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Parenting Among Hispanic and Anglo-American Mothers with Young Children

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The authors examined parenting practices and developmental expectations among 38 Hispanic and 38 Anglo-American mothers living in the United States. Mothers of children 3 to 5 years of age completed the Parent Behavior Checklist (R. A. Fox, 1994), a 100-item measure of parents' developmental expectations, discipline, and nurturing practices. In addition, the authors appraised the Hispanic mothers' acculturation and selected them for participation if their scores on an acculturation scale indicated (a) that their lifestyle was predominantly Hispanic and (b) that they had not been assimilated into the dominant culture. The 2 ethnic groups were also divided by socioeconomic status (SES). There were significant main effects for ethnicity and SES on the discipline and nurturing scores but not on the expectations scores. The Hispanic and higher SES mothers reported higher discipline and lower nurturing scores than did the Anglo-American and lower

Journal of Social Psychology, Vol. 140, No. 3 (2000): pg. 357-365. [DOI](#). This article is © Taylor & Francis (Routledge) and permission has been granted for this version to appear in e-Publications@Marquette. Taylor & Francis (Routledge) does not grant permission for this article to be further copied/distributed or hosted elsewhere without the express permission from Taylor & Francis (Routledge).

SES mothers. An unexpected finding was the tendency for higher SES Hispanic mothers to report more frequent use of discipline than the other 3 groups.

The family's role in the socialization of children and the parents' contribution to this bidirectional process have been recognized (Maccoby, 1992; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Steinberg, Elmen, and Mounts (1989) found that authoritative parenting among Americans facilitated academic success in adolescent children. In a similar study, academic success was negatively associated with both authoritarian (high control, low responsiveness) and permissive (low control, high responsiveness) parenting styles, whereas authoritative (high control, high responsiveness) parenting was positively associated with good grades among high school students (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leidderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). Baumrind (1989) also found that preschool children from authoritative families in the United States were more socially responsible and independent than those from authoritarian families. Clearly, Baumrind's (1971) original typology of parenting styles has stood the test of time, with increasing evidence to support the important role of parenting style in children's present and future socialization. There is general agreement that there are multiple determinants of parenting styles (Belsky, 1990): marital satisfaction, parental beliefs about discipline, history of abuse as a child, grandparents' parenting practices, parents' mental health, level of support from the spouse, and the family's socioeconomic status (SES; Luster, Rhoades, & Haas, 1989; Simons, Beaman, Conger, & Chao, 1993).

As the research on parenting has expanded, Darling and Steinberg (1993) recommended that researchers maintain a distinction between parenting style and parenting practices. They defined parenting style as a "constellation of attitudes toward the child that are communicated to the child and create an emotional climate in which the parents' behaviors are expressed" (p. 493). They defined parenting practices as "the specific, goal-directed behaviors through which parents perform their parental duties" (p. 488). Although Baumrind's (1971) authoritative-authoritarian-permissive parenting typology represents a description of parenting styles, parenting practices represent the specific parental behaviors used to guide children toward attaining socialization goals (e.g., monitoring homework to facilitate academic achievement, providing compliments

to nurture self-esteem). As an example of research that combined parenting practices and determinants of parenting, Fox, Platz, and Bentley (1995) reported that U.S. mothers who were unmarried, had lower education and income levels, and had more than one child reported more frequent use of discipline, lower levels of nurturing behavior, and a higher incidence of child problem behaviors than did mothers who were married, had higher education and income levels, and had fewer children.

Most available research on parenting styles and practices has been conducted among families from the dominant culture, namely, middle-class Anglo-American families. Yet, the beliefs and values that influence patterns of child rearing within the same society differ from one culture to another and from one socioeconomic level to another (Kohn, 1969). Lieberman (1973) found that minority families selected for studies were frequently from lower socioeconomic levels, whereas majority families were from middle socioeconomic status; this finding further confounds the literature. Research on socialization and family processes within the Hispanic family appears very limited and has produced inconsistent findings (Staples & Miranda, 1980; Vega, 1990). Some researchers have described Hispanic parents as warm, nurturing, egalitarian, and family oriented (Keefe, 1984; Mindel, 1980; Staples & Miranda; Vega); others have described the Hispanic family as punitive and authoritarian (Fromm & Maccoby, 1970; Martinez, 1988). In two cross-cultural studies, parenting practices were found to be similar among mothers (Solis-Camara & Fox, 1995) and fathers of young children (Solis-Camara & Fox, 1997) in Mexico and the United States when the parents' SES was controlled.

Martinez (1988) suggested that Hispanic parents, rather than being characterized by one dominant parenting style, demonstrated a variety of styles depending on their acculturation, education background, and income level. As Martinez and Kohn (1969) recommended, it is important not only to study the differences between Hispanic and Anglo-American societies but also to study possible variations within each group that are attributable to such determinants as marital status and SES. Furthermore, as Martinez proposed, acculturation of the Hispanic family also could influence parenting.

The purpose of the present study was to compare the parenting practices among Hispanic and Anglo-American mothers of young

children living in the United States. We carefully controlled for acculturation of the Hispanic families as a criterion for selection of participants. As a parent's marital status and SES are known to be possible determinants of parenting practices (Fox et al., 1995), the present study included only married mothers who represented either a lower or a higher SES.

Method

Participants

We selected 76 mothers (38 Hispanic, 38 Anglo-American) as participants. All were married and lived in intact households with both parents participating in child rearing. We selected each family to represent either lower or higher SES on the basis of the total socioeconomic index score, which is derived from the primary wage earner's occupation (Stevens & Cho, 1985). Higher SES (i.e., middle to upper middle class) occupations were managerial, professional, and technical occupations; sales positions, and administrative support, whereas those classified as lower SES (i.e., middle to lower middle class) included service occupations, precision production, farming, and labor.

We selected the Hispanic mothers also on the basis of their levels of acculturation, which we determined with a scale developed by Marin, Sabogal, Marin VanOss, Otero-Sabogal, and Perez-Stable (1987). On the basis of factor analysis, three factors were identified that contributed to acculturation: Language Use and Ethnic Loyalty, the Media (the types of programs accessed on television or radio), and Culture Influences on Social Relationships. These three factors were represented by 12 items and scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = only Spanish or all Latinos/Hispanics, 5 = only English or all Americans). Individuals with average item scores between 4 and 5 were considered as assimilated to the dominant culture; those with average item scores between 1 and 3 were considered as predominantly Hispanic. For the present study, we selected only those Hispanic mothers with average scores between 1 and 3.

The final sample included 19 Hispanic mothers from higher SES families, 19 Hispanic mothers from lower SES families, 19 Anglo-American mothers from higher SES families, and 19 Anglo-American mothers from lower SES families. All participants were asked to identify one focus child between 3 and 5 years of age. The mean ages

and the gender breakdowns of the focus children were 3.70 years ($SD = 0.56$; 10 boys, 9 girls) for higher SES Hispanic mothers; 4.10 years ($SD = 0.40$; 7 boys, 12 girls) for lower SES Hispanic mothers; 4.30 years ($SD = 0.55$; 9 boys, 10 girls) for higher SES Anglo-American mothers; and 4.00 years ($SD = 0.57$; 11 boys, 8 girls) for lower SES Anglo-American mothers.

Instrument and Procedures

The Parent Behavior Checklist (PBC; Fox, 1994), used to measure parenting expectations and practices, is a 100-item rating scale designed to assess behaviors and expectations for parents of children 1 to 5 years old. The PBC was normed on a representative sample of 1,140 urban mothers with children between the ages of 1 year and 4 years 11 months. Three subscales were derived via factor analysis: Expectations-50 items measuring parents' developmental expectations of their children (e.g., "My child should be able to feed him/herself"); Nurturing-20 items measuring parental use of positive nurturing strategies to promote the child's psychological growth (e.g., "I read to my child at bedtime"); and Discipline-30 items measuring the parents' use of verbal or physical punishment in response to their child's behavior (e.g., "I yell at my child for spilling food"). All items are written at a 3rd-grade reading level. Each item is rated on a Likert-type scale (4 = always/almost always, 1 = almost never/never). Higher scores on the Expectations subscale are associated with higher parental expectations; higher scores on the Discipline subscale are associated with more frequent use of punishment by parents (e.g., corporal punishment or yelling); and higher scores on the Nurturing subscale are associated with parents' more frequent use of positive nurturing activities with their children. From the normative sample, the following respective internal consistencies and test-retest reliabilities for the subscales were reported: Expectations = .97 and .98, Discipline = .91 and .87, and Nurturing = .82 and .81. The PBC also has been shown to discriminate successfully between parents of children of different ages (Fox & Bentley, 1992). In one study, responses on the PBC were not influenced by a social desirability response set (Peters & Fox, 1993).

For the present study, the PBC was translated into Spanish by means of a double translation procedure (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973), with the assistance of three translators. The PBC was

translated into Spanish by a translator of Mexican descent and then translated back into English by a translator of Puerto Rican descent. The Spanish version was then reviewed by a third translator to eliminate parochial wording. In a related study among Mexican mothers, Solis-Camara and Fox (1996) reported the respective internal consistencies and test-retest reliabilities for the three PBC subscales-Expectations = .95 and .96, Discipline .87 and .88, and Nurturing .83, .91 to be similar to those found for the normative sample. For the present sample of parents ($N = 76$), internal consistencies for each PBC subscale were computed by using coefficient alphas: Expectations = .88, Discipline = .84, and Nurturing = .79.

We recruited the Anglo-American and Hispanic participants in the present study from day-care centers, family resource centers, schools, churches, and community agencies. We sent a letter to each family asking for participation in the study; those who agreed to participate received a research package containing a consent form and the study materials. We administered the PBC to the participants individually or in small groups. Each item was read to the participants; therefore questions concerning specific items could be answered individually.

Results

To control for the potential influence of the child's age on the PBC, we transformed raw scores into normalized T scores as compared with those of other parents of children of the same ages. We derived T-score distributions at 6-month intervals from I year 0 months to 4 years II months. Scores on the PBC subscales by mothers' ethnicity and SES are shown in Table I.

We found significant multivariate effects for ethnicity, $\lambda = .747$, exact $F(3, 70) = 7.89$, $P < .001$, with significant univariate effects for the Discipline and Nurturing subscales. The Hispanic mothers ($M = 51.08$, $SD = 10.02$) scored higher on the Discipline subscale than did the Anglo-American mothers ($M = 42.32$, $SD = 8.81$); the Anglo-American mothers ($M = 54.29$, $SD = 9.92$) scored higher on the Nurturing subscale than did the Hispanic mothers ($M = 46.82$, $SD = 10.69$). Significant multivariate effects were also found for SES, $\lambda = .876$, exact $F(3, 70) = 3.31$, $p < .05$, with significant univariate effects for the Discipline subscale. The higher SES mothers ($M = 49.50$, $SD =$

9.99) reported more frequent use of discipline than did the lower SES mothers ($M = 43.89$, $SD = 10.07$).

We performed a multivariate analysis of variance to investigate which types of items distinguished Anglo-American from Hispanic mothers. The Hispanic mothers scored significantly higher on items reflecting the use of corporal punishment and religious values (e.g., "I tell my child that his/her behavior will make God sad") as a form of discipline. The Anglo-American mothers scored significantly higher on items concerning activities that included reading with the child, messy play, and maintaining a routine (e.g., "I allow messy play-finger painting, play dough").

Discussion

By using the PBC, we found evidence of cross-cultural differences in parenting young children. The Hispanic mothers reported a higher frequency of discipline and a lower frequency of nurturing with their very young children; there were no differences in expectations between Hispanic and Anglo-American mothers. Although our results may be generally consistent with results showing evidence of an authoritarian parenting style among Hispanic parents (Fromm & Maccoby, 1970; Martinez, 1988), they are inconsistent with previous research with the PBC (Solis-Camara & Fox, 1995, 1996), which included only mothers living in Mexico. The present sample included Hispanic mothers living in the United States who came from higher socioeconomic circumstances than previous samples. The higher SES Hispanic mothers came primarily from successful, intact, professional families and may have contributed most to the cross-cultural differences that we found. Perhaps they felt that greater control of their children through discipline was necessary to help their children better succeed in the dominant society. This explanation is only a preliminary hypothesis and requires further research. Although the Hispanic mothers' discipline scores were higher than those of the Anglo-American mothers, they were not excessively so. When compared with normative tables developed from a representative sample of urban U.S. mothers, the average discipline score of 55.47 for the higher SES Hispanic mothers would be equivalent to a T score of 57.

The Hispanic mothers obtained lower nurturing scores than did the Anglo-American mothers. One explanation for this difference is

that Hispanic mothers may not interact with their children as often as Anglo-American mothers with the types of nurturing activities measured by the PBC Nurturing subscale. Researchers have found that Hispanic parents tend to give their children fewer material rewards (Kagen & Ender, 1975) and more affective rewards (VazquezRodriguez, 1979). Solis-Camara and Fox (1995) indicated that Mexican mothers demonstrated nurturing by showing affection (e.g., hugging, kissing), whereas other researchers reported such nurturing behaviors as rough-and-tumble play (Roopnarine & Mounts, 1985). Consequently, the manner in which Hispanic parents nurture their children may not accurately be gauged by the PBC. However, even when the nurturing scores of the Hispanic mothers were compared with normative tables, the T-scores for both higher SES (T score = 44) and lower SES Hispanic mothers (T score = 48) were well within a standard deviation of the mean.

We found no significant differences between Hispanic and Anglo-American mothers' scores on the Expectations subscale of the PBC. These findings are consistent with findings that Mexican parents' (both mothers' and fathers') expectations did not differ significantly from those of Anglo-American parents (Solis-Camara & Fox, 1995, 1997).

One limitation of the present study is the selection of participants. Residing in the United States, the Hispanics may have absorbed some U.S. values. We made no distinction in reference to the subgroups within the Hispanic population (i.e., Puerto Rican, Mexican). Cultural differences unique to specific Hispanic subgroups could have influenced the Hispanic group's parenting practices. In addition, we did not determine the length of residence in the United States. Finally, the present results are based on maternal self-reports. Although the study's instrument has been shown not to be influenced by a social desirability response set (Peters & Fox, 1993), future researchers should consider direct observational measures of mother-child interactions.

On the basis of the present data, a conclusion of an authoritarian parenting style among Hispanic mothers, including those from higher SES levels, is unwarranted. Although Hispanic mothers did report higher discipline scores, their discipline scores were well within a standard deviation of the normal range for mothers with children of similar age. Moreover, these mothers also nurtured their children and maintained reasonable expectations for their development. These

three parenting characteristics, when considered together, are not consistent with an authoritarian parenting style (Baumrind, 1971).

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Table 1: Means and Standard Deviations of Raw Scores on the Discipline, Nurturing, and Expectations Subscales of the Parent Behavior Checklist (PBC; Fox, 1994) for Mothers, by Ethnic Group and Socioeconomic Status (SES)

PCB subscale	Hispanic mothers		Anglo-American mothers	
	Lower SES	Higher SES	Lower SES	Higher SES
Discipline				
M	46.68	55.47	41.12	43.53
SD	11.10	6.50	8.30	9.53
Nurturing				
M	48.26	45.37	53.34	55.21
SD	11.10	10.35	10.91	9.02
Expectations				
M	39.74	40.74	39.90	47.95
SD	11.94	10.82	9.88	7.35