COUPLE CONFLICT IN PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH VERSUS WITHOUT AUTISM: SELF-REPORTED AND OBSERVED FINDINGS

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STUDY RATIONALE

- Parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) have unique parenting experiences

- Little is known about how these unique experiences affect and are affected by parents' couple relationship

The **Hartley** Lab

STUDY GOAL

Compare the couple conflict of parents who have a child with ASD to a comparison group of parents of children without disabilities

Self-Report

Observation

RECRUITMENT

ASD GROUP (N = 178)

- Target child aged 5-12 years
  - ASD diagnosis
    - Autism Diagnosis Observation Schedule (ADOS; Lord et al., 2000)
  - Current ASD symptoms
    - Social Responsiveness Scale – Second Edition (SRS2; Constantino & Gruber, 2012)

COMPARISON GROUP (ASD = 174)

- Target child aged 5-12 years
  - No diagnosed or suspected developmental disability
    - Screening questions
  - Lacking ASD symptoms
    - Social Responsiveness Scale – Second Edition

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

	ASD	Comparison	t value or χ^2, p value
Mother			
Age in years (M [SD])	38.71 (5.59)	38.76 (5.99)	$t(350) = 0.32, p = .75$
Race/Ethnicity (N [%])			$\chi^2(2, N = 351) = 1.13, p = .29$
White, Non-Hispanic	160 (89.9%)	150 (86.2%)	
Other	18 (10.1%)	24 (13.8%)	
Education (N [%])			$\chi^2(5, N = 349) = 9.70, p = .05$
No HS Degree	3 (1.7%)	5 (2.9%)	
HS Degree or equivalency	11 (6.2%)	10 (5.7%)	
Some college	31 (17.1%)	19 (10.2%)	
Associates or Bachelor's degree	96 (53.9%)	81 (46.6%)	
Graduate degree	37 (20.8%)	59 (33.9%)	
Couple satisfaction	114.11 (30.47)	124.53 (29.32)	$t(350) = 3.37, p < .01$
Father			
Age in years (M [SD])	40.44 (6.24)	40.51 (6.58)	$t(350) = 0.33, p = .74$
Race/Ethnicity (N [%])			$\chi^2(2, N = 350) = 1.01, p = .32$
White, Non-Hispanic	156 (87.6%)	146 (83.9%)	
Other	22 (12.4%)	28 (16.1%)	
Education (N [%]))			$\chi^2(5, N = 349) = 7.22, p = .12$
No HS Degree	10 (5.6%)	4 (2.3%)	
HS Degree or equivalency	22 (12.4%)	14 (8.0%)	
Some college	25 (14.0%)	23 (13.2%)	
Associates or Bachelor's degree	88 (49.4%)	85 (48.9%)	
Graduate degree	33 (18.5%)	48 (27.6%)	
Couple satisfaction	116.36 (26.62)	125.66 (25.00)	$t(350) = 3.49\ p < .01$
Relationship Length (M [SD])	11.30 (5.23)	11.91 (4.64)	$t(350) = 1.17, p = .24$
Household income (M [SD])	9.00 (3.19)	10.63 (2.85)	$t(349) = 5.06\ p < .01$
Number of Children (M [SD])	2.41 (1.08)	2.55 (1.05)	$t(350) = 1.22, p = .22$
Target Child			
SRS (M [SD])	77.03 (11.48)	49.81 (8.25)	$t(351) = 18.25, p < .01$
CBCL (M [SD])	64.80 (9.63)	49.61 (10.38)	$t(350) = 20.76, p < .01$
ABAS (M [SD])	64.47 (17.38)	100.58 (16.18)	$t(351) = 18.79, p < .01$

MEASURES: SELF-REPORT

THE CONFLICT AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SCALE (CPS; KERIG, 1996)

- <u>Dimensions of Couple Conflict</u>
  - Frequency
  - Severity
  - Efficacy (%)
  - Resolution (+, -)
- <u>Dimensions of Resolution Strategies</u>
  - Verbal Aggression
  - Physical Aggression
  - Collaboration
  - Stalemate
  - Avoidance
  - Child Involvement

MEASURES: OBSERVED

7-MINUTE VIDEOTAPED COUPLE CONFLICT INTERACTION (FROSCH, MANGELSDORF, & MCHALE, 1988; 2000)

- Coded dimensions (7-point scale)
  - **Engagement** (couple): initiating conversation, body language, visual regard
  - **Enjoyment** (couple): positive comments and tone
  - **Positive Affect** (mother and father): smiling, laughter, signs of affection
  - **Irritation** (couple): negative comments and tone
  - **Negative Affect** (mother and father): frowning, eye rolls, sighs
  - **Cooperation** (couple): sense of togetherness/"we-ness" in completing the task
  - **Balance** (couple): control, dominance, smoothness of turn-taking
  - **Sensitivity** (couple): affirmations, consideration of statements and feelings
  - **Conflict Resolution** (couple): smooth and efficient work towards a resolution
  - **Global Quality** (couple): overall extent of liking, caring, and positive emotional commitment

Interrater Reliability

ASD: 0.58 – 0.77
Comparison: 0.56 – 0.77

DATA ANALYSIS
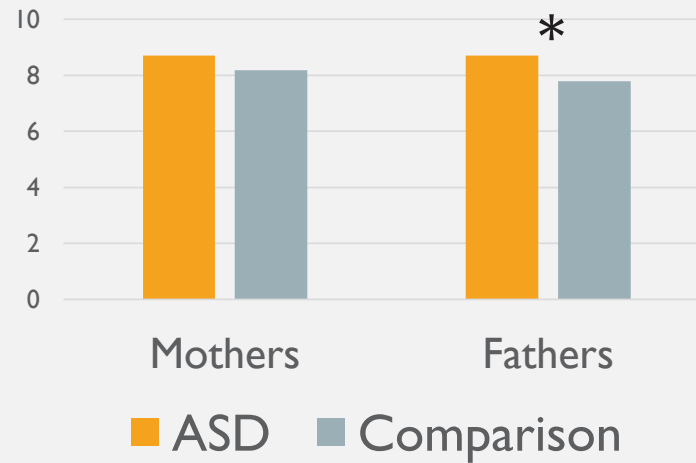
SELF-REPORT

- **Multi-Level Models in HLM**
  - Level 1
    - Mother (Mother = 1; Father = 0)
    - Father (Mother = 0; Father = 1)
  - Level 2
    - Group (Parents of children with ASD = 1; Comparison Group = -1)
    - Parent Race/Ethnicity
    - Parent Education
    - Length of Couple Relationship
    - Household Income
    - Family Size
    - Child Age

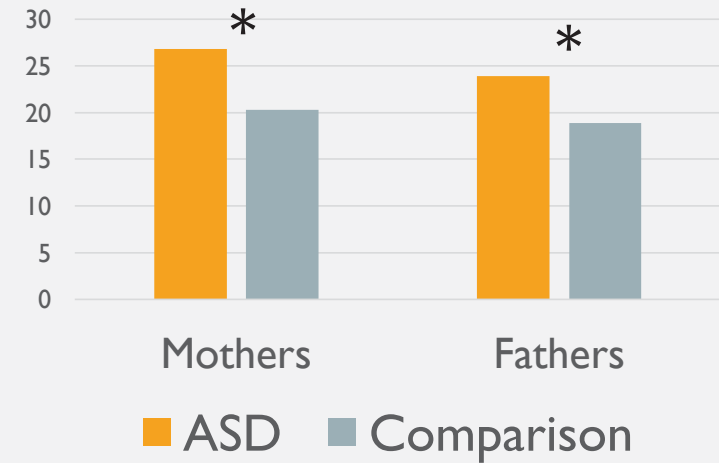## OBSERVED

- **Multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA)**
  - Dependent Variable
    - Observed coded dimensions
  - Fixed Factor
    - Group
  - Covariates
    - Parent Race/Ethnicity
    - Parent Education
    - Length of Couple Relationship
    - Household Income
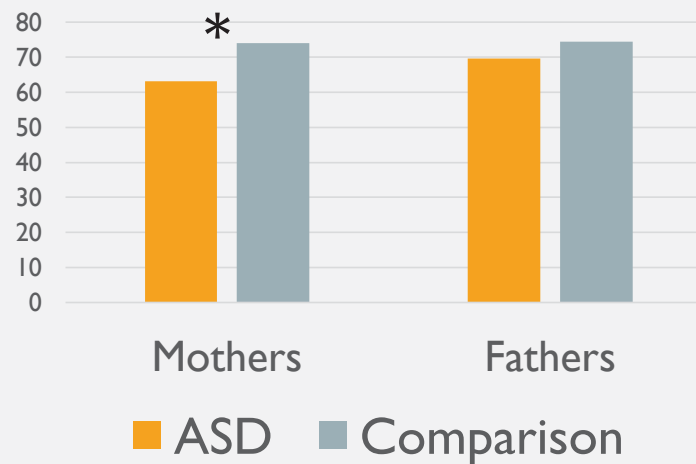   - Family Size
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RESULTS: SELF-REPORT

Frequency
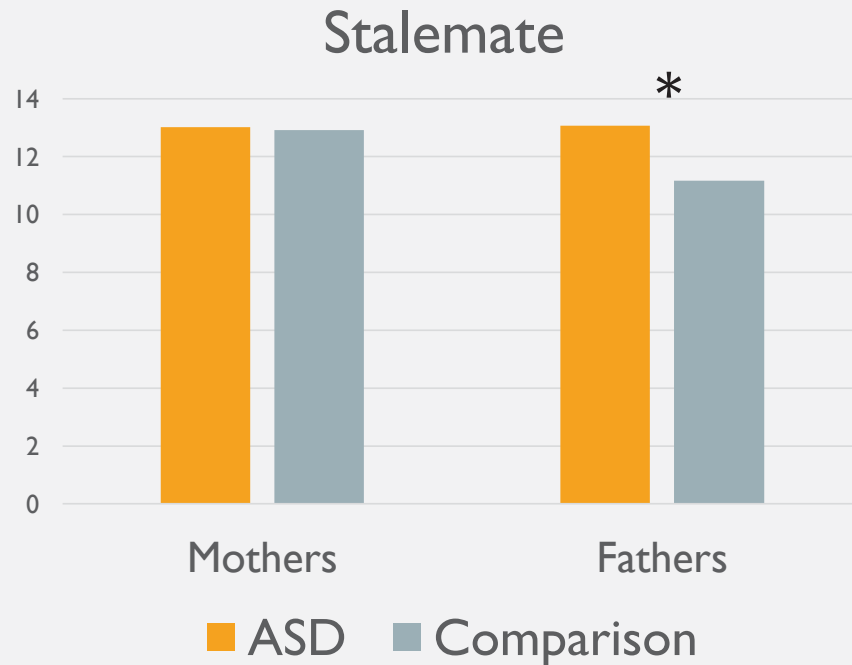
Mothers — ASD, Comparison
Fathers — ASD, Comparison *

Severity

Mothers — ASD *, Comparison
Fathers — ASD *, Comparison

Efficacy (%)

Mothers — ASD, Comparison *
Fathers — ASD, Comparison

<u>No difference</u>

- Resolution (+, -)

RESULTS: SELF-REPORT

- Dimensions of Couple Conflict
  - Frequency
    - *Higher for ASD Fathers*
  - Severity
    - *Higher for ASD Mothers and Fathers*
  - Efficacy (%)
    - *Lower for ASD Mothers*
  - Resolution (+, -)

- Dimensions of Resolution Strategies
  - Verbal Aggression
  - Physical Aggression
  - Collaboration
  - Stalemate
    - *Higher for ASD Fathers*
  - Avoidance
  - Child Involvement

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  - Avoidance
  - Child Involvement

RESULTS: OBSERVED

	ASD N = 173	Comparison N = 171	F value	P Value	η^2_p
Engagement (M, [SD])	4.54 (1.01)	4.89 (0.94)	9.82	<.001	.03
Enjoyment (M, [SD])	3.30 (1.36)	3.20 (1.36)	0.98	.325	.00
Mother Positive Affect (M, [SD])	3.08 (1.50)	2.70 (1.30)	7.05	.006	.02
Father Positive Affect (M, [SD])	2.83 (1.43)	2.42 (1.24)	8.16	.002	.03
Mother Negative Affect (M, [SD])	2.44 (1.33)	2.25 (1.08)	0.53	.472	.00
Father Negative Affect (M, [SD])	2.19 (1.19)	2.13 (0.98)	0.02	.883	.00
Irritation (M, [SD])	2.42 (1.19)	2.26 (0.96)	0.77	.381	.00
Cooperation (M, [SD])	4.45 (0.95)	4.75 (1.00)	5.24	.022	.02
Balance (M, [SD])	4.88 (0.84)	5.11 (0.66)	4.71	.034	.01
Sensitivity (M, [SD])	3.76 (1.07)	3.54 (1.06)	4.98	.031	.02
Conflict Resolution (M, [SD])	4.17 (0.98)	4.32 (0.88)	1.12	.292	.00
Global Quality (M, [SD])	4.51 (1.15)	4.44 (1.00)	0.68	.413	.00

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RESULTS: OBSERVED TOPICS

Group and topic were independent

Topic	ASD	Comparison
Habits/Personality	16 (9.2%)	16 (9%)
Work	11 (6.2%)	22 (12.2%)
Target Child	26 (14.6%)	15 (8.6 %)
Other Parenting	17 (9.6%)	23 (13.2%)
Intimacy/ Commitment	7 (3.9%)	6 (3.4%)
Relatives	18 (10.1%)	13 (7.5%)
Leisure/Friends	19 (10.7%)	20 (11.5%)
Communication	26 (14.6%)	14 (8%)
Money	15 (8.4%)	21 (12.1%)
Chores	23 (12.9%)	23 (13.6%)
Other	2 (1.2%)	4 (2.3%)

DISCUSSION

VULNERABILITY

- Higher Frequency
- Higher Severity
- Lower Efficacy (%)
- Higher Stalemate
- Lower Engagement
- Lower Cooperation
- Lower Balance

STRENGTH

- Higher Positive Affect
- Higher Sensitivity

IMPLICATIONS

Vulnerability and Strength

- Acceptance and change-based therapies
- Utilize positivity and sensitivity
- Debunking myths

STUDY STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

STRENGTHS

- Large sample size
- Comparison group
- Range of child ASD symptoms
- Inclusion of self-report and observational measures
- Inclusion of mothers and fathers
- Use of multi-level models

LIMITATIONS

- Homogeneity of sample
- Married
- Cross-sectional

COLLABORATORS AND FUNDING

Waisman Center

THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MADISON

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The Hartley Lab

QUESTIONS

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