordial approach, the interaction/instrumental approach, and the power/domination approach.

The earliest approach to ethnicity in anthropology was the isolationist/primordial approach. In this approach, ethnic groups were defined as distinct cultures: groups of people with distinctive customs and outlooks. These intergroup differences were developed because of geographical differences and isolation. In this view, each group can be studied in isolation from the others, and the focus is on the distinctive characteristics of the culture such as foods, music, clothing, folk tales, dialect, etc. In the isolationist/ primordial approach, the emphasis is on cultural content (i.e., what each ethnic group consists of).

In the instrumental/interaction approach, according to Pyburn (2003), the emphasis is upon ethnic affiliation. Ethnic affiliation refers to the loyalties that develop among a group of people based upon the presumption of shared history and common cultural inheritance. In this approach, the factual existence of cultural differences is not important; what is important is the belief or "conviction" that one belongs to a group of people who are culturally unique and therefore share some kind of common bond. This approach emphasizes individuals' assertions about their own group membership, and the character of that group as defined by its members. It focuses on how people develop their own feelings of ethnic identity.

Acknowledging that ethnic consciousness often entails not only recognition of differences, but also a hierarchical arrangement of different groups, Pyburn (2003) highlights the power/dominance approach. In the power/domination approach, ethnic self-consciousness is introduced by a dominant group. This group uses ethnic identity to legitimize its own privileges in terms of some superior cultural or biological traits said to be characteristic of the dominant group or some inferior cultural or biological traits said to be characteristic of the subordinate group. This process involves ethnic attribution, the use of stereotypes to characterize oneself or others. In the power/domination approach, the process of ethnic attribution (i.e., negative stereotyping) is of central importance.

There have been many definitions, conceptualizations, and indicators of culture provided that have contributed to how culture is operationalized and handled in research. In the present study, culture was conceptualized within the perspective of the ethnic group with which the two members of a couple affiliate. Although the data available for

this study did not allow for the measurement of individuals' subjective beliefs about their cultural affiliation per se, each individual's reported ethnicity was available.

Structural Theory in the Existing Literature

Some of the research on couples' interaction has used structural theory as a guiding framework in an attempt to understand functional and dysfunctional patterns in relationships. The notion behind using this theory is that the partners' success in coping with challenges/stressors that may arise in their life together depends on the way their relationship is structured and organized (Gerhart & Tuttle, 2003). For example, according to Minuchin (1974), there are two significant boundary structures that exist for couples.

First, there is a boundary *between* the partners. In healthy relationships, this boundary is considered clear and semi-diffuse – allowing the partners to interact with each other with a high level of autonomy as they negotiate between themselves when it comes to achieving both individual and collective goals. On the other hand, unhealthy relationships can result from either rigid or diffuse boundaries between partners. According to structural theory (e.g., Minuchin, 1974), a diffuse boundary deprives the members of the couple subsystem of autonomy and individual identities. A rigid boundary between partners, on the other hand, cuts the partners off from each other. As a result, the couple does not behave as a unit in providing support for each other or in solving problems as a team. Structurally, a couple with a diffuse internal boundary does not tolerate differences between partners, whereas a couple with a rigid internal boundary is adversarial rather than collaborative. As a result, the couple subsystem is deprived of their internal relationship resources.

The second boundary structure that exists for couples is the boundary *around* the couple. Structural theory proposes that for healthy relationships a well-defined but permeable boundary allows the couple to function well on its own but also make use of external resources when needed. For unhealthy relationships, both rigid and diffuse boundaries with the environment influence the relationship negatively. Rigid boundaries around the couple involve high levels of disengagement that the couple experiences with outside subsystems (e.g., extended kin). As a result, the couple does not have the outside resources and support available to manage problems if necessary. On the other hand, diffuse boundaries around the couple involve high levels of engagement from the environment and outside systems. Although this high level of engagement may be helpful in terms of providing much needed resources and support to the couple, simultaneously it creates a low level of differentiation of the couple as a subsystem that is distinct from its environment, making it hard for the couple to function appropriately and independently.

In terms of studying the structural dynamics of the couple, much of the literature seems to focus primarily on the boundaries that exist between the couple and outside subsystems. Haxton and Harknett (2009) used qualitative and quantitative data from a recent birth cohort from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing study to compare kin support patterns between African American and Latino couples and the effects that these networks had on the couple. The researchers found that there were differences in the ways that African American and Latino couples described support from their kin networks. African American couples consistently named their own mothers and other female kin as their support providers and explained that support was often given directly to the female partner of the couple and not the male partner. The researchers explained

that the power of the matriarch figure in the African American family may be the reason for this particular trend. In contrast, Latino couples expressed a more integrated extended family structure, in that they reported receiving support from both their mothers and fathers, indicating more of an even influence between the male and female heads of the family.

Haxton and Harknett (2009) also found that both Latino and African American couples reported experiencing strain in their relationship resulting from over-involvement that occurred at times with their extended kin (e.g., a male partner pressuring his female partner to get her extended kin out of their couple business, or vice versa), but that the couples did not feel comfortable revealing the strain to their kin because the extended kin were providing much needed support. The researchers concluded that the high level of interaction between extended kin and the couple, based on cultural expectations that there will be involvement from these subsystems, provided much benefit to the couple even though at times it became overwhelming for them.

The Haxton and Harknett (2009) study is very informative about the structural patterns that exist in the family, such as which figures hold power in the families and the type of boundaries that exist between the couple and outside subsystems. However, a major limitation to the study and other research attempting to study structural dynamics in couples belonging to different ethnicities is that they have only focused on the structural dynamics that exist between the couple and outside subsystems. The present study addressed this shortcoming in that it examined potential cultural differences in structural patterns *between* the partners as well.

Functional Theory in the Existing Literature

The functionalist framework has also been used in a complementary manner to structural theory to explore what purpose structural aspects of a relationship may provide the members of the couple unit. The structural functionalism framework proposes that a structure exists because it has been part of a functional system that has successfully adapted to the environment (White & Klein, 2008). There has been much thought on applying structural functionalism to families, such as the work done by Talcott Parsons – one of the prominent founders of this framework. Parsons, for example, explored the stabilization of the adults (i.e., the couple) into institutional role structures.

Parsons and Bales (1955) make assumptions regarding family role structure such as the attribution of task orientation to specific genders. Parsons and Bales (1995) described females as more expressive and males as more instrumental. Parsons explains that an instrumental orientation involves relations of the system to circumstances outside the system, such as maintaining equilibrium and establishing desired relations with external objects (i.e., the individual being the primary facilitator and navigator of the family's interactions with the outside world through means such as working and producing income). On the other hand, expressiveness focuses on the internal affairs of the system, maintenance of integrative relations between the members, and regulation of the patterns and tension levels of its components (i.e., being the primary facilitator and navigator of the demands contained within the household, from maintenance of its members to making sure that the family system is functioning appropriately). It is from these assumptions that Parsons and Bales (1955) further elaborate these roles by stating that the

father is the technical expert and executive whereas the mother is the expressive charismatic leader and cultural expert.

Parsons and Bales (1955) allude to the fact that these are the values and norms of society that every family structure should adhere to if it wants to fully achieve the goals of providing nurturance, stability, and support for its members. However, although there are strong societal views on what the couple structure should look like, there is much variation due to ethnic group differences that still needs attention. Families from different ethnic groups may have different structural organizations (e.g., rules, expectations, interactions) that they function within, and it is best for clinicians to understand their structure and function in order to highlight and address respectfully the problematic structural issues that distressed couples and families present rather than attempting to change them into what is considered "normal." The present study explored the differences that may exist for couples of different ethnic groups with the hopes of enhancing knowledge needed for cultural competence, so that interventions related to structural problems are addressed in a sensitive manner.

Socioeconomic Status in the Existing Literature

To further complicate the comparative analysis of ethnic groups' couple structural dynamics, prior research has suggested that the socioeconomic status of the couple affects the boundaries and power dynamics more so than the ethnic group differences that exist in the relationship. In terms of the socioeconomic status of the couple as a unit, Cherlin (1979) found that couples with a low socioeconomic status, as indicated by the husband's low income, experienced various kinds of strains in their marriages (e.g., communication problems, abusive behavior). Pertaining to structural effects of the

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difference between partners' socioeconomic statuses, Bracher and Santow (2001) found that couples in which the husband's socioeconomic status was low (based on income contribution) and the wife's socioeconomic status was high had a destabilized marital structure. According to the researchers, a destabilized structure was one in which there was low cohesion and high conflict and disagreement about the basic goals of the relationship (e.g., finances, childrearing, etc.). More specifically, based on traditional gender roles in which the husband is supposed to specialize in "breadwinning" and the wife in "domestic production" (and reproduction), the inverted power differential perceived between the partners led to both partners indicating that the relationship did not seem like a "partnership" due to lack of appropriate negotiating processes. The researchers concluded that when the wife's income contribution was comparatively higher than her husband, changes in power dynamics resulted in marital disruption.

Much of the existing literature focuses on socioeconomic status of the couple as the primary variable for which there are differences in the structural patterns of couples' interactions. Although this is significant, there is a lack of attention to the extent that the socioeconomic status of the couple affects the structural patterns of different ethnic group couples. This is important because culture plays a tremendous role in couples' structural interactions, and each ethnic group may have distinct rules or processes for how couples should address interactions regarding money and decision-making (such as if the couple has a lot of money or not, and if there is a gap between the amounts of money that the partners make). In addition, the presence of greater socioeconomic resources may have an impact on the extent to which couples need to rely on outsiders for assistance, thereby affecting the boundary around the couple's relationship.

Furthermore, much of the literature also uses a wide index for socioeconomic status – this includes highest level of education, occupation, and income (note: this variation in criteria used to operationalize SES stems from the availability of data on these SES components). There is not much attention given to the specific effects that any of these individual SES components have on couples' structural patterns, or on potential cultural differences. Therefore, the present study adds to the knowledge in this area by specifically testing whether financial resources (i.e., income) of the couple moderate ethnic group differences in structural characteristics.

Purpose

This study focused on the degrees to which couples from two ethnic groups (African American and Caucasian) who have sought couple therapy at a community clinic may differ on structural aspects of their relationships related to boundaries and power/hierarchy. In order to address the gap in existing knowledge on this topic, potential moderating effects of financial resources on differences between the ethnic groups regarding the couples' structural patterns also were examined. Based on the existing literature, African American and Caucasian couples have been shown to exhibit some cultural differences that can affect the ways that their relationships are structured and the types of problems that they are experiencing. Whereas most of the studies that have compared these ethnic groups focused on particular presenting problems (e.g., sexual aggression, intimate partner violence), this study compared the two ethnic groups of couples primarily on structural patterns. Culture was conceptualized within the perspective of the ethnic group with which the two members of a couple affiliate. In addition, this study examined the potential moderating effect of financial resources on the

relationship between ethnicity and relationship structure. Findings are discussed in terms of the role that culture plays in the dynamics of couple relationships, with implications for how therapists can work with couples from different ethnic groups and for the importance of conducting culturally sensitive evaluation and treatment techniques.

What is Culture?

The concept of culture has been defined in a variety of ways, modified through additions and/or deletions of by particular researchers, based on their theoretical perspectives. Parsons (1949) defined culture as "those patterns relative to behavior and the products of human action which may be inherited, that is, passed on from generation to generation independently of the biological genes" (p. 8). Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) defined culture as "patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, and on the other as conditioning elements of further action (p. 78)." Useem and Useem (1963) defined culture as "the learned and shared behavior of a community of interacting human beings" (p. 169). Damen (1987) defined culture as "learned and shared human patterns or models for living; day- to-day living patterns. These patterns and models pervade all aspects of human social interaction. Culture is mankind's primary adaptive mechanism" (p. 367). Finally, Lederach (1995) defined culture as "the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them" (p. 9). These definitions illustrate how for anthropologists and other behavioral scientists culture involves the full range of learned human behavior patterns, and it seems that the theme of shared patterns is a common component of how culture is defined.

A shared culture involves the common values, beliefs, and traditions (including some concrete types of behavior such as language spoken, foods eaten, music listened to, clothing worn, etc.), that a group of individuals embrace (Shepherd, 2011). Jervis (2006) expressed that there are two essential features of shared culture. First, the visible signs of shared experiences (e.g., language, foods, music, clothing) give people a sense of belonging to the cultural group, and the more shared superficial behaviors they embrace, the stronger the connection people experience toward the culture and among each other, and the deeper their shared values. Second, shared culture is learned and transmitted from one generation to the next. Jervis (2006) states that shared culture is so internalized within a community that the important aspects of the culture are maintained through these transmissions.

Much thought has been given to examining how shared culture can affect structural dynamics and interaction patterns of couples (e.g., male-female interactions in family relationships). An educational group, Advocates for Youth (2008), focused on strengthening the cultural competence of mental health professionals who may potentially work with individuals of different ethnic groups, by describing the significance of shared culture along the lines of communication processes, family relationships, and gender roles (with implications for power dynamics). In terms of language and communication style, a couple's shared culture will affect their verbal and nonverbal behavioral patterns, including social customs about who speaks to whom—both how and when. Advocates for Youth (2008) suggest that relevant questions about communication include:

"What expressions, gestures and posturing (body language) commonly

accompany communication? Is eye contact considered polite or rude? Is usual

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tone of voice soft or loud? How close do people stand next to each other when speaking? Is touching acceptable?" Additional questions are "Are emotions freely expressed? All or just some? Which ones? When?" (p. 2)

Pertaining to family relationships, Advocates for Youth (2008) state that since the family is the primary unit of society, children are socialized into human society and into a culture's particular beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviors within the family setting. The child learns aspects of family relationships including family structure, roles, dynamics, and expectations. Relevant questions about family relationships and shared culture suggested by the Advocates for Youth (2008) include:

"Is the family structure nuclear or extended? If extended, who is considered a member of the family? Do people have to live in the same household to be considered members of the family?"

"What rights and responsibilities come with family membership? Do they vary by gender? By age?"

"Are family members expected to be involved in other family members' decisions? Which ones? Which family members' opinions receive the most respect?"

"Who has authority in the home? Does one adult have power over some decisions, but not others?"

"How is privacy treated within the home? What family matters are not to be shared with outsiders?" (p. 3)

Pertaining to gender roles, the Advocates for Youth (2008) defined gender roles as what is considered appropriate and acceptable behavior for men and women. In terms of culture, Advocates for Youth (2008) suggests that even though there has been tremendous change regarding gender roles during the last 20 years, deeply-held cultural beliefs about which behaviors are feminine and which are masculine will continue to affect interaction patterns. Relevant cultural questions to ask pertaining to gender roles, as suggested by the Advocates for Youth (2008) include:

"Are tasks within the home assigned by gender? Are some things traditionally done by women and some by men? Which ones? Is that changing? How?"

"Is one gender supposed to be obedient to the other? In what ways?"

"Are both genders expected to express emotions freely? Are some emotions more appropriate for one gender or another? If so, which ones? How are they typically expressed?"

"How are children cared for? How are responsibilities and tasks shared by parents?" (p.5)

In the literature it seems that there is a common assumption that culture defines the structural and interactional patterns of male and female members who have been socialized to accept these dynamics. Questions such as the ones suggested by Advocates for Youth examine the importance of exploring cultural patterns among ethnic groups, because they have meaningful influence on family functioning through the shared structural characteristics (boundaries, hierarchy) those members of each culture share. Not every culture is the same in how its members view and enact structural patterns

between males and females in intimate relationships. Moreover, it gets complicated because sub-cultures within an ethnic group may very well differ on how to handle these same structural patterns. Nevertheless, despite intra-group variation, studying the cultural differences among major ethnic group categories can provide valuable information on the general patterns of how each group enacts structural relationship factors. These differences not only are of general interest in understanding cultural variations but also may be relevant for the work of clinicians in tailoring treatments for distressed couples who seek professional assistance. For the purposes of the present study, culture is defined as patterns of behavioral interactions and cognitive constructs that are learned through a process of socialization and thereby shared by members of a group who identify with the culture. These shared patterns identify the members of a cultural group while also distinguishing them from others.

Culture and Family Therapy

McGoldrick and Hardy (2008) propose that "family therapy has ignored the multicultural dimension of today's society and that the field has continued to develop models of treatment without regard for their cultural limitations" (p. 4). One can assume that some in the field of couple and family therapy have failed to notice that families from many cultural groups rarely seek therapy or find therapists' techniques helpful, and it is important that the field change in order to incorporate these cultural differences. In their book *Re-Visioning Family Therapy* (2008), McGoldrick and Hardy express concerns about therapists ignoring differences among cultural groups when working with families:

The failure of societies to embrace and respect diversity is the greatest single threat to the survival of our civilization. We must break the constraints of our traditional monocular vision of families as white, heterosexual, and middle class. We need to redefine the boundaries of our field to a cultural viewpoint that takes into account the diversity of our society and the way that societal oppression has silenced the voices and constrained the lives of individuals, families, and whole communities since our nation was founded. Racial, sexist, cultural, classist, and heterosexist power hierarchies constrain our clients' lives and determine what gets defined as a problem and what services our society will set up to respond to these problems. (p. 5)

It is important to note, as McGoldrick and Hardy (2008) express, that much of the family therapy field's focus has been on the examination of the interpersonal family level of functioning. Because the family therapy field is rooted in systemic thinking, it has been very hard to shift the thinking about family therapy beyond the family unit (or extended family) to consider the cultural context within which families are embedded. There have been some notable efforts to describe ethnic group differences that can affect family functioning (e.g., McGoldrick, Giordano, & Garcia-Preto, 2005), but overall the field of family therapy needs to make more room for the unspoken structures: the cultural, racial, class, and gender-based hierarchies that are the underpinnings of our society. This is important because family therapy should continue to work to become more attuned to the fact that families of African Americans, Latinos, Asians, and other racially/ethnically oppressed and/or marginalized minority groups are affected by not having the same entitlements to participate in institutions within American society as do members of the dominant culture. Delivering more culturally competent services will

require that family therapy as a field consider the broader ecology of families, widening our lens to take history, context, and community into account. This will require that family therapy theorists and researchers develop more differentiated cultural views of families from different ethnic groups.

Culture Shaping Human Action/Experiences

Most theoreticians have expressed that the reigning model used to understand culture's effect is fundamentally flawed – it assumes that culture shapes individuals' actions by supplying ultimate ends or values toward which action is directed, thus making values the central causal element of culture (Clifford, 1988). Swidler (1986), for example, has written about the interplay of culture and human interactions. Swidler (1986) wrote a social commentary about this phenomenon and stated that "culture influences action by shaping a repertoire or tool-kit of habits, skills, and styles, from which people construct *strategies of action*." (p.1). According to Swidler, strategies of action are cultural products – the symbolic experiences, mythical lore, and ritual practices of a group or society that produce individuals' motivations, ways of organizing their experiences and evaluating reality, ways of regulating their personal conduct, and ways of forming social bonds with other members of the group. Swidler (1986) acknowledges that when individuals notice cultural differences among people, they recognize that people do not all handle the same situations in the same exact way – "how they approach life is shaped by their culture" (p. 13). With this in mind, Swidler argues that the challenge is to develop more sophisticated theoretical ways of thinking about how culture shapes or constrains people's actions toward one another; how, culture interacts with social structure.

Structural Family Theory as the Basis for This Study

Salvador Minuchin's (1974) theoretical model of structural family therapy has become one of the major approaches to conceptualizing normal and dysfunctional family relationships and for intervening therapeutically with distressed couples and families. Structural family theory proposes that the content issues that families discuss are much less relevant to their problems than are the patterns with which the members interact in dealing with their issues. The family is viewed as a small social system that is structured according to set patterns and rules that govern family interactions. Minuchin and Fishman (1981) used the metaphor of the organization of a house, in which one identifies how many rooms there are, where the rooms are located in relation to each other, and how they are connected, to explain how structural family theory views the family as being composed of subsystems that function within the whole. The major subsystems of a traditional nuclear family include the individual family members, the spousal dyad, the parental dyad, and the set of siblings. Other subsystems can be defined by gender (i.e., the subsystem of females in the family) or a shared role or activity (e.g., a subsystem of family members who share a common interest in attending sporting events together).

The structure or organization of the family is the primary concept in this theory, in that the structure of a family system is associated with the establishment of explicit and implicit rules for family interactions (Gerhart & Tuttle, 2003). Structure is defined by a set of both overt and covert rules that govern family interactions. The covert rules and interactional patterns are usually not explicitly stated or consciously recognized (Minuchin, 1974). Examples of overt rules in a family structure include parents telling

their children that they are the authority figures of the household, and that the children are expected to adhere to their parents' rules and expectations. In contrast, parents may implicitly communicate the existence of a covert rule that children are allowed into the supposedly private domain of the parents' couple relationship, a rule demonstrated when one or both parents share confidences with the children regarding marital issues. Thus, family rules and patterns are established through communication on overt and covert levels. Some interactional rules address the management of closeness and distance among family members (boundary characteristics), whereas other rules address the distribution of power/authority (hierarchy). For example, non-verbal cues such as an individual's pitch of the voice and frequent hesitations may reflect his or her one-down position in the couple's power hierarchy.

Functionalist Theory as a Complementary Theory for the Basis of This Study

Much of the scholarly world principally identifies functionalism with the body of theoretical work produced by Talcott Parsons (White & Klein, 2008). White and Klein (2008) note that Parsons was influenced by classical theorists in sociological theory such as Max Weber and Emile Durkheim – specifically using Weber's concept of "individual meaning" and Durkheim's idea of "social systems to maintain order." (p. 37)

White and Klein (2008) express that "Parson's perspective on the family is best understood within the architecture of his larger theory of social systems." (p. 32) According to White and Klein (2008), Parsons divided up the social world into three systems – the cultural, social, and personality systems. The cultural system is composed of shared symbols and meanings, the social system is composed of organized social groups and institutions, and the personality system is composed of the individual's need

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for psychic satisfaction. Parsons and Bales' (1955) work on families lead them to suggest the following:

> That the basic and irreducible functions of the family are two: the primary socialization of children so that they can truly become members of the society into which they have been born; second, the stabilization of the adult personalities of the population of the society. (pp. 16-17)

Parsons and Bales are expressing that the family can be seen as stabilizing adult personalities and socializing the young – both of these outcomes are only functional insofar as they contribute to the well-being of the entire social system and its maintenance (e.g., reproducing members into society to maintain human existence). The social structures of marriage and family create deep social and emotional bonds that give individuals in-depth systems of social support, as well as generating expectations of social responsibility within their members, fulfilling the function of creating social cohesion.

Functional theory complements structural family theory in that family organization promotes or hinders the function of the family system. Specifically, a healthy family organization, such as one in which there are appropriate boundaries between the parents and the child subsystems and a healthy boundary between the partners, helps the family system carry out the important functions for its members. If these structural aspects of a normal family organization do not exist, it is unlikely that the family will be able to function effectively for its members.

Structural Theory and Culture

Minuchin (1974) described how family members relate to each other according to rules and norms that govern their transactions. Although his structural family therapy model tends to focus on relatively universal norms for a well-functioning family (e.g., clear, permeable boundaries rather than either rigid or diffuse ones; a hierarchy in which parents have more power than children do), cultural differences in norms associated with gender and expectations regarding the characteristics of marriage also affect couples' transactional patterns. For example, if both spouses come from patriarchal families, they may simply take it for granted that the woman will have primary responsibility for carrying out chores such as doing the dishes.

In addition to the influence of cultural norms and interactional patterns, Gerhart and Tuttle (2003) suggest that each family's history and intergenerational rules are relevant factors in the formation of family structure. The uniqueness of an individual's family of origin and the associated intergenerational rules and patterns influence the structure of the new family system that the individual forms through establishing his or her adult couple relationship. Therefore, each person's family of origin has its own family culture, in addition to the broader aspects of culture that it embodies based on ethnic group membership. Minuchin (1974) described how individuals face the task of separating from their family of origin and transitioning into the newly defined structure of their adult family, although they carry with them aspects of the family of origin.

Functionalist Theory and Culture

The status of culture and function in the social system is implicit to the *social structure* concept. In the social sciences such as sociology and cultural anthropology,

social structure is more often interpreted as an ensemble of rules (norms) of social control over human behavior, sometimes as stable organizational forms of human activity (Stahovski, 1999). Since culture covers traditions, language, art, religion, moral norms, customs, behavioral patterns, rituals, and thinking patterns, it serves as the "blueprint" of behavioral acts that belong to a special group of people (e.g., ethnic groups). Furthermore, the primary and basic *function* of the family structure when it comes to culture is to transmit the social information controlling the human behavior from parents to children, so that socialization occurs of the next generation.

Structural Theory and Couple Relationships

Structural theory proposes that to large degree problems in family relationships are derived from the interactional patterns of the couple subsystem, including the partners' spousal and parental roles. Because all couples must learn to adjust to each other, raise their children, deal with their parents, earn a living, and fit into their communities, when a structural issue arises in the couple subsystem, problems commonly develop for the whole family.

According to structural theory, when two people join to form a couple, the structural requirements for the new union involve accommodation and boundary making (Gerhart & Tuttle, 2003). Accommodation is the process through which each partner tries to organize the relationship along familiar lines, pressuring the other to comply, but also responding to pressures based on the other person's desires. In accommodating to each other, members of a couple must negotiate the nature of the boundary between them as well as the boundary separating them from the outside world. For example, if partners call each other at work frequently, if neither person has outside friends or independent

activities, and if they define themselves primarily as a pair rather than as two personalities, they have a relatively diffuse boundary between them.

On the other hand, if they spend little time together, have separate bedrooms, have different checking accounts, and are more invested in careers than their relationship, their boundary can be considered relatively rigid. Because often each partner tends to be more comfortable with the level of proximity that existed in his or her family of origin, couples must also define the boundaries between them and their original families. Often rather suddenly the families that they grew up in must take second place to the new marriage (although the degree to which this is so may vary from one culture to another), a shift that may become a difficult adjustment, especially for members of cultures that prioritize the family of origin.

In addition, having children transforms the structure of the family by adding a child subsystem and re-organizing the spousal subsystem into a parental subsystem. Spouses must find a way of balancing their commitments to their children and their couple relationship, and if two spouses have different levels of commitment to the children or use different parenting strategies, problems in the couple and family relationships are likely to develop.

Structural theory recognizes the importance of working with couples as a unit because family problems often are heavily influenced by this particular subsystem. More specifically, it is important to alter the dysfunctional structure within the couple subsystem to promote problem solving and to facilitate the growth of the system to resolve symptoms and encourage growth in individuals, while also preserving the mutual support within the family.

The structural model proposes that by establishing a generational hierarchy, a strong parental coalition, a functioning and mutually supportive spousal subsystem, and clear boundaries among all individuals and subsystems, couples will be able to address any problems that may arise effectively. Although the theory pays less attention to cultural variations among families, attending to cultural differences in interaction patterns can help clinicians be attuned to the needs and issues of the couple. Culture can provide a context for identifying a couple's particular structural dynamics and sources of stress within their relationship. The structural model proposes that working with the couple in a culturally sensitive manner on structural issues such as boundaries/autonomy and power/hierarchy will restructure the couple's interactional patterns so that they can relate to one another and function in a healthy manner.

Functionalist Theory and Couple Relationships

In essence, the couple's relationship is critical in that it serves the functions of reproduction, socialization, and maintenance of society (White & Klein, 2008). Functionalist theory posits that the couple's relationship not only serves to reproduce and socialize their offspring for the maintenance of society but also to provide security and support of each partner in a way that promotes individual well-being and that harnesses the adult personality to flourish in the social system (Strong, DeVault, & Cohen, 2004). For example, spouses support each other financially, socially, emotionally, and physically and are driven to achieve the socially defined expected standards of married life. But, when harmful structural patterns exist (e.g., power conflicts), the structure may threaten the functioning of the couple and the wellbeing of the two individuals, along with those who depend on them (e.g., children).

Boundaries/Autonomy in Close Relationships

In the structural family therapy theoretical model (Minuchin, 1974), boundaries are a characteristic of families and other groups that place limits on interactions among their members, as well as between the members and outsiders. Within a family system, boundaries regulate proximity among the members and also define subsystems in the power hierarchy (Sexton, Weeks, & Robbins, 2003). Problems are likely to occur either if the boundaries within a couple's relationship are too diffuse, resulting in *enmeshment*, or too rigid, resulting in disengagement. Although enmeshed relationships offer the benefit of cohesiveness and support, symptoms may emerge from the extreme closeness and overprotection among members. This kind of relationship tends to stifle individual growth. In contrast, disengaged relationships offer great opportunity for individual growth and autonomy, but they do not provide the protective functions that are a crucial aspect of healthy couples' relationship functioning (Sexton, Weeks, & Robbins, 2003).

Culture Variation: Couples' Boundaries

Much of the research comparing boundary patterns between African American and Caucasian couples has focused primarily on the boundary patterns between the couple as a unit and outside systems and not so much on the boundary patterns that exist between the partners.

For example, Tienda and Angel (1982) explored the differences in the prevalence of extended living arrangements among African, Latino, and Caucasian husband/wife households to evaluate the relative merit of the cultural equivalent and cultural variant explanations of extended structure. In this study, the data were based on the 1976 Survey of Income and Education (SIE), a large public-use data file consisting of over 151,000

households. The actual data used for analysis was a subsample of households consisting of all husband/wife units that contained an adult-child dyad. For the sake of the study, households containing nuclear members were classified as non-extended while those containing at least one other relative of the head of the household, secondary family member, or secondary individual, either adults or children, were classified as extended. The researchers were interested in whether or not the extended family households existed for economic need (indicated by the level of nuclear family earnings and the full-time/part-time status of the head of the household) or cultural preferences (indicated by the ethnicity of the head of the household and immigration status).

The results of the Tienda and Angel (1982) study indicated that the greater prevalence of extended household structure among Latino and African American couples, compared to Caucasian couples, is related to cultural circumstances that lead to extended family structure more than to economic needs, whereas for Caucasian couples there was no statistical difference in whether or not the extended household existed for economic need or cultural preferences. The researchers found that the proportion of extended households among Latino couples was lower than the proportion of extended households headed by African Americans. The researchers concluded that although cultural norms of Latinos and African Americans both favor the concept of extended family living arrangements more so than Caucasian culture does, it would be hard to accept these findings as conclusive when socioeconomic status of the couple can also play a significant role in extended households for all three groups. The researchers also comment that because Latino and African American cultures promote low differentiation

levels among family members, couples who attempt to establish their own family and own identity will still have high involvement with their extended family.

Cultural Variation: The Effect of Socioeconomic Status on Couples' Boundaries

Gerstel (2011) suggests that the nuclear family model ignores the familial experiences of many Americans, particularly those on the lower end of the economic spectrum for whom extended kin are central. Gerstel (2011) states that African American and Latino couples are more involved with extended kin than Caucasian couples, but class trumps race in this regard: African Americans, Latino, and Caucasians with fewer economic resources all rely more on extended kin than do those who are more affluent.

Gerstel (2011) describes a study in which she and colleagues used the National Survey of Families and Households to observe socioeconomic effects on people of different cultural backgrounds and found that minority couples—in particular, African Americans and Latinos—rely on extended kin more than do Caucasians. For example, looking at co-residence, Gerstel (2011) indicated that approximately 40% of African Americans and about a third of Latinos—compared to under a fifth of Caucasian couples—share households with extended family other than partners or young children. Similar patterns exist for living near relatives: over half of African American and Latinos couples compared to only about a third of Caucasian live within two miles of kin. Gerstel (2011) mentions that similar patterns exist for visiting: the data indicate that African Americans and Latinos visit kin more frequently than do Caucasians. As for receiving care (e.g., help with household work, childcare, running errands), African American and Latino couples are much more likely than Caucasian couples to receive such care from a wide range of extended kin. Based on the results, it seems that there was no ethnic group

difference on the involvement of extended kin when socioeconomic status was controlled (e.g., just like poor minority couples, impoverished Caucasian couples were more often likely to engage in mutual, practical help and involvement with extended kin than do their wealthier counterparts).

Gerstel's (2011) work was informative in highlighting important socioeconomic trends that exist within these ethnic groups. It seems that Gerstel wanted to explore a wider range of socioeconomic trends affecting the couples' boundaries, since she obtained information on other SES components and not just income. Furthermore, the study only addressed the boundary between the couple and outside subsystems, as indicated by the involvement and support provided by extended kin. It did not attend to the potential boundary patterns that exist between the partners and whether or not the socioeconomic status (e.g., low versus high) of the couple may influence the boundary between the partners. The study's findings suggest that, generally and historically speaking, both Latino and African American couples less often have the economic resources that allow the kind of "privatization" that promotes clear boundaries between the couple and extended kin that Caucasian couples have. As a result of needing extended family support, the boundary patterns that have existed for both Latino and African American couples and their respective extended kin seem to be less distinct than those among Caucasian couples. As mentioned earlier, although enmeshment can exist between the couple and outside subsystems and can detract from the identity and autonomy of the couple, potentially leading to problems for the partners and the couple's relationship, a high level of closeness does not necessarily create a problematic form of "enmeshment".

Culture and Power Dynamics

Much of the literature expresses the complications of defining power in a cultural context – as Pearson, Whitehead, and Young (1984) mentioned, defining power without considering cultural differences is already difficult because various factors (e.g., historical perspectives and traditions, institutions, rituals) lead to variations in power dynamics from one culture to another.

Culturally determined gender ideologies define rights and responsibilities and what is 'appropriate' behavior for women and men (Prouty & Lyness, 2007). They also influence access to and control over resources, and participation in decision-making. Burck and Speed (1995) stated that across many cultures these gender ideologies often reinforce male power and the idea of women's inferiority. Gender relations are the hierarchical relations of power between women and men that, according to Burck and Speed (1995), tend to disadvantage women. Culture influences gender relations in that it explicitly and implicitly organizes hierarchical relations of power between women and men. These gender hierarchies are often accepted as 'natural' but are socially determined relations, culturally based, and are subject to change over time. They can be seen in a range of gendered practices, such as the division of labor and resources.

Jones (2001) notes that gender relations often interact with other hierarchical social relations such as class, caste, ethnicity and race. For Jones (2001), whether gender relations act to alleviate, or to exacerbate other social inequalities, depends on the cultural context. Burck and Speed (1995) add to the social commentary on power and culture – especially regarding gender relations. According to Burck and Speed (1995), social institutions within a given culture dictate the gender relations between the male and

female members by reinforcing and/or defining the gendered rules and norms over time. Since historically women have been excluded from many institutional spheres (e.g., the workplace), or their participation is circumscribed, they often have less bargaining power to affect change in these same institutions.

Power Dynamics in Close Relationships

Researchers have attempted to explore how power differentials affect relationships and have found that, in general, conflicts regarding power are at the root of much couple distress (Sprecher & Felmlee, 1994). Much of the literature, including seminal publications by French and Raven (1959) and Jones and Pittman (1982), defines power as the degree of social influence exerted by a member of a relationship, as indicated by the amount of change in another person's belief, attitude, or behavior (the target of influence) that results from the individual's actions (the influencing agent). The research on power has also identified six different bases for power that can be applied to understanding power in couple relationships – informational, reward, coercion, legitimate, expertise, and referent power (Raven, 2008). *Informational* power exists when one person has valuable information on an issue and expresses that to another (the subordinate), who accepts the information and changes his or her behavior. *Reward* power stems from the ability of an individual to offer a positive incentive (e.g., money) if the other person complies. *Coercive* power operates when an individual brings about change by threatening the other with negative, undesirable consequences (e.g., physical violence).

Raven (2008) explains that *legitimate* power stems from an individual's acceptance of the right of the other to require the changed behavior, and the individual's

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obligation to comply (e.g., "After all he is my husband and I should do what he requests of me."). In this type of power, terms such as "obliged" or "obligated," "should," "ought to," and "required to," may signal the use of legitimate power. *Expert* power results from the individual's faith that the other person, based on his or her formal identified status, has some superior insight or knowledge about what behavior is best under the circumstances (e.g., "My wife is an accountant and has had a lot of experience with money, so she is probably right about how we should set up our family budget, even though I don't really understand the reason.").

In terms of distinguishing between informational and expert power, Raven (2008) indicates that the assumed expertise associated with an individual's position in society is the key component of the latter type, whereas in informational power a person begins with some information regarding an issue but changes his or her mind after the other person introduces new information. The expert's power is derived to a significant degree from the status associated with his or her established role or formal status, without the validity of his or her current opinions or preferences being evaluated. Lastly, Raven (2008) explains that *referent* power stems from the individual identifying with the other person, or seeing the other as a model that the individual would want to emulate (e.g., "I really admire my husband's work ethic and wish to be like him. Doing things the way he believes they should be done gives me some special satisfaction").

Structural Family Theory & Power

Structural family theory also conceptualizes power in couples' relationships but links it in part to the boundaries between family subsystems. According to Minuchin (1974), family systems are characterized by a hierarchy of power, typically with the

parental subsystem "on top" of the children subsystem. In the model, in healthy families parent-child boundaries are both clear and semi-diffuse, allowing the parents to interact together with some degree of authority in negotiating between themselves the methods and goals of parenting. On the other hand, dysfunctional families exhibit cross-generational subsystems (i.e., coalitions) and improper power hierarchies, as for example when a parent brings an older child into the parental subsystem as an ally, to counter or replace a partner. This act, for example, alters the power dynamics between the child and the other spouse, in addition to the power dynamics between the spouses and among the siblings.

The Definition of Power in the Present Study

In the present study, the definition of power described by Epstein and Baucom (2002) will be used; namely, how much influence each member of a couple has on the couple's decision-making, or the degrees to which their positions are represented in the decisions that are made and how things are done in their relationship. Members of couples commonly make attempts to establish power in their relationship by efforts to exert control. The data set that was available for this study does not include any measure of the several forms of power described by Raven (2008), so the study focused on the degree to which each member of a couple views the other as attempting to exert control rather than participating in an egalitarian relationship.

Cultural Variation: Power Dynamics in Couple Relationships and the Potential Moderating Role of Socioeconomic Status

Much of the literature on power dynamics and the potential cultural factors differentiating among ethnic groups such as African American, Latino, and Caucasian

couples focuses on exploring this relationship through the study of decision-making. These studies usually include exploring the effects of socioeconomic status of the couple as well. One study in particular, by Pinto (2006), explored power dynamics and the effects of socioeconomic status of the couple by examining whether the most commonly used explanations regarding the division of household labor in couples have similar effects on the division of labor for African American, Latino, and Caucasian couples. Pinto (2006) noted that she focused specifically on couples because previous research shows how powerful traditional gender role ideologies can be in influencing decision-making, and because culture may have implications for such gender role beliefs.

Pinto (2006) tested the *time availability*, *relative resource*, and *gender* perspectives regarding division of labor for men and women in different racial groups. Pertaining to time availability, she hypothesized that increased hours worked outside the home by wives would decrease their hours worked inside the home (first hypothesis), and if a wife spends more hours working outside the home, then her husband's hours worked inside the home would increase (second hypothesis). Taking into account the role that children play for these couples (leading to two more hypotheses about time availability), Pinto hypothesized that if children are present in the household, then couples' household work will increase, but it will especially increase for the partner who has more time available to spend on housework (third hypothesis). Furthermore, she expected that the number of adults would decrease housework, because an additional adult can also contribute time to household labor (fourth hypothesis).

Pinto (2006) also applied the relative resources perspective, an approach that suggests that for couples the resources that each partner has (such as education and

income) determine how work gets divided (i.e., the partner with more resources has the ability to "buy" their way out of household labor). Pinto hypothesized that the partner with the higher level of education would do fewer hours of household labor (first hypothesis), and as a wife's contribution to the couple's income increases, then her amount of housework will decrease (second hypothesis).

The gender perspective challenges the two previous perspectives by pointing out that men and women do not divide types of tasks equally or rationally; in fact, women typically are responsible for core household tasks, whereas men are more likely to be responsible for non-core tasks. In applying this perspective, Pinto had three hypotheses. First, she hypothesized that women would spend more time on core tasks compared to men. Second, there would be different effects for other family factors on division of household work for men and women. More specifically, having a larger number of children will increase the amount of household labor, but mainly for women. Similarly, an increased number of adults in the household should decrease household labor, but for men and not women. Finally, Pinto (2006) hypothesized that more egalitarian attitudes among couples will create a more equal division of household labor. More specifically, if husbands have more egalitarian attitudes, then their hours spent on household labor should be greater and their wives' household labor should be less.

Pinto (2006) compared the time availability, relative resource, and gender perspectives for Latino, African American, and Caucasian couples because these perspectives may have different effects for the household division of labor for Latinos and Blacks than for Caucasian couples, based on Latinos and Blacks often facing structural and cultural barriers that affect household work. Pinto proposed that for

African American women hours worked outside of the home will decrease their household labor and increase the household hours worked by their husbands. In addition, this effect on the husband's housework will be stronger compared to the effects among Caucasian and Latino couples. The rationale behind this notion was that egalitarian division of household labor among African American couples is likely a cultural strategy developed to adapt to historical and/or structural circumstances - African American men face tremendous economic disadvantages in the work force when compared to Caucasian and Latino men (Cazenave, 1984). Second, Pinto noted that minorities, overall, have lower socioeconomic statuses, and as a result minority men may have a harder time translating economic resources into bargaining power to "buy their way out" of housework. Lastly, Pinto hypothesized that African American couples are more egalitarian and Latinos less egalitarian than Caucasian couples in terms of decision-making, gender roles, and household labor. The rationale behind this notion is that Latino families are more likely to follow and promote traditional male-dominated patterns, whereas African American couples value the matriarchal figure in the family.

Pinto (2006) used the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) for her study because it has good data for comparing the household division of labor for different racial and ethnic groups. The largest ethnic group in the data set is Caucasians, but there was an effort to over sample African American and Latinos. As indicated by Pinto, the NSFH is good for measuring gender behaviors because it contains measures of the household division of labor, composition of families, family background (e.g., education and income), and other demographic variables. Specifically, Pinto (2006) used the second wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (1992-1994), which

consists of data from interviews with a national sample of 10,005 male and female respondents. For her analysis, she used 5,600 couples from the general sample. She used the self-enumerated NSFH II questionnaire because it asks a broad range of questions, including regarding household labor.

Respondents were asked about the approximate number of hours worked per week on seven household tasks - preparing meals, washing dishes and cleaning up after meals, cleaning house, washing clothes, ironing and mending, outdoor and other household maintenance, paying bills and keeping financial records, and car maintenance and repair. Core tasks include cooking meals, meal cleanup, housecleaning, and laundry. Non- core tasks include those that are more discretionary or less time consuming; for example, outdoor chores, repairs, and bill paying. Time availability was measured by weekly hours worked outside the home and household composition. For each respondent, weekly hours worked outside the home are measured by the usual number of hours worked per week at the individual's main job. The household composition variables measure the presence of children (ages 0-18) and the number of other adults in the home. Relative education was coded into four categories: 1) husband has a college degree and wife does not, 2) neither wife nor husband has a college degree 3) both wife and husband have a college degree 4) wife has a college degree and husband does not. For relative income, the researcher used the wife's proportion of the couple's total income.

Pinto studied the gender perspective in three ways. The first way involved a gender perspective scale that asked respondents if they agreed or disagreed with the following questions "It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the household," "Preschool children are likely to suffer if their

mother is employed," and "It is all right for mothers to work full time when their youngest child is under 5." They used a 5-point scale with 1 indicating strongly agree and 5 indicating strongly disagree. The second way that the gender perspective of the couple was studied was through a gender ideology question. Respondents were asked if they agreed with the following statement: "A husband whose wife is working full-time should spend just as many hours during housework as his wife." Responses were measured on a 1 to 5 scale, with 1 indicating strong agreement and 5 indicating strong disagreement. The third way that the gender perspective was studied measured the different effects of employment on men's and women's household labor, to explore the hypothesis that unemployed men do little housework as a way to reassert their masculinity. Three employment categories were created: 1) husband is employed, but wife is not employed, 2) both husband and wife are employed, and 3) husband is not employed and wife has any work status. Employment was measured as working for pay at the time of the NSFH II interview.

Pinto's (2006) sample included 14 percent African American husbands and 15 percent African American wives. The largest racial group in the sample was Caucasians: 77 percent of the husbands and 76 percent of the wives. Finally, about 7 percent of husbands and wives were Latinos. Regarding educational attainment, the majority of respondents (34 percent of husbands and 37 percent of wives) had a high school education. The second largest group (23 percent of husbands and 26 percent of wives) had some college education. Compared to wives, husbands had a slightly higher percentage of having less than a high school education: 17 percent compared to 15 percent. Approximately 15 percent of both husbands and wives had college degrees.

Finally, about 10 percent of husbands and 7 percent of wives had a professional or graduate degree. Income was quite different for men and women. Wives in the sample reported making about half as much as their husbands (a mean of $15,597 versus $34,379 yearly). Finally, husbands' mean age was 46 and wives' mean age was 44.

In terms of the results regarding any cultural variation among the three ethnic groups, Pinto (2006) found that there was a significant effect among the groups on household labor - African American women worked about 4.4. hours more than Caucasian women. Pertaining to total hours spent on household labor for husbands and wives, the time availability and gender perspectives had more explanatory power in predicting household labor for Caucasian men than for African American or Latino men. Also, for African American and Latino women, the time availability and relative resource perspectives predicted household labor - working outside of the home did not significantly decrease African American and Latino women's household labor (compared to Caucasians). The number of children increased the household labor for women, but at different rates. For Caucasian and African American women, work increased by three hours, but for Latinas work increased by almost 5 hours. Pinto (2006) attributes this difference to traditional attitudes about being a caregiver as being stronger for the Latino community than for the other two groups. Similarly, when both husbands and wives had college degrees, household work decreased but at different rates for the three different ethnic groups. For example, Caucasian women whose partner also had a college degree worked less in the household (about 7 hours less), compared to women whose husband had a college degree but they did not. Pinto concluded that the latter women could not "buy their way out of work". On the other hand, African American women worked about

10 hours less than Caucasian women and Latina women worked about 16 hours less than Caucasian women. Also, Pinto found that when a wife had a college degree and her husband did not she was able to buy her way out of household labor. This also varied for women by race. Caucasian women, for example, worked about 4 hours less when they had more education than their husbands, but African American women worked 7 hours less and Latinas worked 11 hours less.

The Pinto (2006) study contributed to the literature comparing the power dynamics in couples' relationships among all three ethnic groups (Caucasian, Latino and African American) and also addressed the effects of the relative socioeconomic statuses between the spouses. Although the study looked at socioeconomic status by using both education and income, it did make some efforts to explore direct effects of income on the power dynamics of the couple. Since most of the literature on power dynamics incorporates both the gender perspective and the cultural significance aspect, this study was sensitive to the possible barriers that both minority group families (African American and Latino), and more specifically, women in couple relationships, face in attaining power. The study examined all three ethnic groups, power dynamics between the spouses were studied in the context of division of labor, and socioeconomic factors were examined all in the same study. The significant difference between the study done by Pinto (2006) and the present study's comparative analysis is that the present study also examined the boundary *between* the partners (as well as the boundaries between the couple and outside subsystems such as extended family), and possible moderating effects of couples' socioeconomic levels on ethnic group differences in couple relationship structure.

Summary of Research on Culture and Structure in Relationships

The literature on the couples' boundaries in African American and Caucasian couples tends to focus specifically on the boundary around the couple and not on the boundary between the partners. Findings from these studies suggests that culturally and historically, African American couples tend to experience highly permeable boundaries with extended families because the culture promote this high level of involvement as compared to Caucasian couples, who historically and culturally, tend to experience much clearer boundaries with extended families in order to promote high levels of autonomy of the couple. When exploring the effects of socioeconomic levels on the boundary around the couple, research suggests that lower-income African American and Caucasian couples will show more diffuse boundaries with extended family in receiving resources and support in order to live, whereas higher-income couples will show clearer boundaries with extended family because they have the resources to survive on their own as a distinct family subsystem.

The literature on the power dynamics in African American and Caucasian couples tends to focus specifically on the concept of decision-making (i.e., the influence that an individual has in promoting his or her position in the couple's decision-making) and gender roles. Findings suggest that African American couples are more likely to show an egalitarian power dynamic in that the female partner has involvement in the decision-making (based on the high value of the matriarchal figure), and Caucasian couples tend to exhibit a moderate level of an egalitarian power dynamic in that both partners have involvement with decision-making but at the same time display a traditional male-dominated structure. When exploring the effects of socioeconomic status on the power

dynamics of the couple, studies tend to focus on the income disparity between the partners and decision-making (and not on lower-income vs. higher-income subgroups of these ethnic groups). The findings suggest that when there is an income disparity between the partners, both ethnic groups (African American and Caucasian couples) engage in some form of implicit and explicit negotiations in decision-making (e.g., regarding household labor) but to different degrees, depending on the educational levels, the current employment statuses, and the incomes of the two partners.

As mentioned earlier, the literature acknowledges that although there are similarities and differences between these two ethnic groups on structural dimensions such as boundaries and power, it is also important to be mindful about the within-group differences that exist in the sub-groups of each of these three ethnic groups. Studies such as the present one focus on group differences but do not overlook variations within groups (a key reason why this study also examines variation in couple structure based on income level).

Variables in the Current Study

Independent variables

The primary independent variable in this study is couple ethnicity, represented by the ethnic groups - African American and Caucasian couples. The focus of this study was to assess the potential differences between these two ethnic groups in their characteristics and patterns related to structural factors of relationship boundaries/autonomy and power/hierarchy.

A second independent variable that was examined as a potential moderator of the relationship between ethnic group and the dependent variables tapping structural aspects

of the couple's relationship is the financial resources of the couple. Couple financial resources were assessed in terms of the couple's income.

A third independent variable (a repeated measure within couples) that was examined as a moderator variable was gender. In other words, both female and male partners' perceptions of the structural characteristics of their couple relationship were examined.

Dependent variables

One of the dependent variables in this study is the degree of boundaries (connection versus autonomy) *between* members of a couple. Boundaries were defined as the degree to which members of a couple tend to have opportunities to function independently versus interdependently. More diffuse boundaries involve a high level of overlap between the partners, whereas rigid boundaries involve a high level of autonomy, in which each person primarily functions independently rather than as a dyad. The second dependent variable was the degree of boundary *around* the couple's relationship (whether diffuse, rigid, or clear), separating the couple from influences of the outside world.

The third dependent variable in this study was power/hierarchy in the couple's relationship. For this study, power was defined in terms of the degree to which each member of a couple makes attempts to control the other member, including in decision-making, to get his or her way in the relationship and/or block the other person from getting his or her way. A summary of the variables in this study is presented in Table 1.1.

Table 1: Summary of Variables and Instruments Used to Measure Them

Variables	Measures
Independent	
Ethnicity	Couples Information and Instructions form
Gender	Couples Information and Instructions form
Income	Couples Information and Instructions form Median split of combined income (couple information from intake) Median income = $55,000 Lower income - $55,000 or below Higher income - $55,250 or above
Dependent	
Boundary between spouses	ARI (8-item subset of 19-item inventory; total score of items 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 14, 18, 19) 1 = not at all like him/her 5 = very much like him/her
Boundary around the couple	PSS (total score of the PSSfa subscale – items 1- 20) 1 – Yes 5 – No
Power dynamics	ARI (5-item subset of 19-item inventory; total score of items 2, 3, 7, 12, 17) 1 = not at all like him/her 5 = very much like him/her

Hypotheses

The overall research question that was addressed by this study was: "What are the culturally associated structural differences between African American and Caucasian couples?" This question was answered by studying the boundary between partners, the boundary surrounding the couple, and the power hierarchy between the partners. Below are the hypotheses associated with this question:

Hypothesis 1

(Boundary between the partners): *It is hypothesized that Caucasian couples will show a higher degree of autonomy between the partners, as compared to African American couples, who will show a moderate degree of autonomy.*

Hypothesis 2

(Boundary surrounding the couple): *It is hypothesized that Caucasian couples will show a lower degree of such boundary permeability (a more rigid boundary) than African Americans couples who will show a more moderate degree of boundary permeability (i.e., somewhere between the levels of high and low interactive exchanges with extended families).*

Hypothesis 3

(Power dynamics between partners): *It is hypothesized that African American couples will exhibit a more egalitarian power structure between the partners (due to the historical and cultural importance of the matriarchal figure in the African American culture), than Caucasian couples, whose members will report more attempts by their partners to control them.*

In addition, this study investigated the degree to which differences in structural dimensions among these two groups of couples vary according to financial resources of the couple. Below are hypotheses associated with this question:

Hypothesis 4

(Main effect of financial resources on boundary between the partners): *It is hypothesized that lower-income African American and Caucasian couples will exhibit lower levels of autonomy between partners than higher-income African American and Caucasian couples.*

Hypothesis 4A

(Moderating effect of financial resources on the boundary between the partners): *It is hypothesized that as income increases for both ethnic groups, the difference in autonomy between the groups will be smaller (i.e., the more income, the less discrepancy in autonomy levels between the two groups).*

Hypothesis 5

(Main effect of financial resources on the boundary surrounding the couple): *It is hypothesized that, overall, lower-income African American and Caucasian couples both will exhibit higher levels of permeability in their boundary between their couple relationship and outside subsystems such as family.*

Hypothesis 5A

(Moderating effect of financial resources on the boundary surrounding the couple): *It is hypothesized that as income increases for both groups, the difference in the degree of boundary around the couple between the two ethnic groups will be smaller (i.e., the more*

income, the less discrepancy in levels of support interactions with outsiders between the

two groups).

Hypothesis 6

(Main effect of financial resources on power dynamics): *It is hypothesized that*

members of lower-income African American and Caucasian couples will engage in fewer

control behaviors toward their partners than higher-income African American and

Caucasian couples.

Hypothesis 6A

(Moderating effect of financial resources on power dynamics): *It is hypothesized*

that as income increases for both groups, the difference in the degree of control between

the two ethnic groups will be smaller.

Research Question

In addition to the above hypotheses, a research question was also explored.

1. Are there differences between females and males in their perceptions of the three

   structural dimensions of couple relationships:

   a. The boundary between the partners

   b. The boundary surrounding the couple

   c. The degrees to which partners attempt to exert control over each other

Chapter 3: Methodology

Sample

This study utilized previously collected data from a larger study on treatment and prevention of psychological and mild to moderate physically abusive behavior in couple relationships. In the original study, data were collected from an ethnically diverse sample of heterosexual couples. The couples were cohabiting or married and were seeking therapy from a community couple and family therapy clinic at the University of Maryland, College Park. Couples seeking help at the clinic consist predominantly of large numbers of Caucasians and African Americans. The couples agreed to participate in a research project, the Couples' Abuse Prevention Program (CAPP), which compares the effectiveness of types of couple therapy for improving couples' ability to manage anger and reduce conflict in their relationships. The program is intended to reduce partners' tendencies to behave in verbally and physically aggressive ways toward each other when they have disagreements or conflicts. Couples were not excluded due to marital status, and thus may have been cohabiting, married, dating but not living together, or separated.

The sample for this current study consisted of 78 heterosexual couples who voluntarily sought therapy from 2000 to 2008 at the Center for Healthy Families, an outpatient clinic at the University of Maryland. Of the 78 couples who participated in this study, 42.3% ($n = 33$) were African American and 57.7% ($n = 45$) were Caucasian. The age range for African American female participants was 22-44 years old (Mean = 31; SD = 5.97). The age range for African American male participants was 25-49 years old (Mean = 33; SD = 5.96). The age range for Caucasian female participants was 19-57

years old (Mean = 31; SD = 9.71) and the age range for Caucasian male participants was 21-61 years old (Mean = 33; SD = 9.99).

The relationship statuses of these two ethnic groups varied. Among the African American couples, 60.6% reported being currently married, living together; 9.1% reported being currently married, separated; 15.2% reported living together, not married; 6.1% reported being separated; and 9.1% reported dating, not living together. As for Caucasian couples, 51.1% reported being currently married, living together; 2.2% currently married, separated, 17.8% living together, not married, 22.2% reported dating, not living together, and 4.4% reported being single.

The occupations of these four groups varied as well. Among the African American women, 24.2% reported their positions as clerical sales, bookkeeper, secretary; 12.1% as homemakers; 3% as owner, manager of small business; 27.3% as professional – associate's or bachelor's degree; 18.2% as professional – master's or doctoral degree; 3% as service worker – barber, cook, beautician; and 9.1% as student. Among African American men, 18.2% reported their positions as clerical sales; 3% reported working as an executive, large business owner; 3% reported as homemaker, 3% reported no occupation (child responsibility); 6.1% reported as owner, manager of small business; 18.2 reported as professional – associate's or bachelor's degree; 15.2% reported as professional – master's or doctoral degree; 18.2% reported as skilled worker/craftsman; 6.1% service worker – barber, cook, beautician, 3% unskilled worker, and 3% reported as student.

Among the Caucasian women, 13.3% reported working in clerical sales; 11.1% reported working as a homemaker; 8.9% reported as an owner, manager of small

business; 17.8% reported working as a professional – associate's or bachelor's degree; 15.6% reported working as a professional – master's or doctoral degree; 2.2% reported as a skilled worker/craftsman; 4.4% reported working as a service worker – barber, cook, beautician; and 24.4% reporting being a student. Among Caucasian men, 6.7% reported working in clerical sales; 2.2% working as an executive, large business; 13.3% reported as an owner, manager of small business; 24.4% reported being a professional – associate's or bachelor's degree; 15.6% reported being a professional – master's or doctoral degree; 17.8% reported as a skilled worker/craftsman; 4.4% reported being a service worker – barber, cook, beautician; and 4.4% reported as being an unskilled worker.

Regarding personal yearly gross income, the range for African American women was $10,000 to $125,000 (Mean = $32,780) and the range for African American men was $2,000 to $200,000 (Mean = $46,077). Among the Caucasian couples, the range for women was $1,000 to $83,000 (Mean = $21,776), and the range for men was $3,000 to $106,000 (Mean = $42,644).

The highest level of education across all four groups varied as well. Among the African American women, 9.1% reported having a high school diploma, 18.2% reported having some college. 18.2% an associate's degree, 12.1% a bachelor's degree, 15.2% some graduate education, 9.1% a master's degree, 9.1% a doctoral degree, and 9.1% reported going to trade school. Among African American men, 27.3% reported having a high school education, 33.3% some college, 3% an associate's degree, 12.1% some graduate education, 9.1% a master's degree, 9.1% a doctoral degree, and 6.1% reported attending a trade school.

Among the Caucasian women, 4.4% reported having completed some high school, 4.4% a high school diploma, 20% some college, 4.4% an associate's degree, 17.8% a bachelor's degree, 15.6% some graduate education, 22.2% a master's degree, 4.4% a doctoral degree, and 6.7% reported attending a trade school. Among Caucasian men, 4.4% reported completing some high school, 11.1% a high school diploma, 26.7% some college, 2.2% an associate's degree, 17.8% a bachelor's degree, 15.6% some graduate education, 13.3% a master's degree, 6.7% a doctoral degree, and 2.2% reported attending a trade school.

Regarding the number of children who the couples had living in their home, African American women reported a mean of 1.73 children (SD = 1.28), African American men reported a mean of 1.17 children (SD = 1.18), Caucasian women reported a mean of .62 children (SD = .89), and Caucasian men reported a mean of .64 children (SD = .96).

Procedure

In the CAPP study, couples call the clinic to inquire about therapy services and are randomly assigned to one of two treatment conditions (based on the order of when they called). The two treatments are cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and usual treatment (UT) (other major systemically-oriented models of couple therapy). Random assignment of these couples occurs, in that every other couple is placed in either the CBT or the UT treatment.

On the first day of assessments for both treatments at the clinic, the clients are told about the objectives of therapy, given consent forms that they sign to confirm their willingness to receive therapeutic services at the clinic, and complete the clinic's standard

assessments. Next, a set of questionnaires are given to each couple, with partners placed in separate rooms to ensure privacy, so that they can answer the questions openly and honestly. The clients are reassured by the therapists that their answers will remain confidential.

As part of the assessment of each couple, the therapists score measures of psychological and physical abuse to determine the degree to which members of a couple have engaged in aggressive behaviors during the last four months. The degrees of psychological and physical aggression in the last four months serve as an eligibility factor for couples' participation or exclusion in the CAPP study. Specifically, those couples who reported high levels of physical violence resulting in injury or involving the use of a weapon pose a risk for conjoint therapy, so they are excluded from the couple therapy study. Those couples who qualified and agreed to continue in the treatment study attend a second day of assessments at the clinic. They fill out questionnaires and then are asked to complete a communication sample involving a ten-minute discussion of a low-to-moderate conflict topic that they are currently struggling with in their relationship (as they indicated on a Relationship Issues Survey). Three questionnaires from the first and second assessment sessions from the CAPP study contain measures used in the present study.

Measures

Couples Information and Instructions. The Couples Information and Instructions (CII) form (Epstein & Werlinich, 2000) is a self-report measure used exclusively by the Center for Healthy Families at the University of Maryland. This form is a 38-item self-report inventory designed to collect demographic information as well as information regarding medications, legal actions, and the purpose for which the couple entered therapy.

Information regarding the couples' ethnicity, yearly income, and gender were used specifically from this measure. Regarding race/ethnicity, question number 14 asks for "race." Participants select among six options: Native American (1), African American (2), Asian/Pacific Islander (3), Hispanic (4), White (5), and Other (6). In terms of the yearly income, question number 13 asks for "personal yearly gross income (i.e., before taxes or any deductions)." Participants are able to write down their amount in dollars in the space provided. In terms of gender, question number 5 asks the participant to circle either M (male) or F (female). See Appendix A for this measure.

Autonomy-Relatedness Inventory (ARI; Schaefer & Burnett, 1987). The ARI is a 19-item self-report inventory with six subscales assessing perceived partner behavior on major dimensions of independence/dependence and love/hostility. One subscale of interest in the current investigation was the autonomy scale, assessing the degree to which each partner believes that his/her spouse provides opportunities for the respondent's autonomy (or independence) within the relationship. The ARI is a refinement of an earlier scale, the Marital Autonomy and Relatedness Inventory (MARI) (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1979), and the revision was based on scale and factor analyses of

the MARI. With the ARI, the respondent rates how well each statement describes his or her partner's behavior toward him or her on a 5-point scale, ranging from not at all like him/her (1) to very much like him/her (5). In an investigation with 213 women, Hall and Kiernan (1992) found a Cronbach's alpha of .62 for the Autonomy scale. In the current investigation, the researcher extracted an 8-item autonomy subscale from the 19-item ARI, based on item content, high corrected item-total correlations, and each item's contribution to subscale internal consistency (see Appendix B for the 8 items used in the sub-scale). An example of these items is "respects my need to be alone at times." This researcher found a Cronbach's alpha of .89 for the set of 8 autonomy items within the data set that was used for the current study. This subscale was used in this study to assess the perceived autonomy levels between the partners, in that higher scores on the autonomy subscale indicate that the individual perceives his or her partner as providing more opportunities for him or her to have those autonomous experiences within the couple's relationship.

The ARI was also used to measure the power dynamics in the couple's relationship. In order to measure the concept of power in the relationship, this researcher extracted a 5-item control subscale from the 19-item ARI based on the content of these items related to power dynamics (see Appendix D for the 5 items questions used in this subscale), high corrected item-total correlations, and each item's contribution to the subscale's internal consistency. An example of these items is "is always trying to change me." This researcher found a Cronbach's alpha of .78 within the data set that was used for this study for the 5 control items. This subscale provided information on power dynamics in the relationship, in that higher scores indicate that the individual perceives

his or her partner as attempting to exert greater control (as opposed to the relationship being egalitarian).

Perceived Social Support (PSS; Procidano & Heller, 1983). The PSS is a 40-item self-report inventory that assesses each partner's perceived level of social support received from and provided to his or her family (PSS-Fa scale - 20 items) and his or her friends (PSS-Fr scale - 20 items). The scale of interest in the current investigation was the PSS-Fa scale – the degree to which the individual perceives that he or she receives social support from the family, as well as the degree to which family members seek support from him or her. Participants rate their feelings and experiences on a 5-point scale anchored by the descriptors "Yes" and "No." For example, items on social support from family include "certain members of my family come to me when they have problems or need advice" and "there is a member of my family I could go to if I were just feeling down without feeling funny about it later." In a review of three validation studies on the PSS measure and its sub-scales, Procidano and Heller (1983) found Cronbach alphas of .90 and .88 for the PSS-Fa and PSS-Fr scales, respectively. In terms of gender, the Cronbach alpha for females was .92 and the Cronbach alpha for males was .94. The PSS-Fa sub-scale was used in this study to measure the extent of the boundary that exists between the couple and outside subsystems (e.g., family) in that higher total scores on the PSS-Fa would suggest more permeable boundaries with the respondent's family system. See Appendix C for the SS-Fa subscale.

Financial Resources. Higher versus lower financial resources of the couple were assessed in terms of the couple's total yearly income. The distribution of income scores for the sample was divided into "higher" and "lower" groups based on a median split.

Chapter 4: Results

This study was designed to examine the degrees to which couples from two ethnic groups (African American and Caucasian) differ on structural aspects of their relationships related to boundaries and power/hierarchy. More specifically, the dependent variables of the boundary between the partners and power dynamics were assessed with the ARI, whereas the dependent variable of the boundary around the couple was assessed with the SS. The moderating effect of financial resources on differences between the ethnic groups regarding the couples' structural patterns was also examined. There also was a research question regarding potential gender differences regarding these structural aspects of the couples' relationships. Stepwise multiple regression analyses were used to test the hypotheses of this study.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting the Perception of the Boundary Between the Partners, Using the ARI Autonomy Subscale

Predictor Variable	Beta	t	p
Race	.321	1.90	.059
Combined Income	.410	2.18	.031
Gender	-.083	-0.04	.696
Race x Income	-.337	-1.60	.111
Race x Gender	-.129	-0.57	.569

Table 2 summarizes the final results of the multiple regression analysis predicting the participants' perceptions of the boundaries between the partners (i.e., the degree of autonomy that partners provide for each other). When client gender, race, and couple income were entered in the first step of the analysis, $R = .244$, $R^2 = .059$, and $F (3, 150) = 3.16$, $p = .027$. Thus, the set of three predictor variables was significant in accounting for variance in ARI autonomy scores. Then, when the race-by-income and race-by-gender interaction variables were entered in the regression analysis in the second step, $R = .278$,

$R^2 = .077$, and the change in R^2 was non-significant, $F(2, 148) = 1.44$, $p = .240$. Thus, neither income level of the couple or the gender of the partner moderated the overall association between race and individuals' perceptions about the degree to which their partners gave them opportunities for autonomy in their relationship.

Regarding the individual predictor variables, in the total model, the standardized beta for race was .321, $t = 1.90$, $p = .059$, indicating that there was a trend toward Caucasian couples reporting more autonomy than African American couples (consistent with hypothesis 1); the standardized beta for couple income was .410, $t = 2.18$, $p = .031$, indicating that higher-income couples reported significantly greater autonomy (consistent with hypothesis 4); and the standardized beta for gender was -.083, $t = -.39$, $p = .696$, indicating no gender difference in perceptions of partner support for one's autonomy.

For the interaction effects, the beta for the race-by-income interaction was -.337, $t = -1.60$, $p = .111$ and the beta for the race-by-gender interaction was -.129, $t = -0.57$, $p = .569$. Thus, the results tend to support hypothesis 1, as there was a non-significant trend ($p = .059$) toward Caucasian couples reporting more autonomy than African American couples did. The results also supported hypothesis 4, in that lower income couples (across race) reported lower levels of autonomy than higher income couples. The lack of a significant race-by-income interaction effect did not provide support for hypothesis 4a, that income would moderate the relationship between race and autonomy (that as income is lower for both groups the difference in autonomy between the groups would be smaller. Finally, in regard to the research question regarding potential gender differences in the couples' perceptions of the degree of boundary that exists between the partners, the findings indicated that gender was unrelated to perceptions of autonomy.

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting the Boundary Around the Couple, Using the SSfa Subscale

Predictor Variable	Beta	t	p
Race	.225	1.30	.197
Combined Income	.246	1.28	.202
Gender	.232	1.06	.292
Race x Income	-.260	-1.20	.230
Race x Gender	-.335	-1.43	.154

Table 3 summarizes the final results of the stepwise multiple regression analysis predicting the degree of boundary around the couple's relationship (regarding exchanges and interactions with extended family). When client gender, race, and couple income were entered in the first step, $R = .088$, $R^2 = .008$, and $F(3, 149) = 0.39$, $p = .762$. Thus, the set of three predictor variables was not significant in accounting for variance in SSFa scores. Then, when the race-by-income and race-by-gender interaction variables were entered into the regression analysis in the second step, $R = .175$, $R^2 = .031$, and the change in R^2 was not significant, $F(2, 147) = 1.74$, $p = .179$.

Regarding the individual predictor variables, in the total model, the beta for race was .225, $t = 1.30$, $p = .197$; the beta for couple income was .246, $t = 1.28$, $p = .202$; and the beta for gender was .232, $t = 1.06$, $p = .292$.

For the interaction effects, the beta for the race-by-income interaction was -.260, $t = -1.20$, $p = .230$, and the beta for the race-by-gender interaction was -.335, $t = -1.43$, $p = .154$. Therefore, the findings did not support hypothesis 2 (that Caucasian couples would report a greater boundary around their relationship than African American couples), hypothesis 5 (that couples with less income would have less of a boundary around their relationship), or hypothesis 5a (that income level would moderate the relationship between race and degree of the boundary around the couple relationship). In relation to

the research question regarding possible gender differences, the results indicated no

gender difference in perceptions of the degree of boundary around the couple

relationship, and no gender by race interaction effect on perceptions regarding that

boundary.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting the Perception That One's Partner Tries to Exert Control, Using the ARI Power Subscale

Predictor Variable	Beta	t	p
Race	-.242	-1.46	.145
Combine Income	-.407	-2.20	.029
Gender	.411	1.94	.054
Race x Income	.427	2.06	.042
Race x Gender	-.239	-1.06	.292

Table 4 summarizes the results from the stepwise multiple regression analysis

predicting individuals' perceptions that their partner tries to control them. When client

gender, race, and couple income were entered in the first step, $R = .222$, $R^2 = .049$, and F

$(3, 152) = 2.63$, $p = .052$. Thus, the set of three predictor variables approached

significance in accounting for variance in ARI power scores. Then, when the race-by-

income and race-by-gender interaction variables were entered in the regression analysis

in the second step, $R = .287$, $R^2 = .082$, and the change in R^2 showed a non-significant

trend, $F (2, 150) = 2.67$, $p = .072$.

Regarding the individual predictor variables, in the total model the beta for race

was -.242, $t = -1.46$, (non-significant); the beta for couple income was -.407, $t = -2.20$, p

= .029 (indicating less perceived control within higher income couples); and the beta for

gender was .411, $t = 1.94$, $p = .054$.

For the interaction effects, the beta for the race-by-income interaction was .427, t

= 2.06, $p = .042$ but the beta for the race-by-gender interaction was not significant.

Therefore, the data did not support hypothesis 3, in that there was no group difference between African American and Caucasian couples in their perception that their partner tries to control them (whereas it had been hypothesized that African American couples would be more egalitarian and perceive less effort by partners to exert control. Regarding the main effect for income, the data did not support hypothesis 6, and in fact there was a significant effect in the opposite direction, in that higher income couples reported less controlling behaviors from their partners than lower income couples. The data did support hypothesis 6a in showing that income significantly moderated the relationship between race and perceptions that partners were attempting to exert control within the couple relationship.

Pertaining to the research question about possible gender differences in perceptions that one's partner is trying to control them, the results showed that males (across both ethnic groups) were more likely (with a trend at $p = .054$) to report that their female partner tries to control them, than vice versa. On the other hand, gender did not moderate the relationship between race and perceived control.

Table 5: Cell Means for Moderating Effect of Income on African American and Caucasian Couples' Controlling Behavior

	Low-income	High-Income
African Amer.	13.67	13.28
Caucasians	12.88	12.88

In order to explore the moderating effect of income on the relationship between race and perceived control, a 2 x 2 matrix of perceived control cell means was calculated for the 4 groups involving the combinations of higher versus lower income (based on a

median split of the distribution of income amounts) and African American versus

Caucasian race (see Table 5). The pattern of means indicates that the difference in

perceived control between lower income African American and Caucasian couples is

approximately .8, whereas the difference between higher income African American and

Caucasian couples was approximately .4. Thus, the data support hypothesis 6a in that as

income was higher the difference in the degree of control perceived by the African

American and Caucasian couples would be smaller.

Exploratory Analyses

After the analyses regarding the hypotheses for the three structural dimensions

focused on in this investigation (i.e., the boundary between the partners, the boundary

around the couple, and power dynamics), the investigator decided to explore available

data for the sample on positive and negative communication patterns that seem relevant

to the structure of the couple's relationship. The communication data were derived from

the ten-minute communication sample completed by each couple as part of their standard

pre-therapy assessment at the Center for Healthy Families. Those data had been coded by

undergraduate student research assistants who had been trained to use the global rating

version of the widely used micro-analytic Marital Interaction Coding System. The global

MICS-G (Weiss & Tolman, 1990) involves coders viewing a couple's ten-minute

communication sample and rating each of the five two-minute sections on specific verbal

and nonverbal components of three positive (problem solving, validation, facilitation) and

three negative (conflict, invalidation, withdrawal) categories of communication.

Watching the taped interaction, the coders observe each partner's behavior and rate on a

scale from 0-5 (none, very low, low, moderate, high or very high) the levels of the

positive and negative forms of communication by each partner separately during each two-minute interval. To achieve inter-rater reliability, raters' scores were required to fall within one point of each other. In this study, the focus of the exploratory analyses was the degrees of positive and negative communication in the two racial groups. The three forms of positive communication were added to produce a positive communication composite score for each individual, and the three forms of negative communication were added to produce a negative communication composite score. As described earlier in this document, Minuchin (1974) stated that the communication patterns between the members of a couple reflect the structure within the relationship.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting the Positive Communication in Couples' Relationship, Using the MICS-G

Predictor Variable	Beta	t	p
Race	.473	2.41	.018
Combined Income	.009	0.04	.969
Gender	.303	1.24	.217
Race x Income	-.078	-0.33	.745
Race x Gender	-.247	-0.95	.345

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was computed predicting positive communication behavior, When client gender, race, and couple income were entered in the first step, $R = .366$, $R^2 = .134$, and $F (3, 104) = 5.36$, $p = .002$. Thus, the set of three predictor variables significantly accounted for variance in positive communication scores. Then, when the race-by-income and race-by-gender interaction variables were entered in the regression analysis in the second step, $R = .377$, $R^2 = .142$, and the change in R^2 was not significant, $F (2, 102) = 0.50$, $p = .606$.

Regarding the individual predictor variables, in the total model, the beta for race was .473, $t = 2.41$, $p = .018$; the beta for couple income was .009, $t = 0.04$, $p = .969$; and

the beta for gender was .303, $t = 1.24$, $p = .217$. For the interaction effects, the beta for

the race-by-income interaction was -.078, $t = -0.33$, $p = .745$, and the beta for the race-by-

gender interaction was -.247, $t = -0.95$, $p = .345$. Thus, the results indicated a race effect

in that Caucasian couples exhibited more positive communication than African American

couples. There were no other significant main or interaction effects for the predictor

variables.

Table 7: Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting the Negative Communication in Couples' Relationships, Using the MICS-G

Predictor Variable	Beta	t	p
Race	-.343	-1.67	.099
Combined Income	-.212	-0.91	.365
Gender	-.073	-0.29	.775
Race x Income	.381	1.52	.132
Race x Gender	-.012	-0.04	.964

In the multiple regression analysis predicting couples' negative communication,

when client gender, race, and couple income were entered in the first step, $R = .194$, $R^2 = .038$, and $F (3, 104) = 1.35$, $p = .262$. Then, when the race-by-income and race-by-gender

interaction variables were entered in the regression analysis in the second step, $R = .243$,

$R^2 = .059$, and the change in R^2 was not significant, $F (2, 102) = 1.16$, $p = .319$.

Regarding the individual predictor variables in the total model, the beta for race was -

.343, $t = -1.67$, $p = .099$; the beta for couple income was -.212, $t = -0.91$, $p = .365$; and the

beta for gender was -.073, $t = -0.29$, $p = .775$. For the interaction effects, the beta for the

race-by-income interaction was .381, $t = 1.52$, $p = .132$ and the beta for the race-by-

gender interaction was -.012, $t = -0.04$, $p = .964$. Therefore, the findings indicated that

there were no significant main or interaction effects for race, gender, or income in regard to couples' negative communication.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study was undertaken in an attempt to explore the degrees to which couples from two ethnic groups (African American and Caucasian) differ on structural aspects of their relationships related to boundaries and power/hierarchy. Examining these differences is important due to substantial prior research findings indicating that these differences may contribute to researchers' and clinicians' understanding of cultural aspects of couple relationships. The role of financial resources as a possible moderator of ethnic group differences in structural patterns also was tested, and gender differences were also explored. This study was ultimately conducted to enlighten researchers and clinicians about ways to conduct culturally sensitive evaluations of couple relationships, as well as culturally sensitive and treatments.

Summary of Overall Findings

Table 8 presents a summary of the study's findings:

Table 8: Summary of Overall Findings

Hypothesis	Results
1. Caucasian couples will show a higher degree of autonomy between the partners than African American couples.	Some support
2. Caucasian couples will exhibit a stronger boundary around their couple relationship than African American couples.	Not Supported
3. African American couples will report less controlling behaviors between the partners than Caucasian couples.	Not Supported

4. Lower income African American and Caucasian couples will exhibit lower levels of autonomy than higher income African American and Caucasian couples	Supported
4a. When income is higher for both groups, the difference in autonomy between the groups will be smaller (*moderating effect*).	Not Supported
5. Overall, lower income couples will exhibit higher levels of interactions with outside family members (a more permeable boundary around the couple) than higher income couples.	Not Supported
5a. Among couples with higher income, the difference in the degree of boundary around the couple between the two ethnic groups will be smaller than among couples with lower income (*moderating effect*).	Not Supported
6. Members of couples with lower income will engage in fewer control behaviors toward their partners than members of higher income couples.	Not supported – opposite effect
6a. Among couples with higher income, the difference in the degree of control behavior exhibited between the two ethnic groups will be smaller than among couples with lower income (*moderating effect*).	Supported
Research Question – Is there a gender difference in partners' reports of the perceived degree of boundary between	There were no gender differences

partners?	
Research Question – Is there a gender difference in perceptions of the degree of boundary around the relationship?	There was no gender difference
Research Question – Is there a gender difference in the perception of the degree to which one's partner attempts to exert control?	There was a gender difference; males reported more that their female partner tries to control them
Exploratory analysis: The level of positive communication in the relationship.	Present only for Caucasian couples
Exploratory analysis: The level of negative communication in the relationship	No significant findings

Consistency between the Existing Literature and the Findings in this Study

Autonomy between Partners – Ethnic Group Differences

The findings of this study are somewhat consistent with previous research on the potential differences on structural dimensions of the couple relationship for African American and Caucasian couples. As mentioned before, there is not much research that focuses on the boundary between the partners of both ethnic groups. This study added to the existing comparative research in finding a trend that indicates Caucasian couples exhibit more autonomy between partners than African American couples. Members of African American couples were less likely to report that their partner provides them opportunities for autonomy. It may be that African American couples feel less comfortable with exercising their own free will in the relationship, because historically the theme of individuality regarding one's behavior and actions has not been promoted

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within African American culture. Hays and Mindel (1973) noted that ever since slavery, African American families have promoted putting one's family before oneself in order to help maintain the nuclear family structure for the family (and its members), to survive the harsh conditions that undermined family relationships during that time period. Brewer (1988) also mentioned that African American families since slavery have held on to the notion that autonomous behavior did not necessarily create many benefits for an individual, and that depending on others such as loved ones actually helped those individuals to excel in life.

Autonomy between Partners – The Role of Financial Resources

The present findings indicated that, regardless of the ethnic group, members of lower income couples experience lower levels of opportunity for autonomy provided by their partner than members of higher income couples. This suggests that having more money provides a couple with the ability to promote more autonomy between the partners. It may be that having more money and resources lessens the need for each partner to rely on the other to satisfy his or her own personal needs, while also maintaining the needs of the relationship, compared to the circumstances faced by lower income couples.

Boundary around the Couple – Ethnic Group Differences and the Role of Financial Resources

In terms of the boundary around the couple, previous research has indicated that culturally (and not so much financially), African American couples rely on their extended family and have higher relational exchanges with their extended family, compared to Caucasian couples (Tienda & Angel, 1982). In the present study, there were no results

that indicated such a pattern. There was no main effect between the two groups regarding boundaries; neither was there a moderating effect of financial resources on boundaries around couple relationships in the two ethnic groups. This is contrary to findings from the previous research that consistently indicated that African American couples exhibit higher exchanges with extended family than Caucasian couples do, which has been explained as being due to African American families historically facing economic disadvantages as compared to Caucasian couples. Also, there was no significant gender difference in the perceived degree of a boundary around the couple relationship.

Measuring the Boundary around the Couple – The PSS Inventory

This study used the Perceived Social Support inventory, specifically the PSSfa (the family support subscale) to examine the level of exchanges between the couple and their family. One possible explanation for the lack of support for the hypothesis is the question of whether or not the measure used adequately assesses the construct of the boundary around the couple to examine possible ethnic group differences. The Perceived Social Support inventory allowed the participant to rate the feelings and experiences that he or she has with family members. The idea for using this particular inventory (and subscale) to measure the boundary around the couple was that higher scores indicated higher levels of mutual supportive exchanges with one's family. For example, there is an item that states "members of my family come to me for emotional support." Items such as this seem to reflect an open exchange between members of the couple and significant others outside the dyad. Thus, more mutual support between the members of the couple and their family reflect a more permeable boundary around the couple's relationship. However, this measure may have been limited in how well it assessed the boundary

around the couple, because it did not measure both the emotional and behavioral

exchanges with the couple's extended families (e.g., a couple dropping their kids off

with their extended family for day care). The PSS also does not include items reflecting

the degree to which extended family members actively intrude into the couple's

relationship, such as giving the couple advice regarding child-rearing and money

management, or the members of the couple sharing intimate details about their

relationship with members of their extended family. Thus, the PSS was the only measure

available to this investigator for attempting to measure the boundary around a couple's

relationship, and it was fairly limited in covering the range of interactions that define

such a boundary.

Perceived Control in the Relationship – Ethnic Group Differences and the Role of Financial Resources

In terms of the power dynamics between the members of the couple, the results of

this study are somewhat consistent with previous research. Previous research has found

that there are ethnic group differences in how power is managed and perceived – African

American couples experiencing fewer control efforts between partners based on more

egalitarian gender roles, and Caucasian couples tending to exhibit more controlling

behavior based on a relatively greater male-dominated structure. The results of the

present study regarding power (efforts to exert control over one's partner) did not support

previous research, in that there was no significant difference between the two ethnic

groups. However, the significant moderating effect of couples' financial resources on the

ethnic group difference in controlling behavior was as hypothesized, in that with higher

income the difference in controlling behavior of African American and Caucasian

couples was smaller than it was for couples with lower income; yet this pattern was due to less controlling behavior among higher income African American couples (with income level having no effect on Caucasian couples). There was no evidence of African American couples being more egalitarian than Caucasian couples, at least in terms of the way that control was defined and assessed in this study.

Possible Explanations for Perceived Control Findings

There are two notable reasons that may explain this study's finding regarding no significant ethnic group difference in controlling behavior. First, the clinical sample for this study was comprised of couples who had experienced some conflict and aggression in their relationships, so both ethnic groups might have been characterized by common power struggles; i.e., their tendency to be conflictual may have overshadowed any ethnic differences in egalitarian roles. There has been a substantial amount of research on couples' use of aggressive behavior as a means to exert control in their relationships (Caetano, Ramisetty-Mikler, & Field, 2005) and the finding that lower income was significantly associated with more control may be due to lower income being a stressor on the relationship that elicits partners' aggressive behavior. Such a pattern is consistent with research findings that couples' financial strain is associated with partners engaging in a variety of negative forms of communication with each other (Falconier & Epstein, 2011). Thus, the present study's overall finding that couples with lower income reported more controlling behavior was in contrast to previous findings that controlling behaviors are less likely among lower income couples in that they are more willing to be open and cooperative to help their financial and relational aspects of their relationship, but they

were consistent with findings that financial stress often leads to adversarial exchanges between partners.

The findings regarding control also may have been influenced by the scale that was used to measure control. The ARI power subscale only had six items and may not have included a sufficient range of content to fully capture the power structure in the couples' relationships. For example, perceived efforts at control may not tap into the degree to which members of a couple have an egalitarian relationship when it comes to making decisions.

Perceived Control in the Relationship – Gender Differences

When examining gender differences, it was found that males (across the two ethnic groups) reported more controlling behavior by their partner than females did. This is quite consistent with previous research on gender differences in couple interaction patterns. Prior studies, such as the one done by Sprecher and Felmlee (1997), have indicated that historically women have less perceived bargaining power in a patriarchal society, and this influences how females and males behave regarding power in many interpersonal relationships. A commonly found couple interaction pattern associated with conflict is the demand-withdraw pattern, in which one partner pursues the other to interact while the other partner withdraws. Studies have demonstrated that in heterosexual couples female partners are more likely to engage in demanding or pursuing behaviors, and males are more likely to engage in withdrawal behavior (Christensen, & Heavey, 1990; Heavey, Christensen, & Malamuth,1995; Ward, Bergner, & Kahn, 2003). In addition, it may be that one partner is over-functioning while the other is under-functioning in the relationship to maintain its structure. To the extent that this pattern

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also occurred in the present sample (although it was not assessed in this study), it may be that this particular dynamic led the males to be more likely to perceive that their female partners were attempting to control them than vice versa.

Exploratory Analyses Regarding Ethnic Group Differences in Communication

In the exploratory analyses, there was no ethnic group difference in negative communication that was assessed through direct behavior observation (e.g., conflict, invalidation, and withdrawal); neither did income or gender influence such negative forms of communication. On the other hand, Caucasian couples exhibited more positive communication (problem solving, validation, facilitation) than African American couples. Jordan-Jackson and Davis (2005) expressed how historically and culturally African Americans have used "Black English," a dialect that stemmed from "Standard English," as part of the development of their own vocabulary, pronunciation, grammatical rules, nonverbal cues, dress, walk, and distinctive speech culture dating back to the period of slavery. Jordan-Jackson and Davis (2005) also mentioned that the distinct perceptions of both styles of communication complicate the reality of these patterns – African Americans tend to perceive Standard English as uninvolved and removed, whereas Caucasians tend to perceive Black English as loud, aggressive, and impolite. This notion then speaks to the coding of both groups' behaviors by the team of undergraduate coders, using the MICS-G. Perhaps the MICS-G criteria/cues that were used for the communication sample were developed from a research tradition based on the researchers' experiences with traditional Caucasian culture, so the coders may have

been more likely to code some behaviors exhibited by African American couples as more conflictual than the partners themselves either intended them or experienced them.

Limitations of the Current Study

Sample Groups

The current study had limitations that are noteworthy. First, although this study examined structural differences between two ethnic groups of couples, the investigator originally intended to include another important ethnic group, Latinos, but had to drop that comparison due to an insufficient number of Latino couples in the clinic database. Including a Latino group may add important information for cross-cultural comparisons of couple relationship structure, given that Latino culture includes traditions regarding boundaries and the distribution of power in couple relationships that may differ from those in African American and non-Latino Caucasian couples. Future studies, if the data are available, would benefit from the addition of a third group when comparing couples of different ethnic groups in one study, because much of the current research focuses on studying just two groups at a time.

Measuring Cultural Differences

Another notable limitation of this study is that the way culture (and to a certain extent, cultural beliefs) were defined was solely in terms of the ethnic group membership indicated by each partner in the couple relationship. This meant superficially assessing the significance of the couples' structural patterns based solely on their classifying themselves as African American or Caucasian. Future research should use a measure that allows for assessing the cultural beliefs and traditions of each member of the relationship. This is highly important because it can provide valuable information regarding the

distinctness between the ethnic groups on issues regarding power dynamics, boundaries between the partners, and how they manage their boundary with outside systems (e.g., extended family). As mentioned earlier in this document, culture is so complex that limiting its operational definition to ethnic group affiliation does not fully capture how the couples' cultural beliefs and traditions may influence their means of managing and negotiating structural aspects of their relationship.

Expanding Financial Resources to SES

Although there was evidence that couples' financial resources were associated with control behavior (although not as expected), they were not associated as hypothesized with couples' boundary-related behaviors. It is possible that the range of financial resources within the current sample was not broad enough to fully capture the degree to which economic factors may influence couple structural characteristics such as being self-sufficient versus turning to others for support. Including a sample with a wider range of socioeconomic status may allow for a much richer analysis of the role that SES may play in couple relationships (as previous research indicates). Furthermore, future research on this topic would benefit from using criteria for SES beyond income, such as partners' education levels and occupations, which also may affect how the couple structures their boundaries and power distribution. Unlike previous research that has not paid much attention to structural dimensions of relationships (generally focusing on presenting problems of the couple), future research should explore how SES affects the structural dimensions of ethnic groups. Having a more comprehensive definition of SES and a wider range of SES levels within the sample seems likely to allow a better test of the effects of SES on couple relationship structure.

Appropriately Measuring Income Split

In addition to the limitation of attempting to assess SES solely in terms of couple income, this study may have been limited by using a median split of the sample's distribution of income across the two ethnic groups. It would be helpful to consider what effects occurred when using a common cutting score for both ethnic groups, when historically African American families (along with other disadvantaged groups such as Latinos) have obtained lower incomes on average than Caucasian couples. Future research should explore culturally appropriate ways of managing the income levels of the different groups that are compared, because criteria used to define higher versus lower income might bias results.

Theories Used as a Basis for this Study

Another limitation to this study may have been the use of structural and functional theoretical concepts when examining ethnic groups' structural dimensions of couple relationships. Structural-functional theory assumes that as long as a basic structure exists in a couple or family relationship, then the function typically associated with the structure will always be carried out. Both of these theories helped make sense of the findings in this study in regard to how relationships are structured in order to achieve a goal. However, both theories do not allow room for cultural variation in what is culturally appropriate and accepted regarding these same structural dimensions. As this study is based on some assumptions that members of an ethnic group share particular beliefs, a theory is needed that gives culture a voice in shedding light on the similarities and differences among ethnic groups. Future research should utilize a theory that provides enough room for the concept of culture to be examined sensitively, because culture can

inform theory. For example, Minuchin's structural theory and Parsons' functional theory both were informed by the cultures within which their respective founders lived at the time (e.g., Minuchin's South American culture and Parsons' 1950s-60s American culture), regarding family dynamics.

Measuring Communication Styles – Potential Ethnic Group Differences

As mentioned before, the communication sample from each couple's conversation was coded by several undergraduate research assistants. Regarding the finding that there was more positive communication among Caucasian couples than among African American couples, the coding process used by the coders may be a limitation of this research. More specifically, there may be some ambiguity in how to interpret what is positive and negative communication between members of different ethnic groups, and it is important that measurements be culturally sensitive. Future researchers should be very mindful of how they use communication measurements (whether through direct observation of actual verbal exchanges between partners or by means of partners' self-reports about their couple communication patterns) and accurately report them.

Self-Report Measures Used in this Study

In addition, the self-report measures used in this study, the Autonomy-Relatedness Inventory and the Perceived Social Support inventory, may not have been ideal indicators of the structural patterns that they were used to measure (i.e., the ARI for the boundary between the partners and power dynamics; the PSSfa for the boundary around the couple). For example, as noted earlier, for the boundary around the couple, the PSSfa does not explore the frequency of exchanges between the couple and their families to highlight how much interaction a low-income versus a high-income couple has, and

how much each interaction involves the couple receiving forms of resources from the family members or other ways in which extended family members may intrude into the couple's relationship. This information would be vital, as the number and types of exchanges may differentiate the ethnic groups better than the PSSfa scores do. Similarly, the ARI power subscale does not highlight any specific controlling behaviors and their effects. For example, it would be helpful to see what controlling behaviors are occurring (e.g., not wanting your partner to have a job or pressuring the partner do a certain chore/task against his or her will) and the degree to which the partners experience power being exercised by such actions. For this study, these measures were selected because they were the best measures of the couple relationship available in the clinic database, but it seems possible that different results may have been obtained with more valid measures of the study's constructs.

Clinical Implications

This study's findings regarding structural dimensions in African American and Caucasian couples could shape new clinical interventions so that they are culturally sensitive and appropriate for the couples' presenting problems. When working with couples of different ethnic backgrounds, it is important as a clinician to be aware of the assumptions and expectations that one holds so that it does not blind the clinician's experiences to fully appreciate and acknowledge cultural manifestations that may arise when working with the couple. As mentioned earlier, it is equally important to be mindful about the within-group differences (in addition to the between group differences), so there is always some room for the couple to preserve their own uniqueness relative to their cultural affiliation and practice.

The findings indicated that Caucasian couples are more likely to exhibit autonomy between the partners than African American couples. It may be beneficial to explore the families of origin of the members of a couple, how autonomy was handled, and whether the particular current structure holds some cultural meaning for the couple in their respective families. It would also be helpful to explore what was helpful and not helpful (instead of viewing it as functional and dysfunctional) when it came to the partners relating to each other in their relationship.

In terms of communication, the findings suggest that Caucasian couples tend to engage in more positive communication than African American couples, and that males in both groups are more likely to report their female partner as attempting to control them. Clinicians should take the time when working with couples of different ethnic backgrounds to break down the patterns of communication typically exhibited in the couple's culture and explore the partners' level of flexibility in trying new communication patterns. In terms of gender, it would be helpful for the clinician to explore any issues regarding possible demand-withdraw patterns that may exist, because research such as that by Caughlin (2002) has indicated that marital satisfaction is associated with gender differences in this particular communication pattern. Additionally, clinicians may want to explore the non-verbal exchanges during the communication of these couples, because research such as that by Gottman and Silver (1999) has indicated that positive versus negative communication also involves physical movements during the conversations. It may help to provide general tools such as expresser-listener communication guidelines, as supported in cognitive-behavioral therapy, and the

technique of "turning toward" each other, as supported by John Gottman (1999), to promote healthier ways of communicating.

At the same time, the findings indicate that money tends to play a distinct role in how the couple structures their relationship. It seems as though having more money increases the autonomy level that the members of the couple provide for each other, and that the higher the income of the couple, the less likely the individuals will be to perceive being controlled by their partners. It seems that exploring the role that money plays in the relationship regarding decision making and other aspects of power is important. It is also important for clinicians to be mindful about the different dimensions of power, as indicated by Raven (2008), and to explore how the different aspects of power play out in a couple's relationship so that some restructuring can occur in which both individuals (regardless of income) will not be perceived as being controlling by their partner. Power was assessed in a fairly imprecise way in the present study, so future research should assess the subtypes.

Conclusion

Despite the current study's limitations, the findings obtained from exploring the ethnic group differences regarding the boundary between the partners, the boundary around the couple, and the power dynamics provide important knowledge about the way that clinicians should engage with distressed couples from different ethnic group. It has expanded the understanding about potential differences between two ethnic groups and countered tendencies to generalize all experiences of couples under one umbrella. Such research can provide clinicians with the appropriate tools to make culturally sensitive decisions for engaging and helping the couple. The findings from this research may help

contribute to the development of more sensitive measurement of couples' cultural

affiliations and beliefs and possible information on structural dimensions, may highlight

the importance of studying the role of income and SES, and may point to gender issues

that might be considered regarding structural dimensions of couple relationships.

Appendix A: Couple Information and Instructions (CII)

The following information is gathered from each partner separately.

Name: (Print)   Address:

_____   _____

Email address: _____   Zip_____

Phone Numbers: (h)_____   (w) _____
               (cell)_____   (fax) _____

5. Gender: <u>M F</u>   6. SS#_____   7. Age (in years) _____

8. You are coming for: a.) Family _____   b.) Couple_____   c.) Individual Therapy___

9. **Relationship status** to person   10. Total Number of
in couple's therapy with you: **Years** Together: _____

    1. Currently married, living together
        a. **If married**, number of years married: _____
    2. Currently married, separated, but not legally divorced
    3. Divorced, legal action completed
    4. Engaged, living together
    5. Engaged, not living together
    6. Dating, living together
    7. Dating, not living together
    8. Domestic partnership

11. What is your occupation? _____   12. What is your current
                                       employment status

_____

    1. Clerical sales, bookkeeper, secretary   1. Employed full time
    2. Executive, large business owner   2. Employed part time
    3. Homemaker   3.Homemaker,not employed
    4. None – child not able to be employed   outside
    5. Owner, manager of small business   4. Student
    6. Professional – Associates or Bachelor's degree   5. Disabled, not employed
    7. Professional – master of doctoral degree   6. Unemployed
    8. Skilled worker/craftsman   7. Retired
    9. Service Worker – barber, cook, beautician
    10. Semi-skilled worker – machine operator
    11. Unskilled Worker
    12. Student

Personal **yearly gross income**: $_____   14. Race: _____
(i.e. before taxes or any deductions)   1. Native American
                                                          2. African American
                                                          3. Asian/Pacific Islander
                                                          4. Hispanic
                                                          5. White
                                                          6. Other (specify)_____

15. What is **your country of origin**?
    What is **your parent's country of origin**?
16. _____ (father's) 17. _____ (mother's)

18. Highest Level of Education Completed: _____
        1. Some high school (less than 12 years)
        2. High school diploma (12 years)
        3. Some college
        4. Trade School (mechanic, carpentry, beauty school, etc.)
        5. Associate degree
        6. Bachelors degree (BA, BS)
        7. Some graduate education
        8. Masters degree (MA, MS, etc.)
        9. Doctoral degree (PhD, MD, EDD, etc.)

19. Number of people in household:_____   20. Number of children who live in
                                                 home with you: _____

21. Number of children who do not live with you: _____

Names and phone number of contact people (minimum 2):
_____
_____

22. What is your religious preference? _____

        1. Mainline Protestant (e.g., Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian,
        Unitarian)
        2. Conservative Protestant (e.g., Adventist, Baptist, Pentecostal)
        3. Roman Catholic
        4. Jewish
        5. Other (e.g., Buddhist, Mormon, Hindu)
        6. No affiliation with any formal religion

23. How often do you **participate in organized activities of a church or religious group**? ___

1. several times per week	5. several times a year
2. once a week	6. once or twice a year
3. several times a month	7. Rarely or never
4. once a month	

24. **How important is religion or spirituality** to you in your daily life? ____
1. Very important
2. Important
3. Somewhat important
4. Not very important
5. Not important at all

25. Medications: ____ Yes _____No
If yes, please list the names, purpose, and quality of **medication**(s) you are currently taking. Also list the name and phone number of the medicating physician(s) and primary care physician:

Medications:_____
Primary Care Physician: _____Phone:_____
Psychiatrist? Yes/No Name & Phone, if yes.
_____Phone:_____

Legal Involvement

26. Have you ever been involved with the police? Yes/No (circle)
    If yes, what happened? Explain: _____
    _____

27. Have formal, legal procedures (i.e. ex-parte orders, protection orders, criminal charges, juvenile offenses) been brought against you?   Yes/No (circle)
    If yes, what happened? Explain: _____
    _____

28. If formal procedures were brought, what were the results (e.g., eviction, restraining orders?)
    _____

Many of the questions refer to your "family." It will be important for us to know what individuals you consider to be your family. Please list below the names and relationships of the people you will include in your responses about your family. Circle yourself in this list.

29. (Number listed in family) _____.

Name	Relationship

List the concerns and problems for which you are seeking help. <u>Indicate which is the most important by circling it</u>. For each problem listed, note the degree of severity by checking (√) the appropriate column.

		4 – Severe	3- Somewhat Severe	2 – Moderate	1 - Mild
30.	31.				
32.	33.				
34.	35.				
36.	37.				

38. The most important concern (circled item) is #_____

Appendix B: 8-item Autonomy Subscale from the Autonomy Relatedness Inventory

Each of the following statements might describe your partner. Please circle the number that indicates how well each statement describes your partner's behavior with you. Rate each statement on a scale from 1 (Not at All like Him/Her) to 5 (Very Much Like Him/Her).

	Not at All Like	Very Little Like	Somewhat Like	Much Like	Very Much Like
1. Gives me as much freedom as I want.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Knows when to back off and let me be.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Encourages me to follow my own interests.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Let's me make up my own mind.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Respects my need to be alone at times.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Gives me as much privacy as I want.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Let's me do anything I want to do.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Respects my need for time for myself.	1	2	3	4	5

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Directions: The statements which follow refer to feelings and experiences which occur to most people at one time or another in their relationships with **FAMILIES.** When thinking about family, please do not include friends. For each statement there are five possible answers (1 through 5) ranging from "Yes" to "No". Please check the answer you choose for each item.

Yes   No

1   2   3   4   5

__   __   __   __   __   1.   My family gives me the moral support I need.

__   __   __   __   __   2.   I get good ideas about how to do things or make

things from my family.

__   __   __   __   __   3.   When I confide in the members of my family who

are closest to me, I get the idea that it makes them

uncomfortable.

__   __   __   __   __   4.   Most other people are closer to their families than I

am.

__   __   __   __   __   5.   My family enjoys hearing about what I think.

__   __   __   __   __   6.   Members of my family share many of my interests.

__   __   __   __   __   7.   Certain members of my family come to me when

they have problems or need advice.

__   __   __   __   __   8.   I rely on my family for emotional support.

__   __   __   __   __   9.   There is a member of my family I could go to if I

were just feeling down, without feeling funny about

it later.

__   __   __   __   __   10.   My family and I are very open about what we think

about things.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___   11.   My family is sensitive to my personal needs.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___   12.   Members of my family come to me for emotional support.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___   13.   Members of my family are good at helping me solve problems.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___   14.   I have a deep sharing relationship with a number of members of my family.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___   15.   Members of my family get good ideas about how to do things or make things from me.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___   16.   When I confide in members of my family, it makes me uncomfortable.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___   17.   Members of my family seek me out for companionship.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___   18.   I think that my family feels that I'm good at helping them solve problems.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___   19.   I don't have a relationship with a member of my family that is as close as other people's relationships with family members.

___ ___ ___ ___ ___   20.   I wish my family were much different.

Appendix D: 5-Item Control Subscale from the Autonomy Relatedness Inventory

Each of the following statements might describe your partner. Please circle the number that indicates how well each statement describes your partner's behavior with you. Rate each statement on a scale from 1 (Not at All like Him/Her) to 5 (Very Much Like Him/Her).

	Not at All Like	Very Little Like	Somewhat Like	Much Like	Very Much Like
1. Is always trying to change me.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Won't take no for an answer when he/she wants something.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Argues back no matter what I say.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Wants to control everything I do.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Tries to control how I spend money.	1	2	3	4	5

ARI. Research Rev.1/12

Appendix E: Institutional Review Board Protocol Approval

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

1204 Marie Mount Hall
College Park, MD 20742-5125
TEL 301.405.4212
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DATE: February 27, 2012

TO: John Hart
FROM: University of Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [313082-1] Comparing Structural Interaction Patterns in African American,
                            Latino, and Caucasian clinical couples: The Moderating Effect of
                            Socioeconomic Status
REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: February 27, 2012

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 4

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Maryland
College Park (UMCP) IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to
federal regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at 301-405-4212 or irb@umd.edu. Please
include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of
Maryland College Park (UMCP) IRB's records.

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