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**Barriers to Effective Discipline: Situational Contexts, Maternal Cognitions, and
Maternal Affect Associated with Dysfunctional Discrepant Discipline**

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Abstract of the Dissertation

**Barriers to Effective Discipline: Situational Contexts, Maternal Cognitions, and
Maternal Affect Associated with Dysfunctional Discrepant Discipline**

by

Kimberly Anne Rhodes

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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The current study investigated mothers' use of discrepant dysfunctional discipline (i.e. dysfunctional discipline techniques that mothers believe they should not use). Situational contexts, mothers' cognitions about their discipline use, and mothers' negative affect were explored as possible correlates of discrepant dysfunctional discipline. These same potential correlates were also evaluated in situations where mothers are successful in implementing effective discipline techniques that they believe they should use (concordant functional discipline). Participants were 66 mothers of 2-4 year old children recruited from the community. Mothers were interviewed about recent events where they used discrepant dysfunctional discipline and recent events where they used concordant functional discipline. A significant amount of the variability in the magnitude of mothers' discrepant lax discipline was accounted for by maternal negative affect, disciplining in a situation where the mother experienced time pressure, and mothers attributing their

behavior to something about the situation (negatively). A significant amount of the variability in the magnitude of mothers' overreactive discipline was accounted for by their negative affect and by mothers attributing their discipline behavior to something positive about themselves (negatively). Mothers reported more positive child attributions and teaching attributions; and less negative affect, time pressure demands, multitasking demands, and negative self-attributions when they used concordant functional discipline than when they used discrepant dysfunctional discipline.

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Barriers to Effective Discipline: Situational Contexts, Maternal Cognitions, and Maternal Affect Associated with Dysfunctional Discrepant Discipline

Parenting practices exert an important influence on children's social development (e.g., Campbell, 1997). Discipline that is harsh or excessively lax is significantly correlated with child externalizing behavior problems (Baumrind, 1968, 1973; Baumrind & Black, 1967; Block, 1971; Chang, Schwartz, Dodge, & McBride-Chang, 2003; Patterson, DeBaryshe, & Ramsey, 1989). The quality of parental discipline also predicts the escalation and maintenance of children's externalizing problems. Harsh and hostile parents have children whose externalizing problems escalate in frequency over time (Kim et al., 2003). Parents who decrease their use of harsh, inconsistent parenting have children whose externalizing problems decrease over time (August, Realmuto, Joyce, & Hektner, 1999). In addition, parents' use of harsh and lax discipline is amenable to treatment; teaching parents to be firm and consistent decreases children's noncompliance and aggression (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2004).

Because parents exert such a powerful influence on young children, it is important to have a thorough understanding of when and why dysfunctional discipline occurs. Dysfunctional parental discipline can be conceptualized as arising from two broad factors: 1) lack of knowledge about effective discipline and 2) poor implementation ability. For our purposes, effective discipline is defined as those discipline behaviors empirically supported as beneficial to child well-being. Implementation ability refers to parents' ability to actually carry out the skills required for effective discipline. Effective discipline relies on both of these factors. Parents must believe that they *should* use

effective discipline techniques and they must also be able to *implement* those discipline techniques in real-life situations.

A belief that one should use effective discipline techniques is one component of effective discipline. Parental beliefs about how they should discipline their children are positively associated with how they actually do discipline their children (Rhoades & O’Leary, 2007). Additionally, intervention programs that teach effective parenting skills increase effective discipline and decrease dysfunctional discipline (DeGarmo, Patterson, & Forgatch, 2004; Markie-Dadds & Sanders, 2006). Thus, knowledge about how one should effectively discipline influences actual discipline practices. Maternal beliefs¹ about how they should discipline their children, however, are not the sole determinant of effective discipline. Mothers may know what they should do when disciplining their children, but fail to effectively enact the behavior. To fully understand dysfunctional discipline we must understand the factors that could influence effective implementation of those discipline behaviors.

Effective, sensitive discipline requires that mothers be able to reasonably perceive and interpret their children’s behavior as well as plan and implement an appropriate discipline response; in short, it requires effective social information processing (Milner, 1993, 2003). Social information processing models (Milner, 1993, 2003) consist of three cognitive stages and one cognitive-behavioral stage. In the first stage, mothers must encode information from the environment. The second stage consists of interpreting and evaluating that encoded information. Mothers then integrate that information and choose a behavioral response. Finally, their response is enacted and monitored. Any factor that could negatively influence mothers’ abilities to effectively process social information at

any or all of these stages is a possible barrier to implementing effective discipline. One possible discipline implementation barrier is situational or environmental features. The setting in which child misbehavior occurs, the other people who are present, how much time or energy the mother must devote to her child, and the child's particular misbehavior are all situational contexts that could influence maternal discipline. The mother's interpretation and evaluation (see Milner, 2003) of these situational contexts could also influence her ability to discipline effectively. For example, one mother may evaluate her child's tantrum as highly aversive although another mother is hardly bothered by a tantrum (Brestan, Eyberg, Algina, Johnson, & Boggs, 2003). These two mothers would likely respond to this same child behavior in different ways. Finally, high levels of maternal negative affect may influence a mother's ability to process social information (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000; Redlawsk, 2002) and, subsequently, to implement effective discipline. Even if mothers believe that they should discipline their children using effective techniques, maternal negative affect may impede their ability to implement that discipline response due to over-arousal. Additionally, maternal negative affect may prime dysfunctional discipline choices. For example, experiencing anger could make overreactive discipline choices more salient and accessible to mothers than alternative, effective, discipline techniques. Thus, the hypothesis that situational contexts, maternal interpretation and evaluation of those situational contexts, and negative maternal affect serve as barriers to effective discipline implementation was tested. More specifically, whether these factors are associated with the discrepancy that occurs when mothers believe that they should use effective discipline, but fail to do so (hereafter referred to as "discrepant dysfunctional discipline") was examined. These same potential correlates

were also evaluated in situations where mothers reported being successful in implementing effective discipline that they believed they should use (“concordant functional discipline”). The current study focused on: three types of situational features that may be associated with discrepant dysfunctional discipline, i.e., being in a public setting, time pressure demands, and multitasking demands; maternal evaluation of children’s behaviors and attributions for their own discipline behaviors; and three types of maternal negative affect, i.e., feeling overwhelmed, angry, and embarrassed.

Situational contexts

In general, contextual features influencing time pressure (Cates et al., 1996; DeDreu, 2003; Dodge & Somberg, 1987; Lam, Chiu, Law, Chan, & Yim, 2006; Sangals, Rob, & Sommer, 2004; Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004) and attentional capabilities (hereafter referred to as “multi-tasking”) (Brisson & Jolicouer, 2007; Law, Logie, & Pearson, 2006) decrease cognitive resources necessary for planning and implementing behavior. Research focusing directly on parenting has also shown that chaotic settings (Corpaci & Wachs, 2002; Dumas, et al., 2005) and settings with high task demands (Miller, Shim & Holden, 1998) are associated with poorer parenting quality. Additionally, when mothers are asked to generate discipline responses to child noncompliance, they are more likely to report coercive responses under conditions of time pressure than under conditions in which they are given as much time as needed (Beauchaine, Strassberg, Kees, & Drabick, 2002). If a child misbehaves when a mother is already pressed for time or needs to attend to other activities, the mother may be more likely to feel overwhelmed about the entire situation and more likely to engage in discipline strategies designed to garner immediate compliance with less concern about

long-term child behavior or well-being. For example, she may be more likely to yell at her child, physically discipline her child, or simply give in, in an attempt to control the misbehavior; thus making it possible to arrive at an appointment on time or have dinner on the table.

The presence of others may also influence effective discipline implementation. Research has demonstrated that both the number of people present (Sanders, Dadds, & Bor, 1989) and the setting of mother-child interaction (Miller, Shim & Holden, 1998) influence parenting behavior. Thus, dysfunctional discipline may be more likely in contexts where negative evaluations by others may occur (Miller, 1995). Although a mother's goal when disciplining her child in private may be to alter her child's behavior in the long term, to increase her child's wellbeing, or to socialize her child; her goal when disciplining her child in public may reflect her desire to have the attention generating behavior cease immediately, or to not look like a bad mother in front of others.

Maternal Interpretations and Evaluations

Ultimately, the impact of situational contexts is dependent on how mothers interpret those events. For example, the impact of child misbehavior type may lie more in how aversive a mother perceives the behavior to be than in anything particular about the behavior. Patterson's (1982) work demonstrates that mothers' behavior becomes more aversive as the aversiveness of their children's behavior increases. As escalation continues, and the chance of further child aversive behavior is likely, mothers frequently back down or give in to their children (Snyder, Edwards, McGraw, Kilgore, & Holton, 1994). Mothers' ratings of the aversiveness of child misbehavior is also related to how likely they are to punish the behavior (Brestan et al., 2003). As an extreme example of

dysfunctional discipline, abusive mothers are more likely to feel annoyed or irritated in response to a variety of child-related and non-child-related stressors than non-abusive mothers (Bauer & Twentyman, 1985; Trickett & Kuczynski, 1986). It is unknown, however, if perceived aversiveness is related to discrepant dysfunctional discipline. Logically, discrepant dysfunctional discipline should be more likely when mothers perceive their children's behavior as highly aversive and less likely when they perceive the behavior as relatively benign. In line with the behaviorally rated aversiveness of the Patterson (1982) and Snyder et al. (1994) research, mothers' perceptions of the aversiveness of child misbehaviors may increase the likelihood of both harsh and permissive discipline.

Mothers' causal attributions for their own discipline behavior, why they believed they disciplined in a particular way, may also be associated with their reported discrepant discipline. The literature on maternal attributions focuses on mothers' attributions for their children's misbehaviors. When mothers attribute child misbehavior to controllable, intentional, and negative traits of the child, they are more likely to use overreactive discipline (Leung & Slep, 2006; Slep & O'Leary, 1998). When they attribute child misbehavior to internal, stable, and global traits within themselves, they are more likely to use lax discipline (Leung & Slep, 2006). There is little or no research on mothers' attributions for their discrepant discipline. These attributions, however, may function similarly. For example, mothers who believe that something negative about their children is responsible for their discrepant discipline may also be likely to report overreactive discipline. Conversely, mothers who believe that something negative about themselves is responsible for their discipline mistakes may be more likely to report lax

discrepant discipline. If mothers feel guilt about disciplining their children or feel that they are somehow deficient as mothers, they may be more likely to give in to their children's misbehavior or to give their children positive attention in response to misbehavior in an attempt to reduce some of the associated guilt or because they feel that they, and not their children, are to blame for the current situation. When mothers use concordant functional discipline they may be more likely to attribute their behavior to positive attributes of their children or themselves. They should be less likely to make these positive attributions when they use dysfunctional discrepant discipline.

Although research on maternal attributions has not examined the role of situational attributions or other attributions with a locus outside of the dyad, it is possible that they are also related to discrepant discipline. Mothers who believe that their discipline was caused by something about the situation or other people present may be more likely to report discrepant lax discipline. If mothers believe the discipline discrepancy is outside their control or the control of their child, they may also be more likely to either not respond to their children's misbehavior, or to discipline in other permissive ways, even when they believe they should not.

When mothers use concordant functional discipline they may be more likely to attribute their discipline behavior to their discipline knowledge or to the need to teach or socialize their children, than when they use discrepant dysfunctional discipline. Although there is no empirical data directly related to this, literature on parenting goals demonstrates that when parents have a goal of socializing their children they are more likely to use functional discipline techniques (Hastings & Rubin, 1999). Goals and attributions are not the same construct. However, mothers should be more likely to

attribute their functional discipline behavior to a desire to teach their children, than they should be for their dysfunctional discrepant discipline. Similarly, because functional discipline techniques are, by definition, likely to be effective at modifying child behavior, mothers should be more likely to attribute their behavior to knowing that the technique would work when they use concordant functional discipline than when they use discrepant dysfunctional discipline.

Maternal Negative Affect

Excessive negative affect and arousal reduce performance ability. The classic arousal-performance curve (Duffy, 1957) indicates that a moderate amount of arousal is ideal for performance; more or less arousal lessens performance. Thus, excessive amounts of maternal negative affect are likely to inhibit appropriate discipline behaviors. If mothers are overwhelmed by their own arousal they may then have less cognitive capacity to attend to their children's behavior and their responses to those behaviors. High levels of maternal negative affect might also prime mothers to use certain dysfunctional discipline behaviors. For example, high levels of maternal embarrassment may activate a mother's goal of "eliminating the embarrassing stimuli". With this goal in mind, a mother may be likely to give in to her child's misbehavior in an attempt to terminate the behavior. It is probable that negative affect influences discrepant discipline through both processes: by inhibiting appropriate discipline behaviors and by activating dysfunctional discipline behaviors. Three types of maternal negative affect: feeling overwhelmed, angry, and embarrassed, appear particularly likely to be associated with dysfunctional discrepant discipline.

If mothers feel overwhelmed and their cognitive resources are diminished, it is less likely that they will engage in rational decision-making when choosing a discipline response. Gottman (1999), drawing on Ekman's (1984) concept of flooding, asserts that if, in the context of a romantic relationship, one partner feels overwhelmed by the emotions and behaviors of his/her partner, that partner becomes hypervigilant for signs of negativity and is likely to experience "hair-trigger" reactivity when they feel flooded. In the context of parenting, mothers may become flooded by the emotionally-laden behaviors of their children and feel overwhelmed and willing to do anything to stop the behavior.

It is well established that anger is related to general hostility and aggression (Berkowitz, 1993; Bettencourt, Talley, Benjamin, & Valentine, 2006) as well as overreactive discipline (Lorber & O'Leary, 2005; Smith & O'Leary, 1995) and child abuse potential (Rodriguez & Green, 1997). If a mother is already angry and her child misbehaves, she may be more likely to respond to her child with hostility or aggression. Angry mothers, compared to emotionally-neutral mothers, are more likely to believe that they need to discipline sternly and favor the use of disapproving responses (Dix, Reinhold, & Zambarano, 1990). Additionally, maternal anger elicited by the immediate situation may also lead a mother to respond with discrepant harsh discipline. For example, if a mother has already told her child to stop a particular behavior multiple times, the next time the child engages in that behavior the mother may be more likely to become angry at the child and use harsh discipline.

Little is known about the relation between embarrassment and parenting. We do know, however, about the relation between embarrassment and avoidant behaviors.

Among patients with panic disorder, those with agoraphobic avoidance scored higher on measures of embarrassability than those without agoraphobic avoidance (Swoboda, Demal, Krautgartner, & Amering, 2003). Thus, patients who experience more embarrassment are more likely to avoid public situations that may trigger panic attacks. We know less about how embarrassment relates to avoidance or escape from situations in non-clinical populations. We can, however, speculate that embarrassment would motivate one to escape the embarrassing stimuli or take action to lessen the embarrassment.

In discipline contexts it is unlikely that an embarrassed mother would avoid or run away from her child, for instance, by leaving him/her in the store. It is possible, however, that she would take other action to terminate the source of the embarrassment; in this case, her child's behavior. Indeed, her embarrassment may lead her to give her child whatever he/she wants to cease the behavior. She is probably less likely to react with overreactive discipline than lax discipline in public situations because overreactive discipline (i.e. yelling or spanking) is not socially acceptable, especially in public (Blampied & Kahan, 1992; Jones, Eyberg, Adams, & Boggs, 1998), is likely to lead to increased attention from others, and would thus increase her fears of negative social evaluation and embarrassment. We therefore expected that maternal discipline would be more discrepantly lax when mothers are in situations likely to bias their attention toward concerns about social evaluation and induce embarrassment.

Aims and Hypotheses

The overarching aim of the study was to understand whether situational contexts, maternal interpretations of those events, and maternal negative affect relate to dysfunctional discrepant discipline in mothers of 2-4 year old children. Although a large body of research has focused on constructs associated with dysfunctional discipline, little or no research has investigated the constructs associated with dysfunctional discrepant discipline. Thus, we know very little about why mothers think they use dysfunctional discipline even when they believe they should not or other factors associated with dysfunctional discrepant discipline. Because parenting interventions depend on mothers using the techniques they are taught, it is imperative to have a better understanding of the conditions under which mothers fail to use empirically supported discipline techniques that they believe to be effective. Knowledge about why mothers believe they use discrepant discipline (i.e. their attributions for their discipline behaviors) may improve intervention effectiveness and consumer satisfaction, and thus client retention, in parenting interventions.

Lastly, the clinical intervention literature has focused little attention on situational, cognitive, or affective factors associated with effective discipline. We know quite a lot about correlates of dysfunctional discipline; but the absence of a particular form of dysfunctional discipline does not, by itself, equal the presence of functional discipline. It is thus also important to understand the reasons why mothers believe they succeed in implementing effective discipline behaviors that they believe they should use. One might assume that the absence, or decreased levels, of the situational, cognitive, and affective factors related to dysfunctional discrepant discipline would increase the

likelihood of functional concordant discipline. This, however, needs to be empirically supported. Ultimately, to improve parenting interventions we must know what happens when mothers “mess up” (i.e. engage in dysfunctional discrepant discipline) as well as what happens when they “get it right” (i.e. functional concordant discipline).

Hypotheses:

1. The magnitude of mothers’ discrepant harsh discipline would be positively associated with time pressure and multi-tasking situational contexts, the perceived aversiveness of child misbehavior, negative child locus attributions, anger, and feeling overwhelmed, and negatively associated with positive self-located attributions.
2. The magnitude of mothers’ discrepant lax discipline would be positively associated with time pressure, multi-tasking, and public situational contexts; the perceived aversiveness of child misbehavior; negative self-located attributions; situational attributions; embarrassment; and feeling overwhelmed.
3. Mothers would report less anger, embarrassment, overwhelmed feelings, perceived aversiveness, negative child locus attributions, and negative mother-located attributions; and more positive mother-located attributions, knowledge attributions, and teaching attributions for situations where they employ effective discipline techniques that they believe they should use than for situations where they employ dysfunctional discrepant discipline.

Methods

Participants and Procedures

Participants were 66 mothers of 2-4 year old children (see Table 1 for demographic information). Mothers were recruited using a commercially available mailing list. Recruitment materials (see Appendix A) informed mothers about the study and instructed them to call our laboratory for further information and to schedule an appointment. When mothers called the laboratory they were screened to ensure that they had a child between the ages of 2 and 4 and that they could read, write, and speak English. If mothers met inclusion criteria, they were then scheduled for an in-office visit.

Upon arriving at the laboratory, mothers were given information about informed consent. After informed consent was obtained, mothers first completed a battery of questionnaires, including the Parenting Scale-Discrepancy measure where mothers were instructed to indicate, for 21 discipline behaviors, how they actually discipline their 2-4 year olds and how they believe they should discipline them. After mothers completed the first questionnaire packet, the experimenter collected them and left the mother with a second battery of questionnaires, which included measures assessing maternal affect and child behavior problems. These additional questionnaires were part of a larger study, and will not be used in the current study. While the mother was completing the remaining questionnaires, the experimenter determined the two most discrepant and the two least discrepant items from the lax and harsh items of the Parenting Scale-Discrepancy. The magnitude of the discrepancy was determined by subtracting the scores for the “should” ratings from the scores for the “do” ratings for each item. Negative discrepancies were not used as interview prompts as they indicate that the mothers believe they should be

more lax or overreactive than they actually are. These 4 most discrepant items were used as stimuli for the subsequent interview. After the mother completed the remaining questionnaires, the experimenter and mother completed the interview portion of the protocol (see Appendix B). The interviewer asked the mother to remember specific recent incidents where she disciplined her child in reported discrepant and non-discrepant ways. For each instance, mothers were asked why they believe they disciplined in that way, as well as questions about their experienced affect during the episode and situational features of the episode. All interviews were audio recorded. Upon completion of the study, mothers were thanked and paid \$20 for their time and given a parking validation for the parking garage.

Measures

Parenting Scale (PS). The Parenting Scale (Arnold et al., 1993; Rhoades & O’Leary, 2007) is a 30-item measure designed to assess parental discipline strategies. Parents rate their probabilities of using specific discipline strategies in response to child misbehaviors. Ratings are made on 7-point scales that are anchored at the ends by one effective and one ineffective discipline strategy. After reverse coding some of the items, a score of 1 indicates effective discipline and 7 indicates ineffective discipline. Coefficient alphas for this sample were .81 for the overreactivity subscale and .87 for the lax subscale.

Parenting Scale-Should (PS-Should). The Should version of the Parenting Scale (Rhoades & O’Leary, 2007) is a scale designed to assess how parents believe they “should” discipline their children and contains the same items and response options as the Parenting Scale (Arnold et al., 1993). Parents are instructed to answer each item

according to what they think they should do when disciplining their child, whereas the Parenting Scale instructs parents to answer according to what they actually do.

Coefficient alphas for the current sample were .72 for the overreactivity subscale and .60 for the lax subscale.

Parenting Scale-Discrepancy (PS-Discrepant). The Discrepancy version of the Parenting Scale is a scale designed for this study to assess the discrepancy between how parents believe they should discipline their children and how they actual do discipline their children. The scale contains the 21 items from the original Lax and Overreactive subscales of the Parenting Scale (Arnold et al., 1993) and has the same response options as those items. Parents rate their probabilities of using specific discipline strategies in response to child misbehaviors. Ratings are made on 7-point scales that are anchored at the ends by one effective and one ineffective discipline strategy. After reverse coding some of the items, a score of 1 indicates effective discipline and 7 indicates ineffective discipline. Mothers were instructed to mark an “s” over the response that corresponded to how they believe they should discipline their children and to mark a “d” over the response that corresponded to how they actually discipline their children. This direct method of obtaining discrepancy scores and interview prompts was devised to ensure that we would interview mothers about items where they acknowledged a discrepancy in their behavior, and to reduce any feelings that we were artificially creating a discrepancy score from their responses to other items. Coefficient alpha for the current sample was .83 for overreactive “do” ratings, .87 for lax “do” ratings, .60 for overreactive “should”, and .57 for lax “should” ratings.

Information from this questionnaire was used to determine the discipline behaviors that mothers would be questioned about during the subsequent interview. The experimenter first determined the two most discrepant lax and the two most discrepant overreactive items by calculating the differences between the “should” and “do” scores for each item and then selecting those with the greatest discrepancies. For each of the discrepant items, the discrepancy needed to be greater than or equal to one, and greater than the discrepancy of any item chosen as a stimulus for the functional concordant discipline section of the interview. 47 mothers reported discrepancies for at least 2 Lax and 2 Overreactive items. 18 mothers reported one or less discrepancies for Lax and/or Overreactive items. Thus, these mothers were interviewed about more or less items on those subscales. One Mother did not endorse any Lax or Overreactive discrepancy and was interviewed only about her concordant functional discipline. The experimenter then selected the two lax and two overreactive items with the smallest differences between the “should” and “do” ratings. In 77.27% of the cases, the differences between these ratings were zero. In 93.18% of the cases, the differences between these ratings were zero or one. No item was selected as a stimulus for the concordant functional discipline section of the interview if the difference between the “should” and “do” ratings was greater than 2, or greater than any item used as a stimulus for the dysfunctional discrepant discipline section of the interview. 52 mothers reported at least 2 concordant Lax and 2 concordant Overreactive items. Again, 14 mothers reported concordant discipline for one or less Lax or Overreactive items. Thus, these mothers were interviewed about more or less items on those subscales (see Table 2 for discrepancy score means per item and the frequency with which each item was used as an interview prompt).

This questionnaire was also used to determine the Lax and Overreactive discrepancy scores used in the regression analyses. These discrepancy scores were computed by averaging the differences between the “should” and “do” ratings for the two most discrepant lax items and the two most discrepant overreactive items that were used as stimuli during the discipline interview.

Interview Narrative Coding. Mothers were interviewed about 8 recent incidents, 4 where they engaged in discrepant lax and overreactive discipline, and 4 where they engaged in concordant non-lax and non-overreactive discipline (see Appendix B). Information was elicited about situational contexts, mothers’ interpretations and evaluations of those situational contexts and their discipline behavior, and maternal negative affect. Mothers directly rated their own negative affect after each interview item on a scale of 1-5. Mothers indicated how aversive they believed their children’s behavior to be, and how angry, embarrassed, and overwhelmed they felt during the discipline situation. These affect ratings were averaged separately for the discrepant Lax items, the discrepant Overreactive items, the concordant Lax items, and the concordant Overreactive items. All interviews were transcribed by the lead author and coded by undergraduate research assistants who were blind to all study hypotheses (see Appendix C for the full code). Before coding study data, coders were trained in the use of the code and coded fictional transcripts until they became reliable with each other ($\kappa = .80$).

Each transcript was coded by two research assistants and was first coded for situational variables including public versus private setting and time pressure and multitasking situations. Next, coders identified all attributions in the transcript. If there were disagreements, the coders discussed the disagreement and came to a consensus

about whether the utterance was an attribution or not. Of those attributions determined to be attributions through consensus, an average of 80% were initially coded as attributions by each coder. Attributions were then coded for locus by each coder independently. Attribution locus indicates on whom the attribution is focused: the child, the mother, or other variables (see code for a full listing). Again, any disagreements about the locus were reconciled through consensus coding. For the final step, each attribution with a self or child locus was further coded by each coder independently for valence (positive, neutral, or negative). Cramer's v was used as the measure of inter-rater reliability due to low base rate problems (Sheskin, 2004). Cramer's v for the situational variables ranged from .76 to .85. For locus, the range was .86 to .95 and for valence the range was .51 to .61 (see Table 3 for exact values for each code). Reliability guidelines assert that values from .41-.60 indicate moderate agreement, .61-.80 indicate substantial agreement, and values from .81-1.00 indicate almost perfect agreement.

After each transcript was coded, we computed the percentage of items for which the mother indicated that she was in public, that she was experiencing time pressure, or that she was multitasking for the discrepant lax and discrepant overreactive and concordant lax and concordant overreactive interview prompts. We then computed the percentage of time mothers endorsed the various attributions, out of all attributions given, for discrepant lax and discrepant overreactive and concordant lax and concordant overreactive interview prompts.

Results

Data Cleaning

We first examined the data set for missing questionnaire data. No single variable had more than 5 mothers who failed to answer the item (7.58%) Most items with missing data had only 1 or 2 (1.52% or 3.03%) mothers with missing data points. No individual mother had more than 14 missing data points (3.5%). If a mother was missing less than 1/5 of the items for any questionnaire, mean substitution was used for missing items in that questionnaire. If a mother was missing more than 1/5 of the items from any questionnaire, her scores for those items were estimated using EM (Expectation-Maximization) imputation using EQS6.1 (Multivariate Software, 2005). All missing demographic and interview variables were estimated using EM imputation. Next, means, standard deviations, range, and skew were examined for data-entry errors and normalcy. The range for all variables was within normal limits, indicating that no major data entry errors were made. All data were additionally entered twice, ensuring that all data were correctly entered. Any variables with skew greater than 4 were log transformed (see footnote for transformed variables). This transformation greatly decreased or eliminated the skew of those variables. We assessed relations between parenting experience (number of children), child age and gender, mother age, ethnicity, and income and all dependent variables. There were no significant associations. Maternal education and parenting experience was additionally not significantly associated with how lax or overreactive they reported being or how lax or overreactive they believe they should be. Lastly we examined all variables for multicollinearity. For overreactive interview items, anger and feeling overwhelmed were correlated above $r = .65$. For lax interview items, anger, the

aversiveness of child behavior, and feeling overwhelmed were correlated above $r = .65$. Because of these high correlations, we created composite affect variables by averaging anger and overwhelmed for the overreactive items and anger, aversiveness, and overwhelmed for lax items. See Tables 4 and 5 for all bivariate correlations.

Hypothesis 1

The first hypothesis was that the magnitude of mothers' discrepant overreactive discipline would be positively associated with time pressure and multi-tasking situational contexts, the perceived aversiveness of child misbehavior, negative child locus attributions, anger, and feeling overwhelmed, and negatively associated with positive self locus attributions. To test this hypothesis we first examined the bivariate correlations among these variables. The magnitude of the discrepancy was significantly positively associated with the affect composite and negatively associated with positive self attributions. To examine the unique contributions of these variables we then conducted a simultaneous multiple regression predicting the magnitude of the average discrepancy between "should" and "do" scores for the overreactive interview items by the probability of reporting positive self locus attributions for the discrepant overreactive examples and the composite affect variable for the discrepant overreactive examples. The regression equation was significant, $F(2, 65) = 17.73, p < .001, R^2 = .36$. Both variables were individually significant; $t(65) = 4.85, p < .001$ and $t(65) = 1.98, p = .05$ respectively

To test whether these variables predict the overreactive discrepancy over and above how overreactive mothers report being, we conducted a second hierarchical regression analysis with PS-Overreactivity entered in the first step and the affect composite and positive self attributions entered in the second step. Both models were

significant, $F(1, 65) = 89.86, p < .001, R^2 = .58$; $F(3, 65) = 40.07, p < .001, R^2 = .66$ respectively. Adding the variables in the second step did significantly increase the variance explained in the overreactive discrepancy, $R^2 \text{ change} = .08$; $F(2, 62) = 6.90, p < .01$. When PS-Overreactivity is included in the regression model, only PS-Overreactivity and the affect composite remain significant individual predictors of the overreactive discrepancy. See Table 7 for a summary of overreactive regression analyses.

Hypothesis 2

The second hypothesis was that the magnitude of mothers' discrepant lax discipline would be positively associated with time pressure, multi-tasking, and public situational contexts, the perceived aversiveness of child misbehavior, negative self locus attributions, situational attributions, embarrassment, and feeling overwhelmed. To test this hypothesis we first examined the bivariate correlations among these variables. The magnitude of mothers' lax discrepancy was positively associated with the affect composite, time pressure, and safety attributions, and negatively associated with situational attributions. We then conducted a simultaneous multiple regression predicting the magnitude of the average discrepancy between lax "should" and "do" scores for the lax interview items from the probability of reporting time pressure situations, the probability of giving situational or safety attributions for the discrepant lax examples, and the average affect composite for the discrepant lax examples. The regression equation was significant, $F(4,65) = 9.67, p < .001, R^2 = .39$.

Again, to test whether this set of variables predicted the magnitude of the lax discrepancy over and above how lax mothers report being, we conducted a second hierarchical regression analysis with PS-Lax entered in the first step and time pressure,

safety attributions, situation attributions, and the affect composite entered in the second step. Both models were significant, $F(1, 65) = 48.19, p < .001, R^2 = .43$; and $F(5, 65) = 12.62, p < .001, R^2 = .51$, respectively. Adding the variables in the second step did significantly improve the variance explained in predicting the lax discrepancy, $F(4, 60) = 2.55, p < .05, R^2 \text{ change} = .08$. With PS-Lax included in the model, PS-Lax and the affect composite remain individually significant. See Table 6 for a summary of the lax regression analyses.

Hypothesis 3

The third hypothesis was that mothers should report fewer situations involving time pressure or multitasking; less negative affect; fewer negative child focused attributions and negative mother focused attributions; and more positive child focused, mother focused, knowledge, and teaching attributions for the non-discrepant lax and non-discrepant overreactive examples than for the discrepant lax and discrepant overreactive examples. This hypothesis was evaluated using paired-samples t-tests. Because multiple t-tests were conducted, only those analyses significant at $p < .01$ will be reported (see Table 6 for exact significance levels). Mothers reported being angrier, more overwhelmed and more embarrassed when they used discrepant overreactive discipline than when they did not. They also reported that they experienced more time pressure and multitasking demands and attributed their discipline behavior to something negative about themselves more often when they used discrepant overreactive discipline than when they did not. Lastly, they were less likely to attribute their behavior to something positive about their children or to their own discipline knowledge when they used discrepant overreactive discipline than when they did not. For lax discrepant discipline,

mothers were more likely to attribute their behavior to something negative about themselves and less likely to attribute their behavior to needing to teach their children something when they used discrepant lax discipline than when they did not.

Discussion

Overall, mothers' negative affect, situations involving time pressure, and mothers' situational and positive self attributions predicted the magnitude of the difference between what mothers believe they should do when they discipline their children versus what they actually do. The degree to which mothers use dysfunctional discrepant overreactive discipline is partially associated with how angry and overwhelmed they feel in discipline situations. Excessive negative affect might interfere with mothers' ability to think clearly, process information from the episode, and/or enact the effective discipline response that they believe they should use. In situations where mothers believe they should discipline in effective ways, negative affect could influence their ability to effectively implement the behavior; prime them to engage in an alternative, dysfunctional, discipline behavior; or both. The magnitude of the overreactive discrepancy also increases as the number of positive self-attributions decrease. If mothers display more anger toward their children than they believe they should, they should be less likely to attribute that angry behavior to something positive about themselves. Alternatively, if mothers believe that something positive about themselves causes their behavior, they might be less likely to have an extreme overreactive response to their children than if they do not report these positive aspects of themselves.

The magnitude of the lax discrepancy was also associated with how angry and overwhelmed mothers felt during the episodes. Again, if mothers are not able to effectively process or respond to the episode, they should be more likely to give up or give in to their children's inappropriate behaviors. Possibly, mothers become overwhelmed by their children's behavior and the situation, reach a breaking point, and

eventually stop trying to modify their children's behavior or give their children something nice in order to reduce their own negative affect. Unlike the overreactive discrepancy, how aversive the mothers perceived their children's behavior to be was also associated with the lax discrepancy. If a child's behavior is highly aversive, a mother might be more likely to do anything just to make the behavior stop. In this case, the mothers reported being more likely to give in to the child's negative behavior, ignore the behavior, or give the child something nice to cease the behavior.

Mothers were also more discrepantly lax if they were in a situation where time was limited. For example, if a mother is trying to leave the house to get to an appointment on time and her child is refusing to clean up his/her toys, the mother might be more likely to clean up the toys herself whereas she might insist that the child clean up the toys if she did not need to immediately leave the house. Unexpectedly, the magnitude of the lax discrepancy was negatively associated with mothers' beliefs that their behavior is determined by the situation that they are in. The more likely mothers were to make situation attributions, the smaller their lax discrepancy was. Because situation attributions were positively correlated with discipline occurring in a public place, it may be that if mothers need to discipline in public they might be less lax than they would be in other situations because other people are observing their parenting behavior. They might not want to be seen as a mother who is unable to control her children. Although the percentage of situations occurring in public was not correlated with the lax discrepancy, mothers reported very few situations that occurred in public, which might limit our ability to detect this effect if it is present. Embarrassment was also significantly positively associated with the percentage of lax discipline occurring in public. Possibly, if mothers

are disciplining in public and they feel embarrassed, they may be more likely to attribute their discipline to the situation they are in and less likely to use lax discipline due to worries that others will view them as an incompetent parent. Again, there are too few instances of lax discrepant discipline occurring in public to directly test this explanation. Additional studies focusing on public discipline should be conducted to replicate and more definitively explain this unexpected finding.

This study also allowed us to investigate what mothers are thinking and feeling when they discipline effectively. When mothers use functional concordant discipline they are less likely to feel angry or overwhelmed than when they use discrepant overreactive discipline. Thus when mothers use effective discipline, they are less likely to be overrun by negative emotions than when they use discrepant overreactive discipline. This again supports the idea that negative affect might overwhelm mothers' information processing capacity. Additionally, if a mother is already angry or overwhelmed and her child then does something negative, she might be more likely to allow that affect to spill over into the discipline situation than she would if she were feeling calm prior to or during the episode.

When mothers are using effective concordant discipline, they are also less likely to report being in situations that require multitasking or where they are under time pressure than they are when they are overreactive. Mothers thus seem to be more likely to express anger toward their children through their discipline when they need to get something done quickly or are needing to attend to multiple priorities than they do if they have adequate time or energy to address their children's behaviors. For example, many mothers indicated during their interviews that they yelled at their children because they

were cooking dinner or doing something with another child and did not have time to go into the other room and directly address the problem effectively.

There are limitations of this study that must be addressed. First, all of the information in this study was obtained directly from mothers. Although observers independently coded a substantial amount of the mothers' reports, there is still the possibility that the mothers' reports were biased in some way or that reporter invariance artificially inflated some results of the study. The mothers in this study were also predominately Caucasian, highly educated, and the majority of their children did not display significant behavior problems. If we conducted a similar study in a more ethnically diverse, at-risk, or clinical sample, the pattern of results may differ. Finally, the reliabilities for the valence attribution codes, although within moderate agreement guidelines, were fairly low. This may have reduced our ability to detect effects associated with attribution valence.

The results of this study add to the existing literature in a number of ways. We have little information about determinants of lax discipline. The results of this study suggest that the more angry or overwhelmed a mother feels when she has to discipline her child, the more lax she will be, even though she believes she should not discipline her child in a lax manner. Basic affect research could also be advanced by the findings of this study. Although researchers (Frijda, 1994; Lazarus, 1994) have theorized about situations likely to induce specific types of affect, little empirical research exists in this area. The percentage of public situations mothers discussed during their discipline interviews was positively related to embarrassment when they used lax discipline and feeling overwhelmed when they used overreactive discipline. Thus disciplining one's child in

public could prime or trigger both embarrassment and feeling overwhelmed, depending on the type of dysfunctional discipline the mother uses in the situation. Alternatively, the emotion the mother experiences might lead differentially to lax or overreactive discipline. It is impossible to determine from this study whether the embarrassment and overwhelmed emotions stem from or contribute to the mother's dysfunctional discipline. We can see, however, that they are likely to co-occur.

The current study also expands theory relevant to maternal interpretations and evaluations of discipline situations. The parenting attribution literature focuses on the attributions parents make for their children's behavior. Little or no research has investigated the possible association of the attributions mothers give for their own parenting "mistakes" and "successes", and their likelihood of engaging in discrepant dysfunctional discipline. Because mothers are more likely to give teaching attributions when they engage in functional concordant discipline than when they engage in dysfunctional discrepant discipline, it might be prudent to highlight the importance of socialization goals or teaching children important lessons, behaviors, or information, during treatment sessions with mothers of children with behavior problems.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, knowledge gained from this study about discrepant dysfunctional discipline could trigger improvements in parenting interventions aimed at preventing or ameliorating externalizing child behavior problems. Currently, most parent management training programs focus heavily on psycho-educational components with occasional emphasis on managing negative maternal affect. Although these interventions are effective (see DeGarmo, Patterson, & Forgatch, 2004; Markie-Dadds & Sanders, 2006), treatment gains are often not as persistent as most clinicians

would hope and are typically difficult to achieve (Kendziora & O’Leary, 1993). Possibly, interventions enable parents to know what they *should* do, but are not as effective at assisting them in actually carrying out the effective discipline behavior. Because negative affect is highly related to the magnitude of discrepant dysfunctional discipline, we should look into effective ways of training mothers to manage their own negative emotions during discipline episodes. Mothers could learn how to both anticipate situations that may trigger an affective response as well as learn techniques to better regulate their affective responses in those situations. This training could then be incorporated into existing parent management training programs or other empirically supported treatments for behavior problems in young children.

Other situational and attribution-related constructs might also be beneficially addressed during treatment. Time pressure, for example, is related to the extent to which mothers are discrepantly lax. If a mother is trying to make it to an appointment on time or get her children to school, it is not surprising that she might be likely to not address certain misbehaviors or to give her child something nice to obtain immediate compliance. Similarly, mothers are more likely to report multitasking demands when they are discrepantly overreactive than when they are not overreactive. During treatment it may then be advantageous to discuss situations such as these and, with the mother, generate alternative solutions in those types of situations along with possible implementation role-plays.

Lastly, mothers reported more teaching attributions, knowledge, and positive child attributions and fewer negative self-attributions when they engaged in concordant functional discipline than when they engaged in dysfunctional discrepant discipline.

Although we do not know if these attributions are a product of or the impetus for dysfunctional or functional discipline, it may still be beneficial to increase mothers' socialization or teaching goals for their children, and positive feelings toward their children. Although most parent management programs include a substantial amount of information and teaching of effective discipline strategies, it may be beneficial to also assess and attempt to increase mothers' beliefs in the effectiveness of these strategies and her knowledge or belief that they will work. Lastly, we might attempt to empathize more with mothers during treatment and try to decrease some of the self-blame surrounding their dysfunctional discipline.

Footnotes

¹The decision to recruit only mothers, versus mothers and fathers, was made based on reasonably representative data (for information on the dataset see Slep & O’Leary, 2007) demonstrating that, for this age group, mothers are responsible for the majority of child rearing tasks. Data from this sample demonstrate that both mothers and fathers report that mothers engage in more child-rearing tasks than fathers ($t(184) = 27.64, p < .001$; $t(185) = 22.11, p < .001$ respectively).

²Discrepant lax items log transformed: embarrassment, time pressure, multitasking, negative self attributions, positive self attributions, negative child attributions, positive child attributions, other person attributions, knowledge attributions, teaching attributions, and safety attributions. Discrepant overreactive items log transformed: positive self attributions, negative child attributions, other person attributions, knowledge attributions, teaching attributions, safety attributions, and percentage of public situations

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Table 1

Participant demographics

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|------------|------------------|
| | Full-Time | Part-Time | Homemaker | Unemployed | Student |
| Work Status | 31.8% | 27.3% | 34.8% | 3% | 3% |
| | No HS | High School | 4 College | Masters | PhD/Professional |
| Education | 1.5% | 9.1% | 65.2% | 16.7% | 7.6% |
| | Caucasian | Hispanic/Latino | | | |
| Ethnicity | 89.2% | 10.8% | | | |
| | Married | Unmarried | Previously Married | | |
| Marital Status | 93.9% | 6.1% | 7.7% | | |
| | Boy | Girl | | | |
| Child Gender | 62.5% | 37.5% | | | |
| | First born | Not first born | | | |
| Child Birth Order | 56.1% | 43.9% | | | |
| Mom Age (years) | 38.11 (4.91) | | | | |
| Median Income (\$) | 100,000 | | | | |
| Child Age (months) | 40.44 (9.76) | | | | |
| Total # children | 2.35 (1.40) | | | | |

Table 2

PS-Discrepancy item means and frequency with which each item was used as a discrepant or concordant interview prompt

| No. | Item | Mean | % Dis | % Con |
|-----|---|------|-------|-------|
| 6 | When my child misbehaves I raise my voice or yell | 2.58 | 18.56 | 2.27 |
| 1 | When I'm upset or under stress I'm pick and on my child's back | 1.19 | 11.74 | 3.03 |
| 16 | When my child misbehaves I get so frustrated or angry that he/she can see I'm upset | 1.91 | 10.61 | 2.27 |
| 13 | When my child doesn't do what I ask, I often let it go or end up doing it myself | 1.27 | 7.58 | 0.76 |
| 2 | When my child misbehaves I usually get into a long argument with my child | 1.23 | 4.55 | 1.15 |
| 9 | When we're not at home I let my child get away with a lot more | 1.09 | 6.44 | 7.95 |
| 5 | When my child misbehaves I give my child a long lecture | 0.98 | 3.41 | 12.12 |
| 7 | When I want my child to stop going something I coax or beg my child to stop | 0.98 | 6.44 | 10.61 |
| 14 | When I give a fair threat or warning I often don't carry it out | 0.98 | 5.68 | 6.82 |
| 11 | When there is a problem with my child, things build up and I do things I don't mean to do | 0.95 | 2.65 | 4.92 |
| 19 | When I say my child can't do something I let my child do it anyway | 0.95 | 3.03 | 2.27 |
| 10 | When my child does something I don't like, I often let it go | 0.85 | 6.44 | 2.65 |
| 3 | I threaten to do things that I know I won't actually do | 0.77 | 1.89 | 6.44 |
| 17 | If my child misbehaves and then acts sorry, I let it go that time | 0.77 | 3.41 | 3.03 |
| 21 | If my child gets upset when I say "no", I back down and give in to my child | 0.74 | 2.65 | 9.09 |
| 15 | If saying "no" doesn't work, I offer my child something nice so he/she will behave | 0.61 | 2.65 | 2.65 |
| 4 | I am the kind of parent who lets my child do whatever he/she wants | 0.55 | 1.15 | 1.15 |
| 12 | When my child misbehaves I spank, slap, grab, or hit my child | 0.55 | 0.76 | 0.00 |
| 18 | When my child misbehaves I almost always use bad language or curse | 0.52 | 1.38 | 0.00 |
| 8 | After there's been a problem with my child, I often hold a grudge | 0.29 | 0.38 | 20.08 |
| 20 | When my child does something I don't like, I insult my | 0.12 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| | child, say mean things, or call my child names | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|

Note: No. = item number on the PS-Discrepancy measure in order of highest average discrepancy to lowest average discrepancy; Item = wording of the “dysfunctional” end of the PS-Discrepancy item; Mean = average discrepancy score (do score – should score) for each item; % Dis = percentage, out of all interview prompts given for the discrepant half of the interview, that this item was used; % Con = percentage, out of all interview prompts given for the concordant half of the interview, that this item was used.

Table 3
Coding reliability by individual code

| Code | % agreement | Cohen's kappa | Cramer's v |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------------|------------|
| In Public? | 95.85% | .85 | .87 |
| Time Pressure? | 93.55% | .72 | .76 |
| Multitasking? | 95.71% | .79 | .83 |
| Self Attributions | 91.76% | .85 | .89 |
| Child Attributions | 94.78% | .86 | .90 |
| Other Person Attributions | 98.08% | .86 | .91 |
| Situation Attributions | 96.26% | .83 | .89 |
| Knowledge Attributions | 95.92% | .79 | .86 |
| Teaching Attributions | 99.26% | .92 | .95 |
| Safety Attributions | 99.37% | .90 | .91 |
| Positive Valence | 92% | .50 | .51 |
| Negative Valence | 89% | .50 | .61 |

Table 4

PS-Do, PS-Should, and PS-Discrepancy means and intercorrelations

| Subscale | Mean | PS-LAX | PS-OVR | PS-S LAX | PS-S OVR | PS-D LAX |
|----------|-----------|--------|--------|----------|----------|----------|
| PS-LAX | 2.51(.99) | | | | | |
| PS-OVR | 2.93(.98) | .43*** | | | | |
| PS-S LAX | 1.41(.49) | .29* | .00 | | | |
| PS-S OVR | 1.23(.38) | .09 | .12 | .44*** | | |
| PS-D LAX | 1.41(1.0) | .78*** | .38** | -.04 | -.05 | |
| PS-D OVR | 0.87(.89) | .35** | .78*** | -.07 | -.05 | .42*** |

Note. PS-LAX = Parenting Scale Lax; PS-OVR = Parenting Scale Overreactivity; PS-S LAX = Parenting Scale-Should Lax; PS-S OVR = Parenting Scale-Should Overreactivity; PS-D LAX = Parenting Scale-Discrepancy Lax; PS-D OVR = Parenting Scale-Discrepancy Overreactivity.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Correlations among interview variables

| | Discrep | Aver | Affect | Emb ^a | Att | Time | Multi | NSelf ^a | PSelf ^{a,b} | NCh ^{a,b} | PCh ^a | OP ^{a,b} | Sit | Know ^{a,b} | Teach ^{a,b} | Safe ^{a,b} | Pub ^b |
|----------------------|---------|------|--------|------------------|--------|------|-------|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| Discrep | ---- | .18 | .57*** | .18 | .01 | -.12 | -.08 | -.05 | -.35** | -.16 | - | .03 | -.22 | .13 | .17 | -.01 | -.12 |
| Aver | .32** | --- | .47*** | .11 | .06 | .19 | -.27* | .02 | -.20 | .01 | - | .23 | -.29* | .02 | .20 | .07 | .23 |
| Affect | .50*** | - | --- | .47*** | .11 | -.09 | .07 | .12 | -.28** | -.05 | - | .21 | -.10 | .06 | -.09 | .04 | .09 |
| Emb ^a | .13 | - | .27** | --- | .22 | -.08 | .15 | .14 | -.15 | -.11 | - | .15 | .16 | -.02 | -.22 | .03 | .33** |
| Att | .21 | - | .37** | .26* | --- | .05 | .18 | .17 | .19 | .06 | - | .09 | .11 | .20 | -.01 | .01 | -.04 |
| Time | .27* | - | .20 | -.02 | .42*** | --- | .08 | -.13 | .09 | .03 | - | -.34** | .43** | -.13 | -.14 | .00 | .00 |
| Multi | -.05 | - | .12 | .06 | .12 | .09 | --- | .25* | -.04 | -.06 | - | .13 | .28* | -.20 | -.15 | -.19 | -.26* |
| NSelf ^a | .06 | - | .18 | .22 | .26* | .20 | .10 | --- | -.07 | -.20 | - | -.15 | .15 | -.12 | -.13 | -.08 | .10 |
| PSelf ^{a,b} | .18 | - | .24 | -.06 | .12 | -.03 | -.21 | -.17 | --- | .18 | - | -.11 | -.07 | .25* | -.03 | -.03 | .05 |
| NCh ^{a,b} | -.12 | - | -.05 | .04 | .01 | -.12 | .02 | .02 | -.08 | --- | - | -.06 | -.19 | .07 | -.04 | .07 | -.08 |
| PCh ^a | .13 | - | -.04 | -.14 | -.14 | -.16 | -.11 | .07 | .12 | .04 | --- | .19 | - | - | - | - | - |
| OP ^{a,b} | .10 | - | .19 | .50*** | .34** | -.01 | -.13 | .27* | .04 | .06 | .03 | --- | -.19 | -.09 | -.02 | .05 | -.07 |
| Sit | -.35** | - | -.21 | .00 | .02 | .14 | .23 | -.05 | -.13 | -.02 | -.22 | .01 | --- | -.27* | .27* | -.14 | .01 |
| Know ^{a,b} | -.04 | - | .05 | .00 | -.08 | .01 | -.18 | -.10 | .18 | .15 | -.04 | .00 | -.10 | --- | .12 | -.12 | .08 |
| Teach ^{a,b} | -.04 | - | .03 | -.16 | .00 | -.07 | -.09 | -.03 | .26* | -.07 | .02 | .05 | -.13 | -.09 | --- | -.18 | -.02 |
| Safe ^{a,b} | .29* | - | .07 | .01 | .10 | .10 | -.07 | -.07 | .06 | -.05 | .31* | .04 | -.12 | .05 | .07 | --- | .14 |
| Pub ^b | -.05 | - | -.03 | .60*** | .17 | -.07 | -.08 | .02 | .07 | -.13 | -.02 | .27* | .26* | .03 | -.10 | -.05 | --- |

Note: Correlations among variables obtained from the discrepant lax interview questions are given below the diagonal; correlations among variables obtained from the discrepant overreactive interview questions are given above the diagonal; Discrep = discrepancy between the “should” and “do” ratings on the PS-Discrepancy measure; Aver = average of mothers’

ratings of the aversiveness of their children's behavior for the two relevant discrepant items; Affect = average affect composite (combination of anger and overwhelmed for overreactive items and combination of anger, aversive, and overwhelmed for lax items) reported by mothers for the two relevant discrepant items; Emb = average embarrassment reported by mothers for the two relevant discrepant items; Att = total number of attributions given by mothers for the two relevant discrepant items; Time = percentage of relevant discrepant items where mothers reported feeling time pressure; Multi = percentage of relevant discrepant items where mothers reported needing to multitask during the discipline situation; NSelf = percentage of negative self attributions provided by mothers out of all attributions given for the relevant discrepant items; PSelf = percentage of positive self attributions provided by mothers out of all attributions given for the relevant discrepant items; NCh = percentage of negative child attributions provided by mothers out of all attributions given for the relevant discrepant items; PCh = percentage of positive child attributions provided by mothers out of all attributions given for the relevant discrepant items; OP = percentage of other person attributions provided by mothers out of all attributions given for the relevant discrepant items; Sit = percentage of situational attributions provided by mothers out of all attributions given for the relevant discrepant items; Know = percentage of knowledge attributions provided by mothers out of all attributions given for the relevant discrepant items; Teach = percentage of teaching attributions provided by mothers out of all attributions given for the relevant discrepant items; Safe = percentage of safety attributions provided by mothers out of all attributions given for the relevant discrepant items; Pub = percentage of relevant discrepant items where the mother indicated the discipline occurred in public; a = lax variable was log transformed; b = overreactive variable was log transformed.
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 6

Regression analyses predicting the Lax discrepancy

| Model | <i>F</i> – ratio | R ² | Adjusted R ² | R ² change | <i>t</i> (65) |
|---------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Model 1 | <i>F</i> (4, 65) = 9.67*** | .39 | .35 | | |
| Affect Comp | | | | | 3.56*** |
| Time Pressure | | | | | 2.20* |
| Safety | | | | | 1.88 |
| Situation | | | | | -2.63** |
| Model 2 | | | | | |
| Step 1 | <i>F</i> (1, 65) = 48.19*** | .43 | .42 | | |
| PS LAX | | | | | 6.94*** |
| Step 2 | <i>F</i> (5,65) = 12.62*** | .51 | .47 | .08* | |
| PS LAX | | | | | 3.82*** |
| Affect Comp | | | | | 2.32* |
| Time Pressure | | | | | 1.17 |
| Safety | | | | | 0.81 |
| Situation | | | | | -1.62 |

Note: Affect Comp = composite score averaging mothers' ratings of the aversiveness of their children's behavior, their anger, and how overwhelmed they felt for the discrepant lax items; Situation = percentage of situation attributions for the discrepant lax items; Safety = percentage of safety attributions for the discrepant lax items; Time Pressure = the percentage of discrepant lax items where mothers indicated they felt time pressure during the discipline situation.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 7
Regression analyses predicting the Overreactive discrepancy

| Model | <i>F</i> – ratio | R ² | Adjusted R ² | R ² change | <i>t</i> (65) |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| Model 1 | <i>F</i> (2, 65) = 17.73*** | .36 | .34 | | |
| Affect Comp | | | | | 4.85*** |
| Pos Self ^a | | | | | -1.98* |
| Model 2 | | | | | |
| Step 1 | <i>F</i> (1, 65) = 89.86*** | .58 | .58 | | |
| PS-OVR | | | | | 9.48*** |
| Step 2 | <i>F</i> (3,65) = 40.07*** | .66 | .64 | .08** | |
| PS-OVR | | | | | 7.39*** |
| Pos Self ^a | | | | | -1.62 |
| Affect Comp | | | | | 2.98** |

Note: Affect Comp = average anger and overwhelmed feelings reported by mothers for the discrepant overreactive items; Pos Self = percentage of positive self attributions for the discrepant overreactive items; a = variable was log transformed, PS-OVR = Parenting Scale Overreactivity subscale.

p* < .05, *p* < .01, ****p* < .001

Table 8

Mean differences between situational variables, and mothers' affect and cognitions, during discrepant and non-discrepant discipline episodes

| Construct | LAX <i>t</i> – value | OVR <i>t</i> -value |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Affect Composite | 1.72 | 12.80*** |
| Child Behavior Aversiveness | NA | 3.24** |
| Embarrassment | 0.54 | 4.65*** |
| Negative Self Attributions | 3.16** | 7.45*** |
| Positive Self Attributions | -1.65 | -2.19* |
| Negative Child Attributions | -1.72 | 1.39 |
| Positive Child Attributions | 2.12* | -3.56*** |
| Time Pressure | 0.71 | 2.62** |
| Multitasking | 2.50** | 4.78*** |
| Knowledge Attributions | -0.40 | -3.57*** |
| Teaching Attributions | -2.95** | -1.20 |

Appendix A



The Point of Woods Parenting Laboratory is seeking mothers of 2-4 year old children for a research study about parenting and discipline. Participation should take approximately 1-2 hours and all participants will be compensated \$20 for their time. For more information about the study and to schedule an appointment please call Kimberly Rhoades at the Point of Woods Parenting Laboratory (631) 632-7874.



Appendix B

Discipline Interview

SECTION 1: "MISTAKES"

"Now we're going to chat a little bit about some of your responses to questions in the first questionnaire packet. If you'll remember back, those questions asked you about how you actually discipline your son/daughter (find out name) and how you believe you should discipline him/her. In our work with mothers we find that most, if not all mothers, report that they, at times, respond to their children's misbehavior differently than they would like to or believe they should. What we want to learn more about is what goes on during times where mothers discipline differently than they believe they should. For example, we want to know more about where you were, what your child did, what you did, how you were thinking, feeling, ect. during that situation. Then, we'll switch gears a little bit and talk about some of the items where you indicated that you typically discipline in ways that you believe you should. Okay? You indicated that you sometimes _____ although you believe you should _____. Can you remember the last time that happened? What happened?"

If not spontaneously provided:

Where were you?

Who was there?

What did your child do?

What did you do?

When did that happen (time and day)?

Were you doing anything else at the time?

Why do you think you did _____? – Probe once for any other reason they may think of

On this line, from not at all, to very; how aversive or unpleasant was (child's name)'s behavior?

Not at all A little Somewhat Aversive Very Aversive

How angry were you?

Not at all A little Somewhat Angry Very Angry

How embarrassed were you?

Not at all A little Somewhat Embarrassed Very Embarrassed

How overwhelmed did you feel?

Not at all A little Somewhat Overwhelmed Very Overwhelmed

REPEAT THESE QUESTIONS FOR THE TOP 2 DISCREPANT HARSH ITEMS AND THE TOP TWO DISCREPANT LAX ITEMS WHERE MOMS REPORT USING DYSFUNCTIONAL DISCIPLINE THAT THEY BELIEVE THEY SHOULD NOT USE SECTION 2: "GETTING IT RIGHT"

"Now we're going to switch gears and talk about some times where you have disciplined (child's name) in ways that you believe you should. You reported that you _____, which you also believe you should do. Can you remember the last time that happened?

What happened?

If not spontaneously provided:

Where were you?

Who was there?

What did your child do?

What did you do?

Were you doing anything else at the time?

Why do you think you did _____? – Probe once for another reason they may think of

How aversive or unpleasant was (child's name)'s behavior?

Not at all A little Somewhat Aversive Very Aversive

How angry were you?

Not at all A little Somewhat Angry Very Angry

How embarrassed were you?

Not at all A little Somewhat Embarrassed Very Embarrassed

How overwhelmed did you feel?

Not at all A little Somewhat Overwhelmed Very Overwhelmed

REPEAT THIS PROCEDURE FOR THE 2 LEAST DISCREPANT LAX ITEM AND
THE 2 LEAST DISCREPANT HARSH ITEM (ONLY USE ITEMS WHERE MOMS'

REPORT USING, AND THINKING THEY SHOULD USE, AN APPROPRIATE
RESPONSE)

Appendix C

Coding Manual (KAR Dissertation 9-24-08)

Situation Codes

Location and People Present:

Public

Code “PUBLIC-HOME” if they are at home and anyone else is there other than the mother and child

Code “PUBLIC-OUT” if they are out of the home and other people are present.

Code “PRIVATE” anytime only the mother and child are present.

If public-home or public-out, then code:

Adults

Code yes if adults are present, no if other adults are not present

If yes: Code if the adults are: Strangers, Friends, Relatives
Code number of adults

Children

Code yes if other children are present, no if other children are not present

If yes: Code if the children are: Strangers, Friends, or Relatives
Code number of children

Time of Day:

Code if the event occurred in the

Morning

Afternoon

Evening

Late Night

Child Behavior:

Code reported child behavior into one or more of the following categories:

Noncompliance/Defiance

Code anytime the child refuses to comply with any parental command, tells the mother “no”, or continues to engage in an activity that the mother told him/her to stop.

Aggression

Code anytime the child hits, kicks, bites, shoves, or pinches another person

Rule Breaking

Code anytime the child does not adhere to a rule set for proper behavior. Do not use code if the behavior could also be coded as noncompliance/defiance or aggression.

Negative Affect

Code anytime the mother reports the child was crying, whining, screaming, or otherwise having a tantrum. Can be coded in conjunction with other behavior codes

Time pressure/ Multi-tasking settings

Time Pressure

Code “yes” anytime the mother reports that she was:

Examples:

 Needing to leave the house soon

 In a hurry

 On her way to an appointment/meeting/other event

Or, gives any other indication that she was strapped for time.

Multi-tasking

Code “yes” anytime the mother reports that she was in the middle of completing another activity while she was disciplining her child.

Examples:

 Talking to someone else

 Cooking dinner

 Driving

 Trying to read

Attribution Codes

We will be coding attributions on 2 different dimensions: Locus and Valence. Locus codes specify whether parents are focusing the attribution on themselves, their child, other people, the situation, teaching, or safety. Valence codes specify whether parents' attributions are positive or negative. For each response please give at least one code for each dimension. Please mark any codes that apply. Certain responses may fit multiple codes. Code ALL categories that are applicable.

The first step in coding, is determining if the statement is an attribution. An attribution is a statement of *causality*. Any statement that implies a reason why a mother behaved in a certain way is an attribution and should be marked as such. Any other statements are not attributions and will not be coded further. Code all statements for attribution status first. We will then use consensus to resolve any discrepancies before moving forward.

The second step will be to provide codes for the locus. These codes will again be consensus coded and finally we will code valence for self and child locus codes.

Locus

Self:

Code anytime parents attribute their discipline behavior to something about themselves

Examples:

- “I just can't stick to what I say”
- “I'm a horrible parent”
- “I was really tired”

Child:

Code anytime parents attribute their discipline behavior to something about their children

Examples:

- “My child was really trying to annoy me”
- “He just made me so angry”
- “She was being naughtier than usual”
- “It was the tenth time he had done that today”

Other people:

Code anytime parents attribute their discipline behavior to other people

Examples:

- “Other people were staring”

“My friend told me that’s what I should do”
“I didn’t want to do something different than the other parents/I just did what the other parents around me were doing”
“Someone else handled the situation for me”
“The behavior really bothers my husband”

Situation:

Code anytime the parents attribute their discipline behavior to the situation

Examples:

“I couldn’t give a time out in the grocery store”
“I didn’t want to take away his fun time at the park”
“I had to finish my shopping”

Knowledge:

Code anytime the parent reports that their own or others knowledge contributed to their discipline behavior

Examples:

“I just didn’t know what to do”
“It’s the only way I know how to control him”

Teaching

Code anytime the mother indicates that she was trying to teach the child something or that the child needs to learn to do or not do something.

Examples:

“He needs to know that he can’t do that in public”
“I’m trying to teach him how to respect others”
“I want him to know how to share”

Safety

Code anytime the mother indicates that she reacted in a certain way because she was afraid that the child would hurt him/herself.

Examples:

“It was a busy street and I didn’t want her to get hit”
“She was too high up”
“I was afraid he would cut himself”

Note: If a mother’s response includes more than one locus, code all as present.

Valence

Positive:

Code anytime the parents' attributions are positive.

Examples:

“She was just having so much fun I didn't want to ruin it”

“I didn't want to take away his fun time at the park”

“The other parents thought it was funny”

Neutral:

Code anytime the parents' attributions are neutral

Examples:

“She's just so strong willed”

“I was really tired”

“I don't know what else to do”

Negative:

Code anytime the parents' attributions are negative

Examples:

“I'm just a bad mom”

“She was really out to get me”

“He just made me so angry”

Note: Code each attribution locus with a corresponding valence. Code *only one* valence category for each locus code.

Appendix D

Parenting Scale-Discrepancy

The previous two questionnaires asked you questions about how you respond to your child when he/she does something you dislike and how you think you should respond to your child when he/she does something you dislike. All parents, at least occasionally, respond to their child's misbehavior in ways that they believe they shouldn't. We would like you now, for each of these responses, to indicate how you believe you should respond to your child's misbehavior and how you actually do respond to your child's misbehavior. Indicate how you believe you should respond to your child's misbehavior by marking an "S" over the circle. Indicate how you actually do respond to your child's misbehavior by marking a "D" over the circle. If you actually respond the same way you believe you should respond, simply fill in the appropriate circle.

SAMPLE ITEM:

AT MEAL TIME I...

let my child
decide how much
to eat.

0---D---0---0---S---0---0

decide how
much my child
eats.

1. When I'm upset or under stress...

I am picky and on my
picky
child's back.

0---0---0---0---0---0---0

I am no more
than usual.

2. When my child misbehaves...

I usually get into a long
argument with my child.

0---0---0---0---0---0---0

I don't get into
an argument.

3. I threaten to do things that...

I am sure I can
carry out.

0---0---0---0---0---0---0

I know I won't
actually do.

4. I am the kind of parent that...

sets limits on what
do

0---0---0---0---0---0---0

lets my child

my child is allowed to do.
he/she

whatever
wants.

5. When my child misbehaves...

I give my child
talks short
a long lecture.
point.

O---O---O---O---O---O---O

I keep my
and to the

6. When my child misbehaves...

I raise my voice
child
or yell.

O---O---O---O---O---O---O

I speak to my
calmly.

7. When I want my child to stop doing something...

I firmly tell my
child to stop.
stop.

O---O---O---O---O---O---O

I coax or beg
my child to

8. After there's been a problem with my child...

I often hold a grudge.
back to
quickly.

O---O---O---O---O---O---O

things get
normal

9. When we're not at home...

I handle my child the
get
way I do at home.
lot more.

O---O---O---O---O---O---O

I let my child
away with a

10. When my child does something I don't like...

I do something about it
go.
every time it happens.

O---O---O---O---O---O---O

I often let it

11. When there is a problem with my child...

things build up and I do ------------------ things don't
get out
things I don't mean to do. of hand.

12. When my child misbehaves, I spank, slap, grab, or hit my child...

never or rarely. ------------------ most of the
time.

13. When my child doesn't do what I ask...

I often let it go or end ------------------ I take some
other
up doing it myself. action.

14. When I give a fair threat or warning...

I often don't carry it out. ------------------ I always do
what I said

15. If saying "No" doesn't work...

I take some other ------------------ I offer my
child
kind of action. nice something
so he/she will
behave.

16. When my child misbehaves...

I handle it without ------------------ I get so
frustrated or
getting upset. angry that my
child
can see I'm upset.

17. If my child misbehaves and then acts sorry...

I handle the problem ------------------ I let it go that
time.
like I usually would.

18. When my child misbehaves...

I rarely use bad
always
language or curse.
language.

I almost
use bad

19. When I say my child can't do something...

I let my child
I said.
do it anyway.

I stick to what

**20. When my child does something I don't like, I insult my child, say mean things,
or call my child names...**

never or rarely.
time.

most of the

21. If my child gets upset when I say "No"...

I back down and
I said.
give in to my child.

I stick to what