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A Cross Cultural Investigation of the Nurturing Father's Program Outcomes

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Abstract

The impact of having a nurturing father has been well documented in the literature. This study examined what differences existed in parental attitudes and behaviors among African-American, Hispanic, and White participants following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program. Results indicated that all three groups improved significantly in their parenting attitudes and behaviors, as measured by the Adult and Adolescent Parenting Inventory-2, upon completion of the program. However, White participants showed greater levels of improvement than African American participants and Hispanic participants showed greater levels of improvement than both African American and White participants in different AAPI-2 constructs. Practice implications and implications for future research are discussed.

A Cross Cultural Investigation of the Nurturing Father's Program Outcomes

In recent years there had been an increasing focus on father involvement with their children (Day & Lamb, 2004; Schwartz & Finely, 2005; Tamis-LeMonda & Cabrera, 2002). Researchers argued that the parent-child relationship was viewed as the primary mechanism by which children were socialized (Coiro & Emery, 1998; Maccoby & Martin, 1983). The importance of father involvement and the quality of involvement needed for healthy child and adolescent development also was well documented in the literature (Palkovitz, 2002).

Additionally, “there exists a great variation in the types and frequency of father involvement and in the “expression of fathering behaviors” (Henley & Pasley, 2005, p61). These authors further explained that these variations largely depended on father's *personal characteristics* (e.g. ethnicity, age, socio-economic status and level of education), *relational factors* (e.g. perception of mothers of father's skills and abilities as a father), and *other factors* such as sex of the child, mother's income level and age. However, only 27% of fathers had attended parenting classes (Hofferth, 2003). Of this group, only 17% of black fathers attended a parenting class and the majority of all groups report that they learned about parenting from their mothers. In contrast, the percentage of fathers who learned from their own fathers varied by ethnicity with all minority fathers being less likely than Whites to learn to parent from their fathers (Hofferth, 2003). The goal of this study was to evaluate the impact of the Nurturing Father's Program (Perlman, 1998) on the parental attitudes and behaviors of fathers from three different cultures.

A nurturing father has been defined as, “A man who actively provides guidance, love and support to enhance the development and growth of children for whom he cares” (Perlman, 1998). Research had demonstrated that a child with a nurturing father was more likely to

experience increased cognitive competence, empathy, self-control, self-esteem, life-skills and social competence (Amato, 1994; Pleck, 1997). Other advantages of quality father involvement included fewer externalizing and internalizing behavior problems (Mosley & Thompson, 1995). An important conceptualization of father involvement was put forward by Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine, 1987. They suggested that parental involvement included three distinct categories: (1) *engagement* (parent interactions with the child), (2) *accessibility* (parent is available to the child), and (3) *responsibility* (parent understands and is committed to the welfare and care of the child). Palkovitz (2002) expanded this model to include a total of fifteen parental involvement categories. Briefly, these were *communication, teaching, monitoring, thought processes, errands, caregiving, child-related maintenance, shared interests, availability, planning, shared activities, providing, affection, protection and supporting emotionality*. However, these were not innate skills.

Flouri and Buchanan (2002, p.689) reported that “poor child rearing and, in particular, poor supervision, harsh discipline, parental disharmony, rejection of the child and low involvement” were shown to be very related to antisocial behavior problems in children. Lack of or little paternal involvement also contributed to bullying (Fouri & Buchanan, 2003) and early sexual behavior (Miller, McCoy, Olson, & Wallace, 1986).

In a study done by Farrington (1989), it was found that the most frequent predictors of violence in men aged 32 and younger were low parental interest in the child, authoritarian parents and harsh parental discipline. In spite of this knowledge in the area of paternal involvement, more studies were needed that focused on minority families and the impact of ethnicity on parent-child relationships.

Since it had been established that fathering played a vital role in the lives of children, it was necessary to determine whether cultural differences and beliefs explained fathering differences among minority groups (Hofferth, 2003). Fathering patterns varied by race and ethnicity for various reasons. Some of these included different neighborhoods and economic statuses as well as differing cultural influences which shape their values and attitudes towards parenting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hofferth, 2003). Researchers agreed that socialization practices varied across ethnic groups and differed from those of White families (Garica-Coll, Lamberty, Jenkins, McAdoo, Cmic, & Wasik, 1996). Others proposed that child rearing was primarily geared towards developing the essential competencies that were adaptive for the environments in which these children existed (Ogbu, 1981). Thus, minority parents transferred to their children, skills they deemed necessary for successfully managing ethnic and racial barriers.

The literature also suggested that Black parents exerted more control and less warmth than White parents (Garcia-Coll, 1990). Studies also indicated that Latino families demonstrated more warmth and exerted less control over their children (Fuller, Holloway, & Liang, 1996) and Asian fathers often play a distant role in their families (Schwalb, Kawai, Shoji & Tsunetsugu, 1997). Other factors that need to be considered when explaining fathering behaviors across ethnic groups included “differences in intergenerational experiences, gender-role attitudes, economic differences, child characteristics and family structure and composition differences” (Hofferth, 2003). Hofferth also reported that Blacks rated themselves lower on warmth than White fathers, and Hispanic fathers did not significantly differ from Whites in this regard. It also was found that Black fathers were more controlling than White fathers, but Hispanic fathers were less controlling than both. The results of this study also showed that both Black and Hispanic fathers ranked higher than White fathers on responsibility for caring (Hofferth, 2003).

Although research existed on fathering from a cross cultural perspective, the need existed for additional research on cross cultural outcomes from participation in a father-focused parenting program. The research question investigated in this study was what differences existed in changes in parental attitudes and behaviors, as measured by the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory 2 (AAPI-2) (Bavolek & Keene, 2001), between African-American, Hispanic, and White participants following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program (Perlman, 1998)? The following two hypotheses were examined in order to answer the research question: (1) No differences existed in overall changes in parental attitudes and behaviors between African-American, Hispanic, and White participants following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program; and (2) No differences existed in changes in expectations, empathy, corporal punishment, role-reversal, and power and independence between African-American, Hispanic, and White participants following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program.

Method

Participants

Participant data for this study was extracted from a larger data set of 1,061 Nurturing Father's Program participants from five implementation sites from across the United States: the Florida Department of Health and the Ounce of Prevention Fund's *Nurturing Fathers Programs in Hillsborough and Sarasota Counties* in Florida; the *Brownstone Work Release Nurturing Fatherhood Program* in Spokane, Washington; the *SUMA Fatherhood Project* in Cincinnati, Ohio; the *Dad's Tool Time Project* in Charlotte County, Florida; the *Newport News Healthy Family Initiative* in Newport News, Virginia; and the *Family Nurturing Center of Central New York*. The three largest groups of participants in this larger data set were the 637 (60%) white participants, 224 (21.1%) African-American, and 175 (16.5%) Hispanic participants. For the data

set in this study, all 175 Hispanic participants contributed data and a random selection of 175 participants from the two other groups were extracted for use in this study. Thus, the participants in this study included 175 (33.3%) African-American participants, 175 (33.3%) Hispanic, and 175 (33.3%) White participants. The majority of participants (n=226, 43%) reported high school diploma or equivalent (GED) and 131 (25%) reported not achieving a high school diploma or equivalent. Seventy-eight participants (14.9%) reported four-year college degrees or higher, 34 (6.5%) reported some college, 18 (3.5%) reported associate college degrees or vocational training certificates, and there were 38 (7.2%) participants who did not provide educational information. There was somewhat equal representation of single participants (n=344, 32.4%) and married participants (n=226, 43%). Additionally, 204 (19.2%) were separated/divorced, 6 widowed (.6%), and 15 missing (1.4%).

Measures

The Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory 2 (AAPI-2) (Bavolek & Keene, 2001) was a 40-item inventory designed to assess the parenting and child rearing attitudes of adult and adolescent parent and pre-parent populations. Each inventory took approximately 20 minutes to be administered and was presented in a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Responses to the AAPI-2 provided an index of risk in five specific parenting and child rearing behaviors. These were (1) expectations of children, (2) empathy towards children's needs, (3) use of corporal punishment as a means of discipline, (4) parent-child role responsibilities, and (5) children's power and independence. The subscale descriptions were:

1. Inappropriate Expectations of Children: High scores indicate a realistic understanding of the developmental capabilities of children, as well as general acceptance of

developmental limitations. Low scores indicate a general lack of understanding of children's developmental capabilities;

2. Inability to be Empathetically Aware of Children's Needs: High scores indicate an individual is sensitive to the needs of children and places those needs in high regard. Low scores indicate low empathetic awareness of their children's needs and often have difficulty helping children find ways to meet their needs;
3. Belief in the Value of Corporal Punishment: High scores indicated the use of alternative strategies to corporal punishment. Low scores suggest a belief that hitting is the only way children learn to obey rules and stay out of trouble;
4. Parent-Child Role Reversal: High scores often indicate an understanding and acceptance of the needs of self and children. Low scores suggest that children are perceived as objects for adult gratification; and
5. Oppressing Children's Power and Independence: High scores generally mean parents place a strong value on children feeling empowered. Low scores generally mean parents place a strong emphasis on obedience (Bavolek & Keene, 2001, p. 25).

Reliability coefficients for the five parenting constructs using the Spearman-Brown formula ranged from .83 to .93 on Form A, .80 to .93 on Form B, and .87 to .96 on Forms A and B combined. The Cronbach alphas ranged from .80 to .92 on both Forms A and B and .86 to .96 on Forms A and B combined. Content, construct and criterion-related validity demonstrated that the AAPI-2 discriminates between abusive and non-abusive parents in samples of adults and in sample of adolescents and is effective in assessing parenting attitudes.

The Nurturing Father's Program

The Nurturing Father's Program (Perlman, 1998), a 13-week group-based program for developing attitudes and skills for male nurturance, had been established in various states in the U.S. The groups, which consisted of eight to sixteen fathers, were designed to improve the parental attitudes of fathers, develop parenting skills and to encourage them to be more nurturing to themselves first and then to their children. The Nurturing Father's Program (Perlman, 1998) defined a nurturing father as "a man who actively provides guidance, love and support to enhance the development and growth of children for whom he cares" (p.ix).

Participants engaged in planned discussions and activities which include (1) the roots of fathering, (2) Nurturing Ourselves/Our Children, (3) Fathering Sons/Fathering Daughters, (4) Discipline without violence, (5) playing with children, (6) Managing anger/resolving conflict, (7) Teamwork with spouse/partner, (8) Balancing work and fathering, (9) Communication and problem solving, (10) Cultural Influences, (11) Dealing with feelings and (12) The father I choose to be. All programs used the 13-week Nurturing Father's Program (Perlman, 1998), which included pre and post administration of the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory 2 (Bavoleck, & Keene, 2001).

Analyses

The goal of this study was to investigate what differences existed in changes in parental attitudes and behaviors, as measured by the Adult-Adolescent Parenting Inventory 2 (AAPI-2) (Bavolek & Keene, 2001), between African-American, Hispanic, and White participants following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program (Perlman, 1998). Two hypotheses were examined. To identify what differences existed in overall changes in parental attitudes and behaviors among African-American, Hispanic, and White participants following participation in

the Nurturing Father's Program, an Analyses of Variances (ANOVAs) was conducted. The single categorical independent variable, race, had three levels: African-American, Hispanic, and White. The dependent variable was the mean difference in the overall pre and post-test scores on the AAPI-2. To investigate the second null hypothesis, a Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with follow-up one-way Analyses of Variances (ANOVAs) were conducted to investigate what differences existed in the five different AAPI-2 subscales among African-American, Hispanic, and White participants following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program. Race was the single categorical independent variable and the dependent variables were expectations, empathy, corporal punishment, role-reversal, and power and independence.

Results

Overall Changes in Parental Attitudes and Behaviors

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine what differences existed in overall changes in parental attitudes and behaviors among African-American, Hispanic, and White participants following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program. Results of the Analysis of Variance indicated that a significant difference existed between the groups and the overall mean ($F(2,524)=10.43, p>.001$). A Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis to examine which groups differed indicated that there was a significant mean difference ($p<.001$) between the African-American ($m=4.46$) and Hispanic ($m=8.04$) participants. This suggested that Hispanic participants reported greater amounts of positive change in their overall parental attitudes and behaviors than African-American participants following participation in the Nurturing Father's program. Additionally, White participants ($m=6.82$) had significantly higher mean differences between their AAPI-2 pre and post scores than African-American participants. Although the mean differences for the Hispanic participants was higher than that of the White participants, the

difference was not significant ($p=.275$). Thus, Hispanic participants demonstrated the greatest gain in changes in overall parenting attitudes and behaviors among Hispanic, African-American, and White participants; and White participants demonstrated greater gain than African-American participants. See Table 1.

Changes in AAPI-2 Subscales

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) with follow-up one-way Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) were conducted to examine what differences existed in changes in expectations, empathy, corporal punishment, role-reversal, and power and independence among African-American, Hispanic, and White participants following participation in the Nurturing Father's Program. The means and standard deviations for the five dependent variables (AAPI-2 subscales) in the three groups (African-American, Hispanic, and White) were summarized in Table 2. The multivariate null hypothesis of equality of means over all groups for all variables was rejected at the .05 level (Wilk's Lambda = .88, $F[10,1038] = 6.71$, $p<.001$; Pillai's statistic [.12] and Hotelling's test statistic [.13] also resulted in p values that were less than .001). The very small p valued resulting from the overall test supported the presence of true mean differences.

Significant one-way ANOVAs support follow-up pairwise comparison testing for expectations ($F(2,524)=11.25$, $p>.001$), empathy ($F(2,524)=11.13$, $p>.001$), corporal punishment ($F(2,524)=5.16$, $p>.01$), and role-reversal ($F(2,524)=14.78$, $p>.001$), but not for power and independence ($F(2,524)=1.47$, $p=.23$). The Tukey HSD procedure was used multiple comparisons with expectations, empathy, corporal punishment, and role-reversal. For the AAPI-2 expectation subscale, the mean difference in the Hispanic participants' subscale scores were significantly higher than the African-American and White participants. White mean differences

were significantly higher than African-American participants but there was no difference between the mean difference scores for the Hispanic and White participants. For the empathy subscale, Hispanic and White participants demonstrated significantly greater gains than African-American participants but there were no differences between the gains made by the Hispanic and White participants. In the area of corporal punishment, the mean differences for White participants were greater than those made by the Hispanic or African-American participants, but no significant differences existed between the Hispanic and African-American participants. For role-reversal, Hispanic mean differences only were significantly higher than those of the African-American participants and there were no significant differences between the White and African-American participants. Table 3 presented the race contrasts for the five dependent variables.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to evaluate the impact of the Nurturing Father's Program (Perlman, 1998) on the parental attitudes and behaviors among African-American, Hispanic, and White participants. Significant improvements were found between the pre and post-test scores on the Adult and Adolescent Parenting Inventory – 2 (Bavolek & Keene, 2001), which measured parenting attitudes and behaviors. Additionally, Hispanic participants demonstrated significantly higher levels of improvement than the African-American and White participants. Also, White participants had higher levels of improvements than African-American participants. Additionally, all three groups demonstrated significant gains from the Nurturing Father's Program in all five AAPI-2 constructs: appropriate expectations (knowing what children can and cannot do or understand at each age), empathy (being able to understand what a child is feeling), corporal punishment (the degree to which hitting a child is unacceptable), role reversal (children

being able to act their age and parents being the adult), and power and independence (degree to which a parent can let a child explore vs. the need of the parent to control the child's behavior). However, further analyses indicated significant differences in the amount of improvement between the pre-post intervention scores among the three groups.

Hispanic participants showed the greatest gains in the 'expectations' with significantly higher mean differences than White and African-American participants. The gains between the White and African-American participants were not significantly different. Hispanic and White participants demonstrated significantly greater gains than the African-American participants in 'empathy,' but the differences between the Hispanic and White participants' scores were not significantly different. In the degree to which hitting a child was unacceptable, corporal punishment, White participants showed significantly higher gains than Hispanic and African-American participants. Hispanic participants also had significantly higher mean differences than White and African-American participants in attitudes and behaviors related to children being able to act their age and parent being the adult. Although all three groups improved in power/independence no group scored significantly higher.

These results suggested that the Nurturing Father's Program, a psychoeducational program for developing attitudes and skills for male nurturance, was effective in changing parental attitudes and behaviors for its participants as measured by the AAPI-2. This was of particular importance since responses to the AAPI-2 provided an index of risk in five specific parenting and child rearing behaviors known to contribute to child abuse and neglect (Bavolek & Keene, 2001). Additionally, Hispanic fathers appeared to get the most out of the program, particularly in appropriate expectations, empathy, and role reversal. A number of practice implications became evident. The Nurturing Father's Program could be a valuable resource for

Early Head Start Programs and other programs to assist individuals in bolstering their parenting skills and decrease risks of child maltreatment. Fagan & Iglesias (1999) found that African-American and Hispanic Early Head Start parents with greater parenting skills demonstrated more engagement in the program. Thus, the Nurturing Father's Program also could augment services provided by Early Start Programs by increasing the fathers' readiness to participate in these programs. Moreover, certain states with a high Hispanic population, such as Florida, Texas, and California, should consider the Nurturing Father's Program in local and statewide intervention programs for fathers, particularly because of the stronger outcomes for Hispanic participants. Additionally, grassroots organizations that serve different populations of fathers might find this an effective approach particularly because a higher education degree was not needed for training to be a facilitator of this program.

Although the outcomes of the Nurturing Father's Program are promising, additional research could prove beneficial. Future research could identify programmatic or cultural factors that contributed to Hispanic participants having the strongest gains. Another area of research is the program length. Thirteen weeks, in some setting, might be too long for participants to commit. It might be beneficial for program developers to examine and evaluate if a shorter version of the Nurturing Father's Program would generate similar outcomes. Another important area for future research, which also proves to be a limitation in this study, is the need for longer term outcomes. The AAPI-2 post-test is given the last day of the program, during the 13th week. However, six and twelve month follow-up studies along with control group studies would further elucidate the long term outcomes the Nurturing Father's Program.

While the study contributes to the body of research on effective psychoeducational interventions for fathers, it is not without limitations. As mentioned, longer term outcomes are

not available so long-term inferences should be done with caution. Additionally, a control group would have added additional strength to the findings. A third limitation is that the participants in this program were slightly biased because they wanted to participate in the program. A fourth limitation is that program outcomes were not linked to child outcomes. Although the AAPI-2 provided an index of risk of attitudes and behaviors known to contribute to child abuse and neglect (Bavolek & Keene, 2001), practitioners should be cautioned on making this assumption with clients without research linking program outcomes directly to child experiences or outcomes.

Overall, the findings of this study provide support for cross cultural use of the Nurturing Father's Program, specifically with White, Hispanic, and African-American participants. Agencies and mental health practitioners who work with Hispanic fathers in family-related services should consider the outcomes reported in this study. Additionally, this study underscored the value of psychoeducational interventions for fathers. Although some research indicate that African-American fathers report greater control and less warmth, and that White fathers reported less responsibility for caregiving (Hofferth, 2003); it is promising to know that White, African-American, and Hispanic fathers can still benefit and demonstrate significant gains in attitudinal and behavioral changes following this psychoeducational intervention.

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adaire@mail.ucf.edu, (407) 823-0385, or Counselor Education Program, University of Central Florida, P.O. Box 161250, Orlando, FL 32816-1250. We would like to thank the programs that contributed data to this study. The results or views expressed in this manuscript are those of the authors and not of the programs that contributed data to this study.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Multiple Comparisons for the 1st Hypothesis

Variable	Comparison Variable	Mean Difference	SE	Sig.
African American				
N=175, M=4.46, SD=7.22	Hispanic	-3.58*	.80	.000
	White	-2.35*	.80	.000
Hispanic				
N=175, M=8.04, SD=8.32	White	1.22	.80	.275
	African-American	3.58*	.80	.000
White				
N=175, M=6.82, SD=7.58	African-American	2.35*	.80	.009
	Hispanic	-1.22	.80	.275

* $p < .05$ Table 2: Means and Standard Deviations for the 2nd Hypothesis

Variable	Race	Mean	Std. Deviation
Expectations	African-American	.99	2.14
	Hispanic	2.09	2.64
	White	1.31	1.86
Empathy	African-American	.73	2.33
	Hispanic	1.84	2.52
	White	1.47	1.85
Punishment	African-American	1.07	2.01
	Hispanic	1.13	1.81
	White	1.65	1.75
Role-Reversal	African-American	1.00	1.87
	Hispanic	2.13	2.41
	White	1.31	1.82
Power & Independence	African-American	.67	2.15
	Hispanic	.85	2.35
	White	1.06	1.84

Table 3: Multiple Comparisons for the 2nd Hypothesis

Contrasts	Mean Difference	SE	Sig.
<i>Expectations</i>			
African-American v. Hispanic	-1.10*	.24	.000
African-American v. White	-.33	.24	.361
Hispanic v. White	.78*	.24	.003
<i>Empathy</i>			
African-American v. Hispanic	-1.11*	.24	.000
African-American v. White	-.75*	.24	.006
Hispanic v. White	.37	.24	.283
<i>Corporal Punishment</i>			
African-American v. Hispanic	-.05	.20	.964
African-American v. White	-.58*	.20	.011
Hispanic v. White	-.53*	.20	.023
<i>Role Reversal</i>			
African-American v. Hispanic	-1.13*	.22	.000
African-American v. White	-.31	.22	.325
Hispanic v. White	.82*	.22	.001
<i>Power and Independence</i>			
African-American v. Hispanic	-.18	.23	.716
African-American v. White	-.39	.23	.202
Hispanic v. White	-.21	.23	.621

* $p < .05$