

The Delay of Gratification in Latina Mother/ Child Dyads

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship among parental attitudes, parental teaching techniques and maternal level of acculturation and how these influence their child's ability to delay gratification. This study is an extension of the one conducted by Mauro and Harris (2000), whereas the current study focuses solely on Latina mothers. The task consisted of a mother/ child patience teaching session and a contrived gift scenario, in which the child was instructed to wait to open a tempting gift. A modified assessment, excluding the mother/ child interaction and the child-waiting task, was used to learn more about the connection between parental attitudes and maternal level of acculturation. For the delay of gratification task, behavioral distractions were the strategy used most frequently. Overall the results showed that there was a significant correlation between restrictive parenting behaviors and the maternal level of acculturation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to give a special thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Yvette Harris, without her help this study would not have been possible. Also to my thesis readers Dr. Charles Ganelin and Dr. Aaron Luebbe, thank you for your time and support in editing and finalizing my honors thesis. Additionally to Dr. Ana Diaz-Burgos for helping edit the Spanish documents as well as Dr. Charles Ganelin. Finally I would like to thank my participants and the individuals who helped with recruitment and local community groups for the use of their facilities. With the help of my professors and the community I was able to successfully complete my project. Funds were made possible by a grant from the Miami University Honors Program.

The Delay of Gratification in Latina Mother/ Child Dyads

Parenting plays a major role in the development of a child (Whiteside-Mansell, Bradley, & McKelvey, 2008). As previous research has shown, the mother's role in parenting is essential to understanding the child's emotion regulation and his/her ability to delay gratification.

Parenting styles and parental practices are integral aspects of life because of the potential effects these behaviors have on a child's development (Whiteside-Mansell, Bradley, & McKelvey, 2008). Previous research draws a connection between early maternal behaviors and the emotional growth of the child (Graziano, Keeane, & Calkins, 2010). Consequently parenting styles and practices become insurmountably important when understanding a child's impulse control. For that reason, impulse control has a role in the child's outcomes, whether they are positive or negative.

Impulse control and emotion regulation are important control systems that increase positive outcomes. For example, when a child has competent self regulatory skills for emotion control s/he is more likely to have fewer behavioral problems, better social competencies, and better academic performance (Li-Grining, 2007). Poor emotion regulation is more predictive of negative outcomes. The study conducted by Leerkes, Paradise, Calkins and Lange (2008) found a negative correlation between behavior problems and emotion control. Additionally this shows that being able to have control over one's emotions is important to later child development for social behavior (Leerkes, Paradise, Calkins, & Lange 2008).

Previous research has focused on the effortful control, in particular by looking at both the ability to delay gratification and the ability to utilize executive control. Effortful control is expressed by the impulsivity of the child, whether s/he is able to control their impulses or if the child will give in to immediate desires. More specifically, effortful control is a child's voluntary

actions that dictate whether s/he appropriately reacts to contextual demands by controlling their responses (Eisenberg & Spinard, 2004; Rothbart & Bates, 1998; as cited in Li-Grining, 2007).

The following study conducted by Mauro and Harris (2000) discusses the link between parental attitudes and self regulation through a gift task. The study found a negative correlation, among the children who did not delay gratification, between maternal verbalizations during the teaching task and restrictive child rearing attitude of the mother. Additionally the study found a negative relationship between total strategies employed by the mother and maternal restrictiveness. These results were not the same for the dyads, in which the child did delay gratification. This shows that of the children who did not delay gratification maternal restrictiveness may have been an important factor. The study found that the majority of the mother's parenting attitudes were either high in nurturance and low in control, or high in nurturance and moderate in control. However the study did not have participants of low nurturance and high restrictiveness.

In regards to this study it shows the gap in the participant pool of mothers with high levels of restrictiveness. Studies show that overcontrolling may impede a child's ability to delay gratification. Which may have been an important factor in the study conducted by Mauro and Harris (2000). Consequently, overcontrolling mothers may not provide the proper care giving to enable their child to adequately develop their impulse control. For this reason their ability to delay gratification may be negatively effected as well (Silverman and Ragusa 1990; as cited in Mauro & Harris 2000). Graziano, Keane, and Calkins (2010) found that a child's effortful control is negatively predicted by maternal overcontrol. Meaning, the children, of mothers who are restrictive and controlling, may not have fully developed effortful control self regulatory

abilities, whereas maternal warmth or nurturance was predictive of a child's successful abilities of effortful control (Graziano, Keane, & Calkins 2010).

The study conducted by Cardona, Nicholson, and Fox (2000) shows overwhelmingly that the Anglo-American mothers had higher nurturance scores than the Hispanic mothers, whereas Hispanic mothers had higher discipline scores than the Anglo American mothers. Generally speaking, Puerto Rican mothers and Mexican American mothers tend to be more controlling. Culturally, Hispanics use control to instill the values of obedience and conformity in their children. Although some studies suggest their children may face difficulties adapting to U.S. society. In the United States, the cultural values are different, instead of valuing conformity and obedience, U.S, culture values independence and creativity (Laosa 1982, Moreno 1991; as cited in Villarruel, Carlo, Grau, Azmitia, Cabrera, & Chahin (Eds.), 2009).

The differences that exist among Latino parenting attitudes is reflected by the parenting values, however acculturation plays a major role in how cultural values are viewed. Therefore acculturation affects a mother's parenting styles and beliefs. Grusec, Rudy, and Martini (1997) theorized that although in individualistic societies authoritarian parenting styles, high restrictiveness and low nurturance, may occur due to negative feelings towards the child and therefore negatively affects the child's outcomes, whereas in collectivistic cultures, authoritarian parenting is determined to be best for the child (as cited in Ispa et al., 2004).

In particular, the study conducted by Howes and Guerra (2009) found that mothers who had more contact with family in Mexico, as the participants all are of Mexican descent, had more positive interactions with their children as found by their levels of intrusiveness and the quality of the mother-child attachment. In the study conducted by Graziano, Keane and Calkins (2010) the mother's levels of intrusiveness with their child predicted lower reactive emotion

growth in their child. However these studies show results that may seem conflicting, overall these studies point to the same idea that intrusiveness and restrictiveness is moderated by maternal level of acculturation.

As a parent becomes more acculturated to Euro American parenting styles, as generally exhibited in the United States, the outcomes associated with the parenting styles will mirror those of Euro American descent. However when the parent is less acculturated and still holds strong to their cultural parenting values, the outcomes will be different than authoritarian parents of European American descent (Ispa et al, 2004).

Previous research shows that counter to other ethnic groups, Latinos who have controlling or intrusive parenting styles are most often linked to positive child outcomes, instead of having negative developmental effects on the child (Howes & Guerra, 2009). Ispa, Fine, Halgunther, Harper, Robinson, Boyce, Brooks-Gunn, and Brady-Smith (2004) explored the role of intrusiveness in parenting among different ethnic groups. Within this sample, the study divided less acculturated and more acculturated mothers, showing a distinct difference between their cultural connection, language acquisition and parenting practices. The study explored the differences between parenting in regards to individuals of collectivistic cultures and those of individualistic cultures.

It seems that some studies suggest that intrusiveness and restrictiveness can negatively affect a child's ability to have impulse control, whereas for Latinos, culturally they tend to be more restrictive, although the effects on child behavior and child outcomes are positive, this creates a paradox worth exploring. Does restrictiveness, as a culturally relevant and important parental belief in Latino culture, aid impulse control in delay of gratification tasks or hinder the child's ability to control their emotions?

In fact, previous research does not emphasize parenting styles or attitudes as a factor on the child's ability to delay gratification. Some studies, however discuss the importance of maternal traits such as maternal warmth, maternal intrusiveness, or maternal depression as factors that affect a child's ability to regulation his/her emotions. The current study will incorporate maternal attitudes toward child-rearing, an assessment of a child's effortful control, particularly his/her ability to delay gratification as shown by the child's impulse control, and maternal level of acculturation. This study is an extension of the study conducted by Mauro and Harris (2000), to focus on only Latina mothers. A condensed version of the study, excluding the mother/ child interaction and child waiting task, will be conducted to learn more about Latina mother's parenting attitudes and their level of acculturation.

Goals and Potential Outcomes

1. How do Latina mothers teach their children to wait? Furthermore, do Latina mothers teach their children to delay gratification similarly to the mothers of the study conducted by Mauro and Harris (2000) (the sample consisted of a majority of Caucasian participants)?
2. How does maternal level of acculturation relate to parental attitudes towards child rearing? Are Latina mothers that are more acculturated more restrictive in their parenting?

Method

Participants

In this study the operational definition of Latino and Hispanic mothers refers to mothers who are of Spanish speaking heritage/ from a Spanish speaking country, therefore mothers who identified as Latina or who identified as Hispanic were included. The present study uses the term Latino, despite the inclusion of a Spanish participant because the main focus of this study is

mothers from Latin America, Central America, South America and Mexico. It is not necessary that the participants spoke Spanish and was not a requirement in order to participate. Their preferred language was accepted both verbally and written, whether it was Spanish or English. Therefore, the consent forms, questionnaires and instructions were available in both languages.

The participants included 8 Latina mothers from the Midwest. Of the mothers who participated 6 mothers completed only the demographic information, the parental attitudes questionnaire and the acculturation scale. Whereas the other 2 mothers that participated completed the video interaction segment of the experiment as well. The recruitment was initiated through local Hispanic organizations and members of the Hispanic community in the area. The children were between the ages of 4 to 6. This age range allows researchers to see early signs of impulsivity and in a group of potentially bilingual children to see the range of verbal development and cognitive development that is present. The mean age of the mothers was about 33 years old, this number excludes one participant who did not want to put her age. Concerning their country of origin, 5 of the participants were from Mexico, 1 was from Guatemala, 1 mother was from Spain and one mother did not respond.

Overall, in the study the mean age of the children was about 5, where 5 of the children were male and 3 were female. For the 2 dyads that completed the interaction aspect of the study, in dyad 1 the child was 4.5 years old and in dyad 2 the child was 6 years old, both were males.

Materials

The materials for the study included a demographic form, a maternal child-rearing attitudes questionnaire and an acculturation scale. The present study utilizes the same maternal child-rearing attitudes questionnaires as used in the initial study conducted by Mauro and Harris

(2000), The Rickel and Biasatti (1982) modified Block Child Rearing Practices questionnaire.

The parental attitudes questionnaire consisted of 40 questions to assess the mother's childrearing nurturance with 18 items and restrictiveness with the other 22 items on a 6 point Likert scale.

The parental attitudes questionnaire included items such as: *I believe a child should be aware of how much I sacrifice for him or her*, or *I encourage my child to talk about his or her troubles*.

In addition to assessing maternal attitudes towards parenting the second assessment took into account the mother's level of acculturation using a Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics developed by Marin, Sabogal, VanOss Marin, Otero-Sabogal, and Perez-Stable (1987). The acculturation scale consists of 12 questions on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is low acculturation and 5 is high acculturation. For example, the items asked the extent of language and cultural involvement, such as *in general, what language(s) do you read and speak?* The responses were 1, only Spanish and 5 only English, whereas all of the numbers between showed a gradual preference towards the other language. Although the acculturation scale was already in Spanish, the rest of the materials were translated to Spanish as well. The materials were translated by the head experimenter, and double-checked by separate Spanish Professors.

The condensed version of the study included a modified consent form, a demographic form, parental attitudes questionnaire, and an acculturation scale. All forms except for the modified consent were the same forms as used in the delay of gratification task.

Procedure

Upon arrival at the Psychology building mothers were greeted in the lobby and shown to the laboratory. At the onset of each study the experimenter orally explained the study using the created outline, which highlighted the participants rights and the demands of the study including

everything that the study entailed, and finally the outline described the compensation for the participant. The compensation included a \$10 gift card to a local grocery store and the child was permitted to keep the gift that s/he had been instructed to wait and open during the task. The delay task is adopted from the EID task utilized by Block and Block (1980) and Vaughn, Kopp, and Krakow (1984) (as cited in Mauro & Harris, 2000). After reading and signing the consent forms the mothers were given instructions to complete all forms (the demographic form, maternal child-rearing attitudes questionnaire and the acculturation scale), which took about 20-30 minutes depending on the mother, meanwhile the child watched cartoons or colored with provided materials. In some instances the mothers brought their other children and/ or another Hispanic mother to accompany them for the duration of the study.

Before the mother-child interaction began, the child assent form was read to the child (in Spanish or English, whichever was preferred) and the child in agreement to participate, communicated a verbal yes or a nod. The child assent instructions included brief directions of the delay task. Then the mother was read aloud the instructions for the mother-child teaching interaction and the instructions they were to tell their child for the delay task. After the mother fully understood her role, the mother and child were led into the interaction room directly off the main room. The mother-child interaction was videotaped as was the delay task. The first aspect involved the mother teaching her child strategies to wait patiently to open the present until she returned, after finishing the teaching segment the mother was instructed to leave the gift on the table in the interaction room and leave the room. The delay task consisted of the child waiting to open the gift and lasted 5 minutes whereas the mother/ child interaction had no time constraints. After the study was completed the child was allowed to open the gift, if s/he had not already done so. The family was thanked and was escorted to the lobby of the psychology building.

For conducting the condensed version of the study the participants were greeted, guided through the consent form and were given the questionnaires to complete. During this time the experimenter was available to answer questions and reword difficult items. They were thanked, and given the \$10 gift card as they were escorted out of the study room.

Coding

The primary investigator coded the 2 mother/ child interactions and the waiting tasks by transcribing the mother/child interactions into a written document and then directly coding the waiting task from the videotapes.

Mother/ Child teaching interaction

The mother/ child teaching interaction was coded based on the frequency of specific behaviors. The following behavior categories are modified from the study conducted by Mauro and Harris (2000) as originally adopted from a study conducted by Altshuler and Ruble (1989). The categories were consistent with the behaviors exhibited in the current study by the Latina mothers.

1. Focus on the demands of the waiting task
2. Behavioral Distraction
3. Cognitive Distraction
4. Emotional manipulation/ tension reduction
5. Focus on the present

Delay Task

The same coding categories were used for the delay task, however the manifestation of the behaviors or utterances was distinct from the strategies mothers used during the mother/ child interaction. For examples of the coding categories for the delay task see Table 1.

Results*How do Latina Mothers Teach Their Children to Delay Gratification?*

In the mother/ child interaction, the mothers used many different strategies to teach her child to wait and open the present (see Table 2). For participant 1 she used 21 utterances to explain to her child the demands of the waiting task and 3 utterances to teach their child behavioral distraction strategies. Participant 1 explained to her child that he was in charge of watching and safely taking care of the present until her return, turning the waiting task into a game. Participant 2 had 15 utterances focusing on the demands of the waiting task, 2 utterances teaching their child behavioral distractions and 3 utterances teaching cognitive distractions. Participant 2 also gave their child a specific strategy to use; this involved not looking at the present, because if they did not look at the present then they would not think about it.

The results show that mothers used the strategy of focusing on the demands of the waiting task more than any other category. Additionally, it is noteworthy to show that neither mother used emotional manipulation or strategies focusing on the present to teach their child, whereas they did use focusing on the demands of the waiting task, behavioral distraction, and cognitive distraction.

It is interesting to note that the child in dyad 1 was younger (4.5 year old) and their mother used more strategies to focus on the demands of the waiting task and behavioral distractions than the mother of the older child (6 year olds) in dyad 2. Additionally, the mother in

dyad 2 used some cognitive distraction strategies where the mother in dyad 1 (of the younger child) did not. Both mothers however did use comprehension check techniques to ensure their child understood what was expected and was willing to try. Participant 1 used high fives to ensure their child understood and was willing, whereas participant 2 used active listening techniques and had their child repeat back what they were supposed to do.

How do Latino children delay gratification?

In dyad 1, the child employed the use of 17 behavioral distraction techniques, 1 emotional manipulation technique and 5 instances of focusing on the present. In dyad 2, the child used 18 behavioral distraction techniques, 5 cognitive distractions, and 4 emotional manipulation techniques. It is noteworthy to mention that in dyad 2 the child took his mother's teaching advice, not to look at the present and he did not even look in the direction of the present. Both children were able to successfully complete the delay of gratification task and waited to open the present, although in dyad 1 the child did not sit in their chair, they still did not open the present.

None of the children focused on the demands of the waiting task, although by not opening the present they essentially accomplished this technique in general. For behavioral distractions the children would make noises with their hands and their mouth, and make funny faces with their hands or tap their leg. Some cognitive distraction techniques include ways that the child showed that s/he was actively thinking about something else, for example in dyad 2 the child practiced counting on their fingers. Additionally, in dyad 2 sighing was the main way they used emotional manipulation, whereas in dyad 1 the child called to their mother wanting to show her items in the room. In dyad 1, the child focused on the present by looking at it, and touching the wrappings.

What is the Relationship between Parental Attitudes and Maternal Acculturation?

In all, the mother's mean level of nurturance was higher ($M=95.25$, $SD=7.36$) than their level of restrictiveness ($M=88.5$, $SD=15.87$) (see Table 3 and Figure 1). However both the mean levels of nurturance and of restrictiveness were high. A correlation was performed showing that maternal level of acculturation is negatively correlated with a mother's level of restrictiveness ($r= -.812$, $p=.014$) (see Figure 2).

Additionally a one sample t test was performed showing that there is a significant difference, $t(7) = 15.77$, $p < .01$, between the mother's use of restrictiveness from her use of nurturance. Furthermore, the mean level of acculturation for the mothers was low ($M=23.69$, $SD=7.40$).

Discussion

Similar to the original study conducted by Mauro and Harris (2000) the mothers used the technique of focusing on the demands of the waiting task most frequently. Additionally, emotional manipulation or focusing on the present to teach their child strategies to wait were the least frequently used strategies in both studies. This shows that consistent with other populations, Latinos teach their children to wait for desired objects in similar ways that Anglo parents teach their children.

Furthermore, the children in the present study were similar to the initial study in that they used behavioral distraction techniques most often. Even the manifestations of the behavior strategies were similar. In the initial study conducted by Mauro and Harris (2000), the children made faces, utilized counting, sighing, and similar to rearranging the furniture, in dyad 1 the child would switch chairs.

Even though both children were able to delay gratification, in dyad 1 the child walked about the room and touched the present, whereas in dyad 2 the child did not even look at the present or get up from his seat. As shown by the results in the initial study Mauro and Harris (2000) concluded that age was a factor for their ability to delay gratification, in which younger children were not as good at refraining from touching or opening the present. In the current study, in dyad 1, the child was 1.5 years younger than the child in dyad 2, and therefore touched the present but did not open it.

The results show that a mother of low acculturation is more restrictive with her child, whereas a mother of high acculturation is less restrictive. However they are both equally as nurturing. This could indicate that as a mother becomes more assimilated to United States culture they become less restrictive.

It is important to discuss the complexity of the populations in question. First of all, previous research refers to several different categories to classify individual's culture, ethnicity and race. For example, previous research uses the term "European Americans" and "Anglo Americans" to describe slightly different groups of individuals. European Americans are described as individual's descendant from European countries, without distinguishing the country. Whereas Anglo American refers to white English speaking individuals descendant from European countries, not including Spain or France. Additionally, the term "Latino" and "Hispanic" just as vague and complex, where the definition may change depending on regional distinctions. Therefore it is important to acknowledge the complexities associated with the naming and grouping of individuals based on culture, race, ethnicity or nationality.

Limitations

One of the major limitations of this study was participant recruitment. The availability of participants whom met the requirements to participate and in turn were willing to participate was low. Additionally, the density of the Latino population in the Midwest is scarcer than in other regions in the United States. Many participants of the Latino population are more apt to trust another individual from the Latino community or someone they know well more than someone outside their community.

Future Research

Future research should examine the outcome of this emotion regulation task considering participants from different Latin American or Spanish speaking countries. Some studies have looked at immigrants from specific countries however more research should be done to truly delve into the similarities and differences between Latinos and Hispanics from different cultural regions.

Despite the politically correct definition and term of Latinos and Hispanics, this category for this group is quite vast and contains a very diverse and unique group of people from different countries, cultures and backgrounds. Consequently, more studies should be conducted showing these unique identifications and exploring the cultural identity and cultural background of Latinos. Further research should be conducted to further differentiate between the terms European American and Anglo American, as both groups are not defined in the same manner, although in some studies are used interchangeable. Therefore, future studies should attempt to consolidate the terminology. In this regard, a single term should be used, as to not only clarify the definition but to enable the easier facilitation of discussion and understanding of studies.

It would be also informative to explore the differences and similarities between parental attitudes of Latina mothers living in the United States as compared to mothers living in their country of origin. An explorative study showing the distinct details of parenting styles and delving into a mother's parenting beliefs would cast light onto the change that parenting undertakes through the process of acculturation. The evolution of parenting through families would allow researchers to further understand the dynamics of Latino parental attitudes. Additionally future studies should include more participants to see if the same patterns observed in the present study would continue with a larger group of participants. Moreover, future studies should look at participants of a wider range of acculturation levels and economic backgrounds.

An interesting and informative aspect to add to the current study would be to explore the maternal motivations behind their parenting attitudes. Figuring out why a mother parents in the manner she does would speak volumes to their child's outcomes. If a mother is harsh and controlling out of love and a desire to do what they believe is best for their child this could, despite the potential negative effects of intrusiveness, aid their child's emotional growth. Although if a mother is restrictive due to being unable to control her own emotions or becomes angry as a result of their child and therefore is controlling, this may have a more negative impact on their child's development and emotional health.

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Appendix

Table 1

Coding Categories for Delay Task and Examples

Category	Examples
1. Focus on the demands of the waiting task	Talking about waiting or needing to wait
2. Behavioral distraction	Physical distraction techniques such as making silly faces, playing with their hands, looking out the window
3. Cognitive distraction	Mental activities such as practicing counting, or singing a song
4. Emotional manipulation/ tension reduction	Ways to alleviate stress associated with waiting by sighing, whining or relaxing
5. Focus on the Present	Looking at the present, talking about the present or examining the wrappings

Table 2

Frequencies of Utterances for Maternal Teaching Session

Category	Maternal teaching	
	Participant 1	Participant 2
1. Focus on the demands of the waiting task	21	15
2. Behavioral distraction	3	2
3. Cognitive distraction	0	3
4. Emotional manipulation/ tension reduction	0	0
5. Focus on the Present	0	0
Total	24	20
Teaching time (minutes)	2:20	2:36

*Table 3**Mean Scores on Nurturance and Restrictiveness Scales*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Restrictiveness	88.50	15.87
Nurturance	95.25	7.36

Appendix (continued)

Figure 1

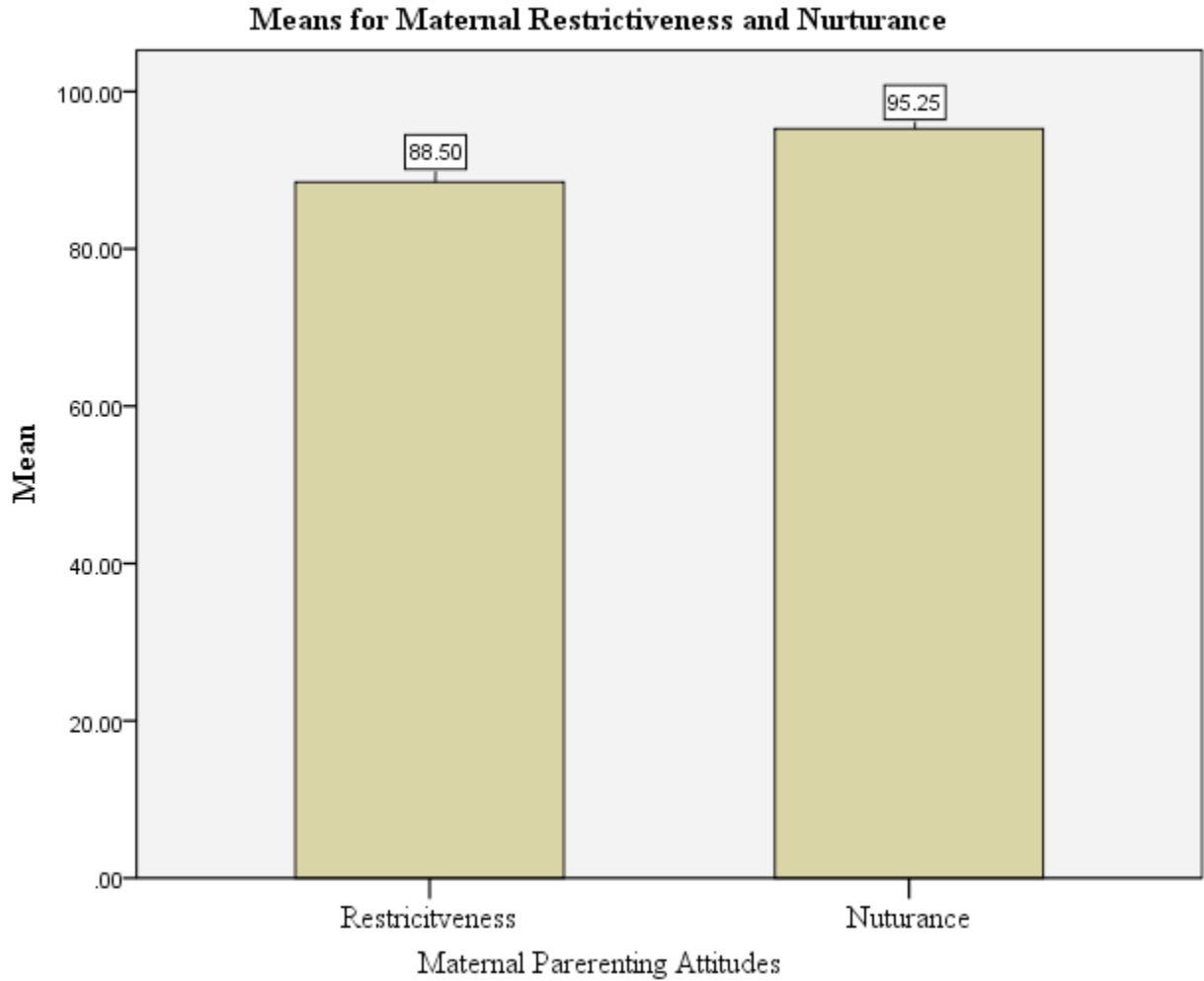


Figure 1. The bar graph shows the means for maternal nurturance ($M=95.25$, $SD=7.36$) and maternal restrictiveness ($M=88.5$, $SD=15.87$).

Appendix (continued)

Figure 2

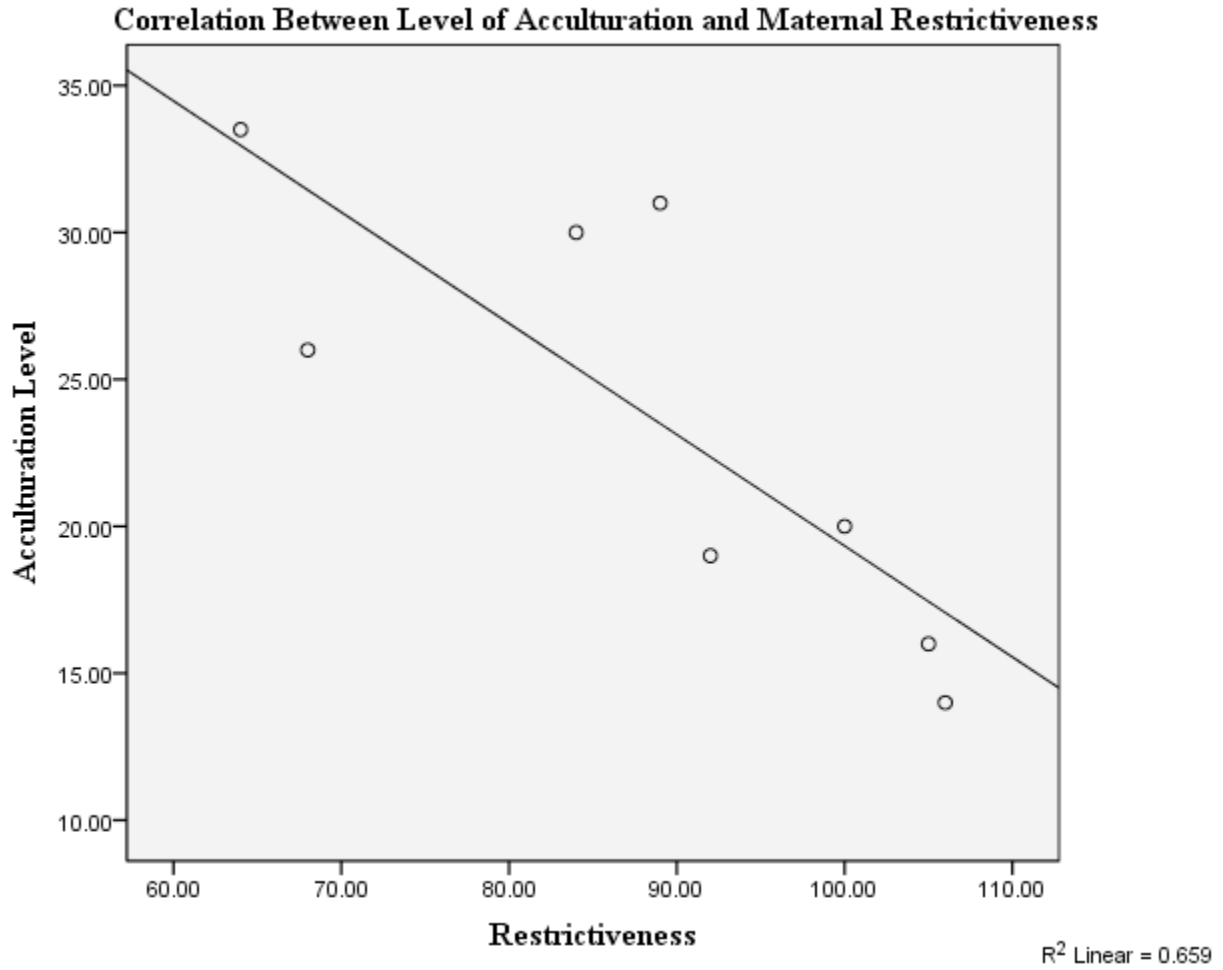


Figure 2. The scatter plot shows the negative correlation between maternal level of acculturation and maternal restrictiveness ($r = -.812, p = .014$).