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Parenting Differences in Minority Families: Implications for Practice in Hispanic and African American Families

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to identify differences in parenting among Hispanic and African American families through the comparison of parenting dimensions. The sample consisted of 110 participants; 50% (n=55) were Hispanic and 50% (n=55) were African American. Participants included mothers of children enrolled in an inner city Head Start program in a large city in an East North Central State. Survey methods were employed to assess parenting dimensions utilizing Parent as Social Context Questionnaire (PASCQ). Data was analyzed utilizing multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), which determines population differences. Findings indicate differences exist, African American participants scored higher in parenting dimensions of warmth and autonomy support and Hispanic participants scored higher in parenting dimensions of coercion and rejection. These findings indicate a need for further research on parenting within minority families. These findings impact practice in fields tasked with supporting and servicing minority families.

Keywords: Minority, Parenting, Dimensions, Hispanic, African American

Introduction

Parenting dimensions have gained attention in family research (Amato & Fowler 2002; Cox 2006; Douglas 2011; Horton, Bleau & Drwecki 2006; Manongdo 2010; O'Donnell, Cardemil, Moreau & Pollastri 2007; Rodriquez, Donovan & Crowley 2009; Ruffman, Slade, Devitt & Crowe 2006; Suldo & Huebner 2004). However, researchers have often focused on warmth and demandingness (also called structure), which are only two of the six parenting dimensions (i.e., warmth, autonomy support, structure, chaos, rejection, and coercion (Rodriquez et al. 2009), thus, identifying a need for further research. Additionally, family research has found significant relationships between parenting dimensions and outcomes in families and children (Amato & Fowler 2002; Cox 2006; Douglas 2011; Manongdo 2010; O'Donnell et al. 2007; Rodriquez et al. 2006; Suldo & Huebner 2004). Few studies have examined differences in parenting dimensions among Hispanic and African American families when the populations are compared, further substantiating the need for research on this topic.

This study compares and assesses differences between Hispanic (defined as Latino descent in this study) and African American families in terms of parenting dimensions. It also addresses a gap in the research that does not assess all parenting dimensions among these populations. Furthermore, this study establishes the use of the Bowen family systems theory (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family 2011) and the human ecological theory (Phenice & Griffore 1996) in Hispanic and African American families. Hispanic and African American families that access Head Start programs were utilized in this study. Group differences among this population were explored in terms of parenting dimensions. These populations were chosen for this study because of their presence in Head Start, as well as the call for further research on ethnically diverse populations (Bueler, Benson & Gerard 2006; Manongdo 2010; Schrlach, Li & Dului 2006).

Literature Review

Baumrind (1966) identified three parenting styles: permissive parenting, authoritarian parenting, and authoritative parenting. Additional in-depth research on parenting styles resulted in the study of the six dimensions of parenting which are warmth, autonomy support, structure, chaos, rejection, and coercion. Parenting dimensions are defined as the features and qualities used to capture parent nature (Skinner, Johnson & Snyder 2005). Each parenting style has a parenting dimension or a combination of parenting dimensions characteristic of a specific parenting style. For example, authoritative parenting style is associated with parenting dimensions of structure (Skinner et al. 2005) and autonomy support (Suldo & Huebner 2004). Authoritarian parenting style is associated with high demandingness and low responsiveness parenting dimensions (Suldo & Huebner 2004).

In addition, researchers focusing on specific dimensions identify important influences of parenting dimension on children and adolescents (Alizadeh, Applequist & Coolidge 2007; Cox 2006; Manongdo 2010; Suldo & Huebner 2004). Rejection and warmth have been noted as dimensions that influence parent child relationships (O'Donnell et al. 2007). Responsiveness (also called autonomy support) and demandingness (also called structure) parenting dimensions are suggested to account for much of children's growth during adolescents (Suldo & Huener 2004). Additional empirical investigations indicate that parenting dimensions are important factors related to emotional stability, development, and decision-making characteristics of children (Bueler et al. 2006). In addition, research on parenting styles suggests links between positive child cognitive skills and parental warmth, and negative cognitive affects related to punitive and or restrictive parenting (Coley, Lewin-Bizan & Carrano 2011). Furthermore, one research study on child well-being and/or outcomes associated with maternal parenting styles reported significant variations in academic achievement, noting the highest levels of positive child academic achievements linked to authoritative parenting, and considerable variations in social problems, noting the highest levels of child social problems linked to authoritarian parenting (Fletcher, Walls, Cook, Madison & Bridges 2008). As such, parenting dimensions play an important role in the family unit and in the development of children.

The study of parenting dimensions enables a broader view of parenting, as parenting dimensions are noted as the core features of parenting styles, thus, considered building blocks of parenting research (Skinner et al. 2005). The lack of research on the interaction between culturally-relevant parenting and universally identified parenting limit the perception of parenting diversity among minority families, especially those from lower socio-economic communities that lack the benefits of substantial resources. As such, empirical research is limited on integrated cultural and universal parenting strategies intended to benefit minority populations (Elmore & Gaylord-Harden 2013). Amato and Fowler (2002) contend most studies regarding parenting dimensions are based on samples of white, two-parent, middle-class families, therefore, leaving a gap in their application to Hispanic or African American families. Furthermore, researchers indicate differences in parenting practices among Hispanic and African American populations (Douglas 2011; McKelvey, Whiteside-Mansell, Bradley, Casey, Connors-Burrow & Barrett 2009). Therefore, parenting dimensions are important in understanding parenting differences, thus, vital in this study of parenting differences in minority families.

Hispanic Parenting

Researchers contend that Baumrind's parenting styles do not fully capture the nature of Hispanic parenting practices, specifically in Latino parents (Rodriquez et al. 2009). Hispanic parents are characterized as protective parents (Crean 2008). During conflict Latino parents remain protective of children, regardless of the level of conflict (Crean 2008). In comparison with other populations, Hispanic parents use less corporal punishment than European Americans and

African American parents (Whiteside et al. 2009). Hispanic parents have been found to be more permissive than African American parents (Douglas 2011). Furthermore, Hispanic and African American children have more respect for parents than European children in at least one study (Dixon, Graber & Brooks-Gunn 2008).

African American Parenting

African American parenting practices differ from the parenting practices of other populations (Koblinsky, Kovalanka & Randolph 2006; Lorber, O'leary & Slep 2011; Nievar & Luster 2006). African American parents have positive attitudes toward corporal punishment and use it more frequently than European Americans (Lorber et al. 2011). Furthermore, economic stress is associated with increased physical punishment among African American parents. Low-income African American parents are more frequently depressed and have fewer positive interactions with their children than higher income families (Nievar & Luster 2006). Additionally, positive parenting practices among African American parents are associated with lower depression symptoms among mothers, fewer externalizing and internalizing behavior problems among children, and lower family conflict (Koblinsky et al. 2006). Evidence that differences exist among Hispanic and African American parenting practices (Lorber et al. 2011), along with recommendations for future parenting research to have a more ethnically diverse focus (Bueler, Benson & Gerard 2006; Manongdo 2010; Schrlach, Li & Dului 2006; Winseler, Madigan & Aquilino 2005), make these ethnic groups valuable to the efforts of this study intended to explore culturally diverse parenting.

Theoretical Framework

This study examines parenting dimensions, which are also characteristic of parent's actions, moods, and attitudes (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family 2011). Bowen's tenets of multigenerational transmission and family projection process accounts for the variations found in parenting which are explored in this study through the examination of the building blocks of parenting in culturally different families. Bowen's tenets of multigenerational transmission and family projection process takes note of the role of the parent by identifying the process in which parents transmit information, emotional reactions, and behaviors to his or her offspring (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family [BCSF] 2011). Multigenerational transmission and family projection process relates to this study by accounting for the differences among parenting moods, attitudes, and actions (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family 2011). This study further addresses this variation by examining group differences among Hispanic and African American families. Bowen family systems theory guides this research by bringing understanding to the role of the parent in balancing the family system and the functioning of the family as whole. The parent's parenting actions influence his or her choices in maintaining congruence which influences the family system (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family 2011). However, Bowen family systems theory does not account for the diversity found in this study. The inclusion of the human ecological theory is used to account for cultural differences found in minority families.

The family ecosystem component of the human ecological theory accounts for the complexity of minority families and supports the population focus of this study (Phenice & Griffore 1996). Phenice and Griffore (1996) state, "... the human ecological framework is suggested for studying the family in all its diverse forms as well as its interaction with all its environments" (p. 7). This theory holds the basic assumption that the family is fundamental, it is a microsystem comprised of individual and family needs, values, and goals, and that communication, decision making, and resource management are processes within the family. It further contends that the quality of life of individuals and families are interdependent among multiple environments and interactions (Phenice & Griffore 1996). The family ecosystem illuminates complex relationships between individuals, families, and environments (Phenice &

Giffore 2000). Phenice and Griffore (1996) state, "Within a family ecosystem approach, several important topics can be addressed to understand ethnic minority families" (p. 8). This study is unique and different because of its examination of all six parenting dimensions in minority families coupled with the application of a theoretical framework that takes into account the complexities of this population. Bowen theory takes into account the variations found in parenting while human ecology theory accounts for the complexities found in minority families.

Methodology

Quantitative methodology was employed to examine group differences among Hispanic and African American families. Differences were identified using multivariate analysis of variance. This study addressed the research question, what are the parenting dimension differences between Hispanic and African American families that access inner city Head Start programs? It was hypothesized that significant differences exist in parenting dimensions for Hispanic versus African American families that access inner city Head Start programs. This hypothesis was supported by previous research efforts that have noted specific differences in the parenting practices of Hispanic and African American families when compared to other populations.

Participants

Cluster sampling was employed in which participants were selected based on their participation in the Head Start program. Hispanic and African American parents were sampled from inner city Head Start programs in a large city in an East North Central State. Head Start was chosen for this study because of its comprehensive focus on parent involvement (Department of Human Service 2009) and the substantial number of Hispanic and African American families who participate in the program. The criteria for participation in this study were: (a) participants must be 18 years or older, (b) participants must have a child or children enrolled in an inner city Head Start program, (c) participants must be the biological mother of the Head Start child, and (d) participants must identify themselves as either Hispanic or African American. The sample consisted of 110 women, 50% ($n = 55$) were Hispanic and 50% ($n = 55$) were African American, who ranged in age from 18-58 ($M = 31.19$, $SD = 7.84$). Approximately 47.3% ($n = 52$) were never married and 37.3% ($n = 41$) were married. Regarding educational attainment, the largest group of women (25.5%, $n = 28$) had one or more years of college and no degree, and 14.5% ($n = 16$) were high school graduates or the equivalent. The majority of respondents were either employed (66.4%, $n = 73$) or self-employed (4.5%, $n = 5$).

Data Collection Procedures

Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained, interested parents were scheduled to complete a demographic questionnaire and a survey which were available in both English and Spanish. Informed consent was obtained prior to administering surveys. *Parent as Social Context Questionnaire* (PASCQ; Parent-Report) measured the parenting dimensions of warmth, rejection, structure, chaos, autonomy support, and coercion. The survey consisted of thirty questions, five questions addressing each of the aforementioned parenting dimensions (Skinner et al. 2005). The questions were summed to create a measure of each dimension. Validity and reliability for this assessment instrument were determined by using a sample of 645 mothers and 567 fathers (Skinner et al. 2005). Internal consistencies were calculated using Cronbach's alpha. Means and standard deviations were also calculated. The researcher reported internal consistencies as satisfactory. Consistent with other studies, fathers and mothers perceived themselves as high on warmth, structure, and autonomy support and low on rejection, chaos, and coercion (Skinner et al. 2005). Validity was determined in relation to similar studies. Findings were consistent to other

studies outcomes of fathers and mothers perceptions of themselves in terms of parenting (Skinner et al. 2005).

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed utilizing SPSS statistical software. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to examine group comparisons among Hispanic and African American families in terms of parenting dimensions. Multivariate tests were interpreted to find the significant differences between groups. F-test for Wilks' lambda was used to examine if there were significant differences between groups. If the alpha level was less than .05, it was concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between groups. If differences were noted, a post hoc test was conducted at the univariate level. Results are reported in table format and by discussion of the findings.

Results

Analysis of variance was utilized to examine group differences. The multivariate result for race or ethnicity was statistically significant, Wilks' Lambda = .814, $F(7, 102) = 3.33, p = .003$. Univariate testing found that African American women scored significantly higher than Hispanic women in the warmth parenting dimension, $F(1, 108) = 15.0, p < .001$. Hispanic women scored significantly higher than African American women in the rejection parenting dimension, $F(1, 108) = 12.13, p = .001$. There was no significant difference in the structure parenting dimension, $F(1, 108) = 2.99, p = .087$, and the chaos parenting dimension, $F(1, 108) = 2.80, p = .097$, between Hispanic and African American women. African American women scored significantly higher in the autonomy support parenting dimension than Hispanic women, $F(1, 108) = 5.68, p = .019$. Hispanic females scored significantly higher in the coercion parenting dimension than African American women, $F(1, 108) = 11.70, p = .001$.

Table 1.1: Group Means

Subscale	Ethnicity or Race	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Warmth	Hispanic	18.69	1.48	55
	African American	19.58	.854	55
	Total	19.14	1.28	110
Rejection	Hispanic	8.62	3.57	55
	African American	6.64	2.26	55
	Total	7.63	3.13	110
Subscale	Ethnicity or Race	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Structure	Hispanic	18.67	1.59	55
	African American	19.11	.994	55
	Total	18.89	1.34	110
Chaos	Hispanic	8.82	2.93	55
	African American	7.98	2.26	55
	Total	8.40	2.64	110
Autonomy Support	Hispanic	17.96	3.08	55
	African American	19.07	1.55	55
	Total	18.52	2.49	110
Coercion	Hispanic	9.96	3.14	55
	African American	8.09	2.58	55
	Total	9.03	3.01	110

Significant differences exist in parenting dimensions among the populations examined, suggesting that there are differences in the parenting of these populations. African American families scored significantly higher in warmth and autonomy support than Hispanic families. Hispanic families scored significantly higher in rejection and coercion than African American families. Four out of six comparisons were significant. Therefore, the hypothesis is supported and the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 2.1: MANOVA Summary Table

Source	Dependent Variable	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Ethnicity or Race	Warmth	1	15.00	.000
	Rejection	1	12.13	.001
	Structure	1	2.99	.087
	Chaos	1	2.80	.097
	Autonomy Support	1	5.68	.019
	Coercion	1	11.70	.001
Error	Warmth	108		
	Rejection	108		
	Structure	108		
	Chaos	108		
	Autonomy Support	108		
	Coercion	108		
Total	Warmth	109		
	Rejection	109		
	Structure	109		
	Chaos	109		
	Autonomy Support	109		
	Coercion	109		

Limitations

The scope of this study is limited. Due to the possibility of unequal representation and lack of visibility fathers were not included in the study, as such, the results of this study are focused specifically on the mother's perspectives. Furthermore, this study included cluster sampling which impacts the generalization of the study's results to Hispanic and African American families. The small sample size also impacts the ability to generalize among populations with similar characteristics. However, the results of this study may be representative of Hispanic and African American mothers that access inner-city Head Start programs and indicates the need for further research that expands the scope of this study.

Discussion

It was hypothesized that significant differences exist in parenting dimensions for Hispanic versus African American families that access inner city Head Start programs. Through the results of this study it may be concluded that this hypothesis is correct in regards to the population studied. The Hispanic families who participated scored significantly higher in rejection and coercion than the African American family participants. Also, there were significant differences in regards to warmth and autonomy support with African American participants. Even though parenting dimension differences were found among these participants, these results cannot be

overgeneralized to the Hispanic and African American population, thus, illustrates the need for further examination of the influences of culture and family environment and their effects on parenting dimensions.

Coercion is defined as the dictation of outcomes and motivation through disciplinary techniques, pressure, or controlling rewards (Skinner et al. 2005). Skinner et al. (2005) further define coercive parenting as, “a restrictive, over controlling, intrusive, autocratic style in which strict obedience is demanded” (p. 187). In this study, Hispanic parent participants reported higher instances of coercion in their parenting efforts in comparison to the African American parent participants. Rejection is defined as the active dislike, aversion, and hostility found in parenting (Skinner et al. 2005). The findings of this study suggest that rejection and coercion are significantly higher in Hispanic family participants, in which rejection and coercion may be used as alternate forms of discipline or means of protection. A review of literature has noted that Hispanic parents are protective of their children (Crean 2008) and utilize less corporal punishment (McKelvey et al. 2009). It is likely that Hispanic parents utilize rejection and coercion as a method of discipline in order to protect their children however; further research is needed to fully explore this possibility. Given the limitations of this study it is important to consider and further examine the cultural impact on parenting dimensions in Hispanic families and how this influences the dynamics of the family system either positively or negatively (Domenech Rodriguez, Donovick, & Crowley 2009).

Warmth is defined as expressions of affection, love, appreciation, kindness, and regard; it includes emotional availability, support, and care. Autonomy support is viewed as freedom of expression and action, allowing a child to attend to, accept, and value preferences and opinions (Skinner et al 2005). The results of the study found that the African American family participants scored significantly higher in warmth and autonomy support than the Hispanic family participants. Furthermore, the results found that the African American parent participants have a higher instance of autonomy support in their parent-child interactions than the Hispanic parent participants. A review of literature contends that African American parents have positive attitudes toward corporal punishment (Lorber et al. 2011) and that positive parenting practices are associated with low depression among African American mothers (Koblinsky et al. 2006). The findings of this study suggest the existence of positive parenting practices among the African American family participants, as warmth and autonomy support were reported in their teachings or efforts toward discipline with their children. Therefore, corporal punishment may be used by some African American parents; however, these parents may also express love, support, and affection.

Research contends that differences exist in the parenting practices of Hispanic and African American parents. Hispanic parents were noted to be more permissive than African American parents in at least one study (Douglas 2011). African American parents were noted to have parenting practices that differ from the parenting practices of other populations (Koblinsky et al. 2006; Lorber et al. 2011; Nievar & Luster 2006). The findings of this study support the notion that differences exist among Hispanic and African American parenting practices by noting significant differences in parenting dimensions. This finding is supported by Bowen family systems theory which accounts for differences that exist among parenting moods, attitudes, and actions (Bowen Center for the Study of the Family 2011). In addition, Human ecology theory supports this finding by contending that minority families are complex and that the family environment and interactions are important in understanding the complexity of minority families (Phenice & Giffore 1996). When making a comparison of one minority family to another, the complexities of minority families and the role of environment in family interactions should be considered. The differences found in this study are significant enough to suggest future research focus on further examining the parenting dimensions identified and the impact they can have on family systems.

Implications for Practice

This study supports the efforts of previous studies by concluding that differences exist among parenting dimensions of minority families. While the Hispanic parent participants engaged in all six parenting dimensions, when compared to the African American parent participants, Hispanic parents scored higher in rejection and coercion; which are considered negative parenting dimensions (Skinner et al. 2005). However, its higher presence among these Hispanic families does not conclude that Hispanic parents have negative parenting abilities. Researchers have found that Hispanic parents use less corporal punishment (Whiteside et al. 2009), are more protective of their children (Crean 2008), and are more permissive parents (Douglas 2011). Based on the findings of this study and previous research efforts (Whiteside et al. 2009, Crean 2008, Douglas 2011), it may be concluded that Hispanic parents utilize rejection and coercion as a method of protecting their children. In practice, counselors, social workers, case managers, and other human service practitioners work to establish rapport with families, assist them in removing barriers, strengthen family functioning, and overcome trauma. As such, understanding parenting dynamics becomes essential to supporting the development of minority families. As noted in the constructs of human ecology theory, understanding minority families means also understanding the complexities of these families. In practice, practitioners could benefit from utilizing a human ecological approach to service. This approach takes into account all of the diverse forms of minority families being served. Various parenting dimensions impact the dynamics of each family differently, which could ultimately impact the needs of the family and service delivery.

Furthermore, the findings of this study may suggest a possible need for parenting trainings that assist Hispanic parents in identifying the use of rejection and coercion in parenting strategies and possibly providing alternatives to the use of rejection and coercion if used in a way that negatively impacts the family system. It is important to consider the Hispanic culture context and how specific parenting dimensions, such as rejection and coercion, may be functional parenting practices (Domenech Rodriguez et al. 2009). In addition, training should focus on strengthening already positive parenting styles present in the family and educating the parents on more positive parenting dimensions, i.e., warmth, autonomy support, and structure (Skinner et al. 2005). Vesely, Ewaida, and Anderson (2014) recommend that parenting education programs consider the cultural values, beliefs, and experiences of the Hispanic population. The Head Start program focuses on parenting and these results could be used to build upon parenting programs by adding aspects that support the parenting needs, such as programs geared toward alternative methods of parenting and strengthening positive parenting dimensions in Hispanic parents.

The results from this study revealed that the African American participants scored higher in autonomy support and warmth (Skinner et al. 2005), when compared to the Hispanic participants. The findings of this study showed that the African American parent participants may or may not utilize corporal punishment but despite the cultural stance that embraces corporal punishment this population can also express warmth and support to their children. Program development can focus on enhancing positive parenting dimensions that exist within African American families, as well as building the presence of positive parent dimensions not found to be significant; such as structure. Head Start agencies that service African American parents may consider adding trainings to their parenting programs that focus on increasing positive parenting dimensions and identifying negative ones, while providing support that build on the strengths of the family (Gaylord-Harden, Elmore, & Montes de Oca 2013).

Future Research

The findings suggest that there are some differences in parenting dimensions identified by this study among Hispanic and African American family participants when compared. This study

included cluster sampling and a small sample size focused on mother's responses to parenting dimensions which hindered the generalizability of the results of this study. Future research should focus on the limitations of this study to enhance the comprehensive understanding of parenting dimensions. As such, future research should include random sampling designs, a larger sampling size to enhance the quality of results, and should include an examination of the family as a whole. In addition, future research needs to examine the parenting dimensions identified by this study and how these dimensions are actualized in use within the families. This study scratched the surface in identifying differences, future research is needed to enhance the quality of the results and deepen the understanding of minority populations which would be a benefit to any field that serves to support and build minority families.

Conclusion

Family is considered the primary group and serves as a social institution that has the responsibility of nurturing youth, meeting the survival and emotional needs of its members, and being the first level of socialization and control (Levin 2013). Each family is unique in how it functions in each of these roles. In practice, it is the practitioner's responsibility of understanding the uniqueness of each family in order to support, strengthen, and remove barriers. This study adds to the understanding of minority families and can serve as a guide to understanding the parenting attributes of these families. An implication for human service professionals would be to consider the ethnic diversity found in the clients serviced and the importance of cultural competence (Hansenfeld 1996). Hasenfeld (1996) states, "As human service organizations encounter an increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse client population, conventional patterns of worker-client relations will have to give way to new forms" (p. 200). This study provides a base for human service practices in their support and advocacy in the healthy family functioning of Hispanic and African American families.

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