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Excavating Culture: Summary of Results

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Abstract

This is a companion paper to the seven articles also published in this special issue of *Applied Developmental Science* This paper summarizes and discusses the results from common analyses that were conducted on different datasets. The common analyses were designed to disentangle contextual and ethnic influences on parenting. Initial ethnic group differences were found in many of the datasets with multiple ethnic groups. Although certain ethnic group differences were explained by contextual influences, some ethnic group differences remained after contextual influences were controlled. Follow-up analyses with datasets containing cultural variables reveal within group differences in the degree to which ethnic differences in parenting may be accounted for by contextual factors versus culturally-specific processes. Methodological and theoretical implications are discussed and future directions are offered.

This paper serves as a companion piece to seven articles published in this special issue. The introductory article (Le et al.) provided the rationale and theoretical grounding for this methodological collaboration. The six individual studies (Ceballo & Hurd; Chao & Kanatsu; Hill & Tyson; Le & Lambert; Murry et al.; Pinderhughes et al.) reported findings from analyses conducted within each dataset.

Summary of Results

In summarizing findings from the preceding six studies, we organized this section around four major issues. First, we highlight ethnic differences that remained in our models after controlling for the influence of contextual variables. Second, we note ethnic differences that were related in predictive ways to one or more of the cultural variables, and highlight the ethnic differences that remain when contextual variables were controlled but were not related to cultural variables. Third, we highlight the ethnic differences that were explained by contextual factors as they shed light on "(mis)assumptions" about ethnic or cultural differences. Finally, we discuss contextual factors and culturally specific processes that were related to parenting in within group comparisons.

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Parental Warmth

Both African Americans and Asian Americans scored lower on parental warmth than did European American parents (Chao). Ethnic differences in warmth differed as a function of the developmental ages of the children. For example, our findings revealed that at younger ages (4th grade—Hill & 3rd grade—Pinderhughes), ethnic group differences remained after controlling for contextual variables. Specifically, African American parents displayed more warmth than did European American parents (Pinderhughes). Among older youth (9–12th grades), however, variations in warmth observed between African American and European American parents were explained by socioeconomic variables, neighborhood quality, and number of children in the home (Chao, Pinderhughes). Cultural factors emerged as significant predictors of parental warmth for Latinos and Asian Americans, including children's native language fluency and values of interdependence (both were positively related to warmth) (Chao).

Findings from within group comparisons revealed that for African Americans, elevated ethnic pride (Hill), and religiosity were significant predictors of parents' reports of warmth (Murry). Further, home ownership, and living in a resourceful/cohesive neighborhood, or one that is unsafe, were associated with greater use of warmth among African American parents (Murry, Pinderhughes). Hill and Pinderhughes also noted the role of neighborhood quality in predicting warmth among African Americans. In their studies, residing in more advantaged communities fostered increases in the use of warmth toward children. In addition, socioeconomic status emerged as an important predictor of displays of parental warmth among African Americans. Noteworthy is that those of low-income status reported higher displays of warmth toward their children than their counterparts of higher SES (Pinderhughes). Also, having a large number of children and exposure to negative life events, including racial discrimination, were associated with reduced parental expressions of warmth and support toward their children (Murry).

Several within group differences also emerged for Asian Americans. Accordingly, Chao found that Koreans and South Asians had higher ratings on parental warmth than did Chinese. In addition, socioeconomic status and cultural factors were also related to parenting, specifically father's education, as well as children's fluency in the native language and endorsement in cultural values of both independence and interdependence. These factors were positively related to the parental warmth of Asian Americans. Similarly, children's degree of fluency in the native language and endorsement of cultural values of interdependence, as well having smaller families were related to increases in parental warmth among Latinos (Chao).

Psychological Control

Of the datasets included in this collection of papers, only two studies were able to examine ethnic differences in psychological control (Ceballo and Hill). Although the study comparing Latina and European American mothers (Ceballo) found no ethnic differences in psychological control, the other study comparing African Americans and European Americans did find differences based on children's reports, but not based on mothers' reports (Hill). With this latter study, African American children reported higher levels of psychological control for their mothers than did European American children. These ethnic differences remained even after accounting for the contextual factors involving neighborhood, socioeconomic, and family risk and stress. Furthermore, although African American children reported higher levels of psychological control, the within group analyses examining cultural factors suggested that beliefs in ethnic equity were a buffer against the use of such control strategies. On the other hand, although no ethnic group differences were found between Latinas and European Americans in mothers' psychological control, one

contextual factor, neighborhood quality, was related to higher levels of psychological control for the sample overall (Ceballo). Additionally, in examinations with the Latinas, acculturation was a buffer against the use of this control. Thus, in both studies by Ceballo and Hill, cultural variables were significant in explaining variation in mother's psychological control among Latinos and African Americans, and in the latter study, may explain the African American and European American differences found.

Behavioral Control

There is much less consistency across datasets for parental reports of the use of behavioral control. Two of the four cross-ethnic analyses examining ethnic differences in the use of behavioral control revealed that variations between African Americans and European Americans remained even after controlling for the influence of contextual variables among families of eighth grade and high school students (Chao, Pinderhughes). Although ethnicity did not emerge as a significant predictor of mothers' use of behavioral control with kindergartners, differences between African American and European American parents' use of behavioral control did emerge for mothers of fourth graders. Accordingly, these differences were explained by socioeconomic status (Hill, Pinderhughes), depression (Pinderhughes) and locale of residence (Pinderhughes). Moreover, ethnic differences were also found between European Americans and Asians Americans with the latter higher than the former (Chao). The contextual factors only partially explained the Asian American and European American differences in that marginally significant differences remained after controlling for SES.

Chao also found ethnic differences between Latinos and European Americans, after controlling for the contribution of contextual factors. An examination of these findings revealed that both mother's education and single-parent status were negatively related to behavioral control. Results from within group analyses from Chao's study revealed that Mexican American youth reported significantly lower levels of exposure to behavior control compared to Central American youth. Additionally, Chao found that the longer the mothers had been in the U.S., the more they relied on behavioral control. These subethnic and immigration-related factors remained significant, even after accounting for the contextual variables of SES, and none of the contextual factors were related to the behavioral control of Latino parents. Similarly, in examinations among the Asian Americans (Chao), subethnic differences found (between Koreans and Chinese) remained even after accounting for the contextual factors. Also, just as with the Latinos, none of the contextual factors were related to the behavioral control of Asian immigrant parents. In contrast, Pinderhughes' data revealed that cultural factors were unrelated to behavioral control.

Monitoring

Some inconsistencies emerged across datasets regarding ethnic differences in parental monitoring. In one dataset, ethnic differences appeared to be more related to cultural factors rather than contextual ones (Chao). Specifically, African Americans and Latinos scored higher than did European Americans on the use of parental monitoring, after contextual variables were in the model (Chao). In addition, results from within group analyses showed that Filipinos scored much lower than South Asians in the use of parental monitoring. These differences, however, were less apparent when controlling for parent's age of arrival to the U.S. and parental language fluency. On the other hand, when controlling for parental English language use with the child and the importance of cultural values for independence and interdependence, the significant differences between Filipinos and Chinese reappeared. Further, both Chao and Murry found that parental monitoring was related to cultural factors for both Latinos and African Americans, respectively. Contextual factors also explained differential use of parental monitoring within African Americans (Murry), which included

the occurrence of stressful life events, parent's and youth's reports of racial discriminatory exposure, and residing in an unsupportive neighborhood. In addition, mother's education, owning one's home, as well as rearing their children in cohesive communities, were significant predictors explaining variations in levels of parental monitoring among rural African Americans (Murry). In another dataset, initial ethnic differences between African Americans and European Americans were explained by contextual influences in two of three adolescent years (Pinderhughes).

Family Communication

Among mothers of kindergarteners, ethnicity did not predict adaptive communication. Rather, contextual variables of neighborhood characteristics and socioeconomic status emerged as significant predictors of adaptive communication about positive events (Hill). Similarly, Pinderhughes found that neighborhood quality and maternal depression predicted communication. Across datasets, results revealed that some ethnic differences remained significant after controlling for various contextual influences. With contextual variables accounted for, African American mothers of fourth graders (as opposed to mothers of kindergarteners) were less communicative than European American mothers about negative events and emotions with their children (Hill). With children of certain ages, African American mothers scored higher on positive communication than European American mothers (Hill, Pinderhughes). Findings from within group analyses showed that cultural variables, such as ethnic pride, and awareness of discrimination, were positively related to communication (Hill, Murry, Pinderhughes). Specifically, rural, African American, single mothers who viewed religion as important were more likely to embrace open communication in their families (Murry). Additionally, Hill found that emphasizing ethnic pride was a significant predictor of adaptive communication about negative events for African American mothers and Pinderhughes reported that adolescents' alertness to discrimination was linked to parent-child communication.

Parental Self-Efficacy

Findings from our combined analyses revealed that parental self-efficacy does, indeed, appear to be linked to ethnicity, such that African American parents report greater levels of efficacy as parents beyond the unique contributions of contextual variables (Hill, Pinderhughes). After controlling for contextual variables, African American mothers in Hill's sample reported greater parental self-efficacy than European American mothers of kindergarten-age children. In addition, African American parents were more likely to view themselves as efficacious parents when they endorsed cultural values related to rearing children. Among African American parents of kindergarteners, for instance, those who more strongly endorsed instilling ethnic pride in their children reported higher levels of parental efficacy (Hill). In a sample of Latina mothers with infants, the contextual variables predicting maternal self-efficacy varied by infants' age. Whereas at six months of age, mothers' annual income predicted maternal efficacy, at 12 months of age, maternal depression emerged as a contextual predictor of parental efficacy (Le).

Conclusion

The aim of these cross-ethnic data analyses was to identify patterns to increase our understanding of the linkages among ethnicity, culture, contextual factors and parenting. Our findings shed light on several "(mis)assumptions" about ethnic or cultural differences in parenting. For example, African American parents in our studies perceived themselves to be competent with the skills necessary to efficiently and effectively fulfill the tasks associated with rearing competent children. Self-perceived parenting competence will undoubtedly influence the process of parenting and child development. In Bogenschneider, Small, and

Tsay's (1997) study, mothers and fathers who self-reported more parenting competence had adolescents who reported higher levels of parental monitoring and responsiveness. Contrary to descriptions of ethnic minorities, in particular African Americans, in extant studies, parents in our studies were more likely to engage in warm behaviors with their children. Additionally, Latinos had a greater likelihood of engaging in this practice than did European American parents. The findings on parental warmth for African Americans however are a bit more complicated in that contextual factors seem to explain these differences between African Americans and European Americans.

Noteworthy is that, across the majority of our ethnic minority parents, increased reports of parental efficacy as well as parental warmth, monitoring, and family communication were heightened when cultural variables were included in the models. Similarly, other researchers found that cultural values reflected in levels of acculturation are associated with parenting strategies among Latino families (Buriel, 1993; Hill, Bush, et al., 2003). Conversely, although African Americans and Latinos reported using psychological control, such parenting often occurred when cultural values were low. Thus, the results underscore the importance of incorporating culturally-specific variables in order to understand and predict behavior in several parenting domains.

Across our combined analyses, several culturally specific processes emerged as significant predictors of parenting behavior. Cultural processes related to ethnic identity, religiosity, and acculturation emerged as salient constructs in our analyses within specific racial/ethnic groups. More specifically, significant cultural factors included ethnic pride, awareness of discrimination, native language fluency, English language use, amount of time in the U.S., and values of independence and interdependence. We should note that previous research on the impact of acculturation among Latino parents has produced somewhat mixed results. Among Mexican American mothers, Hill, Bush, et al. (2003) identified maternal acceptance as a stronger protective factor for children of Spanish-speaking mothers compared to children of English-speaking, Mexican American mothers. Yet, in a sample of 167 Mexican American families, Parke and colleagues (2004) found that maternal acculturation was associated with hostile parenting behavior, such that hostile control strategies decreased as level of acculturation increased. Similarly, generational status among Chinese American families has been associated with beneficial characteristics of authoritative parenting style (Chao, 2001).

Interestingly, the use of behavioral control was more likely to be associated with contextual/ socioeconomic factors (in the Asian American and European American comparison and in the African American and European American comparison) rather than cultural factors. It is not surprising that parents must tailor their parental strategies to meet the demands of financial and contextual stressors, such as neighborhood dangers and disadvantages. Impoverished neighborhood conditions have been associated with lower levels of maternal warmth (Klebanov et al., 1994; Pinderhughes, Nix, Foster, Jones & the Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2001). Moreover, successful parents in poor, high-risk neighborhoods tend to rely upon strict monitoring, control, and firm disciplinary practices (Baldwin et al., 1990; Brody et al., 2001; Furstenberg, 1993; Gonzales, Cauce, Friedman, & Mason, 1996; Sampson & Groves, 1989).

Our findings also highlight the central role of socioeconomic status on parenting. Studies linking poverty to parenting contend that financial strain compromises parenting through its negative influence on parents' psychological functioning (Brody et al., 2001; McLoyd, 1990; Murry et al., 2002). Indeed, previous researchers have documented a connection between economic strain and depressive symptoms in European American parents (Conger & Elder, 1994; Pinderhughes, Dodge, Bates, Pettit, & Zelli, 2000), African American

parents (Brody & Flor, 1998; McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994; Pinderhughes, Dodge, Bates, Pettit, & Zelli, 2000), and Latino parents (Dennis et al., 2003; Parke et al., 2004). Conversely, financial stability facilitates psychological well-being that, in turn, increases effective parenting. Given this, one would expect increases in parental warmth and less evidence of psychological control and behavioral control among African Americans of high socioeconomic status.

Among the contextual factors included in our studies, socioeconomic status deserves specific attention. In the present investigations, indicators of socioeconomic status appear to be of greater importance for African Americans and European Americans than any of the other ethnic groups included in our analyses. In fact, socioeconomic status often emerged as a significant factor but more often differentiated the parenting behaviors of African Americans on several parenting domains. Socioeconomic factors were predictive of variations in parental warmth, use of behavioral control, psychological control, parental monitoring, and family communication patterns but not parental efficacy. The reasons why these patterns were more pronounced among African Americans than other ethnic minorities remain unclear.

We hope that our combined findings present an initial step towards exploring and identifying what Garcia Coll and colleagues (1996) termed adaptive cultural practices, specifically defined as "culturally defined coping mechanisms to the demands placed by the promoting and inhibiting environments (e.g. schools, neighborhoods, and health care systems)" (p. 1904). Much more scholarly work is needed in order to unravel the complex interplay of contextual/socioeconomic and cultural factors on parenting behavior and developmental outcomes for children. In sum, we acknowledge that contextual factors play an influential role, but at the same time, emphasize the need to consider the unique contribution of culture and family characteristics in understanding parenting among and within ethnic minorities.

Limitations

A unique strength of this project was the careful coordination of analyses across datasets and a priori definition of parenting, cultural, and contextual constructs and research questions. However, a number of limitations are also noted, with some of them addressable in future analyses. First, there was a wide variation in sample sizes across studies, resulting in limited power in some cases. Sample sizes range from 40 in one study to close to 3,000 in another study. Issues relating to power need to be addressed in future analyses. Further, in the current investigations, some findings are present with rather small effect sizes. Additionally, while some samples included a number of ethnic subgroups within one pan-ethnic group, like Chinese, Filipino, Korean, South Asian, and Vietnamese, other samples only included one ethnic group, like African Americans or Latinas.

Second, as we noted in the introduction (Le et al.), we did not address child and parent gender differences across studies, and we lacked specific analyses to detect possible gender differences. Regarding gender of the child, although most studies included balanced samples of male/female youth, our analyses did not include consideration of possible differences in mean levels of parenting by gender or possible ethnicity by gender interactions in levels of parenting. Concerning gender of the parent, many of the studies focused on mothers exclusively and relied on maternal self reports, whereas others did not specify the proportion of mothers and fathers, primarily because child or adolescent reports were relied upon, rather than parents' reports.

Third, there is a fair amount of age variability both within and across studies, with age groups ranging from newborns to adolescents in high school. Most of the studies focused on

one specific age group with some following the particular age group over time. This variation provides possibilities for examining differences in parenting levels by age of the child across studies, and also within a particular study (for a few studies only).

Finally, because of the nature of a meta-analytic based approach, the actual items comprising constructs were not similar across studies. Thus, because those items that were chosen from each study to represent each of the constructs were most often not the full original scale, the number of items used to comprise the new scales were somewhat limited and sometimes resulted in less than ideal internal consistencies. Additionally, our measures of "culture" were also limited to pre-existing variables within studies and did not always represent what our ideal measurement of cultural dynamics would be. Although there were datasets that did incorporate measures for capturing cultural processes, these measures were not originally designed for cross-ethnic or cross-cultural comparisons, and so they often were not comparable to each other. We found capturing cultural processes particularly challenging in the context of this meta-analytic approach, as many of the measures in each dataset were adopted for explaining within-culture variation, rather than across-culture/ ethnic variation.

Future Directions

By coordinating analyses across datasets, we were able to examine the degree to which ethnic differences in parenting may be accounted for by contextual factors versus culturally-specific processes. While the present findings are an important first step in answering these questions, it is equally valuable to turn our attention to recommendations for future work addressing parenting behavior across racially and ethnically diverse families. First, the present work underscores the importance of attending to and identifying contextual factors that influence parenting behavior. Specifying contextual influences on parenting behavior will necessarily vary by parents' ethnicity, regional location, neighborhood conditions, etc. Our collective findings also highlight the need to specifically attend to the contextual influences of socioeconomic status on parenting behavior.

Second, in order to fully disentangle the complex relations influencing parenting behavior within specific racial/ethnic groups, samples must be specifically tailored to address these research questions. Large sample sizes that provide adequate numbers within ethnic subgroups (e.g., Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans) will guard against the tendency to over-generalize and essentialize characteristics to any one racial group (e.g., Latinos). Although not the primary focus of our current investigation, we do report differences in parenting strategies within Asian American subgroups (e.g., Chinese, Filipinos, Koreans, and South Asians) and Latino subgroups (e.g., Central American and Mexican American). Future research will need to grapple with complicated issues regarding the measurement of constructs in different racial groups. For instance, we must explore whether it is possible or even desirable to have the same parenting measures work equally well across different cultural groups.

Third, future work must also attend to issues regarding children's developmental levels. Not surprisingly, effective parenting strategies will differ for children at different developmental stages. Fourth, researchers often present parenting as a uni-dimensional phenomenon. In reality, however, parent-child relationships represent more fluid, dyadic processes, with both members of the dyad contributing to each other's behavior. Hence, future research must also account for the characteristics that children may contribute, beyond developmental stages, to parent-child relationships and parenting behavior (e.g., temperament, intelligence, school engagement).

Finally, much more work must attend to uncovering and understanding the dynamic cultural processes (e.g., racial socialization strategies, ethnic identity, ethnic values, immigrant status, acculturation) that underlie the findings of cultural differences in parenting across ethnic groups. Such culturally-specific processes may be highly specific to families of different ethnic subgroups and may vary by many factors, such as family members' generational status and the percentage of ethnically similar families in the neighborhood. By the same token, we should be open to identifying commonalities in cultural processes and the experiences of racial minority groups – commonalities, for instance, that may be associated with experiences of racial discrimination or the racial socialization of children of color in the U.S. Future in-depth knowledge regarding the interplay of cultural values and processes, contextual factors, and parenting behavior will provide a rich springboard for community-based interventions and public policy work.

We encourage future investigations to continue our efforts to move beyond collapsing ethnicity and culture, which are often characterized as one distal variable in order to explain observed group differences. Instead, we underscore the importance of re-conceptualizing ethnicity and culture as distinctive, proximal constructs, for exploring and explaining specific and varied influences that may account for group differences. Further, it is important to recognize that given the complexities of excavating ethnicity, culture and contextual processes, there is a need for a wide range of research methodologies that can more accurately describe the extent to which ethnicity, culture, and context interact to influence parenting and child outcomes.

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