
Correlates of Parenting Styles in Predominantly Working- and Middle-Class African American Mothers

We examined reported parenting and disciplinary practices in 114 working and middle class African American mothers of children aged 5–12 using the Parenting Dimensions Inventory (PDI; Power, 1991). Results indicated substantive variation among parents in their disciplinary strategies. Reasoning, which is characteristic of authoritative parenting, was the most frequently reported strategy. Factor analyses were conducted on mother's responses to PDI items, and sociodemographic and psychological variables were related to the identified factors. Maternal education, socioeconomic status, childrearing history, and maternal depression differentially predicted child-centered parenting, reasoning, and mothers' tendencies to let a situation go. The importance of extending theoretical and empirical models of parenting determinants to underrepresented segments of African American families is emphasized in order to gain a fuller understanding of the factors that contribute to diverse styles of parenting in such groups.

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Numerous investigators have identified significant relations between parenting styles and children's social, emotional, and cognitive development (Baumrind, 1971, 1972; Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, & Petit, 1996; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Kochanska, Murray, & Coy, 1997; Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989), and many investigators have discussed the centrality of disciplinary strategies in characterizing such styles (Baumrind, 1991; Kochanska, Padavich, & Koenig, 1996). Parents who are responsive to their children's needs, who permit children to be active participants in the establishment of family rules, and who engage in inductive reasoning when disciplining their children are more likely to have children who are self-assertive, independent, friendly, and cooperative. In contrast, low levels of parental responsiveness, coupled with high levels of power assertiveness, tend to be associated with negative outcomes in children, such as inadequate internalization of conscience or externalizing symptoms (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Given the extensive literature on the central role of parenting styles in children's lives, it is not surprising that interest in the determinants of parenting has burgeoned.

Determinants of Parenting

Based on an integrative literature review on the predictors of parenting, Belsky (1984) asserted that parenting is multiply determined by factors in the broader social context, the experiences and psy-

chological functioning of the parent, and characteristics of the child. He further suggested that factors in the parent are most central to parenting competence, often mediating associations between broader social variables (or child variables) and variation in parenting styles. In support of his emphasis on parents' experiences and psychological functioning, a number of investigators have identified meaningful relations between mothers' child-rearing history and depression and general styles of parenting or discipline. Mothers' cognitive appraisals of their own childhood experiences, such as their perceptions of the fairness and harshness of punishment and the degree of rejection they experienced as children, predict various parenting behaviors, including the endorsement or use of physical punishment to maintain discipline. Parents who report experiencing low levels of nurturance during their childhoods have been found to sanction the use of physical punishment (Hunter & Kilstrom, 1979; Ringwalt, Browne, Rosenbloom, Evans, & Kotch, 1989). Among low-risk mothers, those who perceive more rejection in their childhoods have been found to display more negative affect toward their own children (Belsky, Herzog, & Rovine, 1986; Belsky, Youngblood, & Pensky, 1989). In contrast, mothers who report having had positive and secure relations with their mothers during childhood are more likely to be responsive to their infants, and their infants are more likely to be securely attached (Gara, Rosenberg, & Herzog, 1996; Main & Goldwyn, 1984).

Similarly, depressed mothers are generally less responsive to their children and less communicative with them than are mothers who are not depressed (Breznitz & Sherman, 1987; Cohn, Campbell, Matias, & Hopkins, 1990). With regards to disciplinary practices specifically, depressed mothers have generally been found to be more likely than nondepressed mothers to yell at or to physically punish their children (Dumas & Wekerle, 1995; Jackson, 1993; McLoyd, 1990; Pannacione & Wahler, 1986). Depressed mothers have also been found to be less consistent and less likely to provide discipline, structure, or rule enforcement, compared with nondepressed mothers (Goodman & Brumley, 1990).

Factors such as mothers' child-rearing history and depression can be particularly compromised in the context of sociodemographic risk (Kaufman & Zigler, 1989; Rutter, 1989). Socioeconomic status may be considered a stressor that influences aspects of mothers' psychological functioning and thereby contributes to harsh or inconsistent disciplinary

practices (Conger, McMarty, Yang, Lahey, & Kropp, 1984; McLoyd & Wilson, 1990; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Wu, 1991). Sameroff, Seifer, Barocas, Zax, and Greenspan (1987), noted that it is the accumulation of risks (or protective factors) that may determine the extent to which certain factors will interfere with or support parenting and optimal developmental outcomes in children. In various studies, relations between social class and mothers' language with children (e.g., Hoff-Ginsberg, 1991), specific parenting practices (e.g., Garbarino & Kostelny, 1993), and developmental expectations, theories, and values (e.g., Sameroff & Feil, 1985) have been identified. The powerful inverse relations that exist between socioeconomic status and positive dimensions of parenting suggest that the challenge of parenting may be magnified in the context of sociodemographic risk.

Parenting of African Americans

Investigators who have adopted Belsky's (1984) theoretical framework in their study of parenting determinants have focused largely on parenting styles in middle-class, European American populations. Over the past decade, researchers have increasingly emphasized the importance of understanding child-rearing in its ethnic and cultural context (Garcia-Coll, 1990; Kelley, Power, & Wimbush, 1992; Kelley, Sanchez-Hucles, & Walker, 1993; McLoyd, 1990; McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballos, & Borquez, 1994). Parenting styles in African American families, in particular, had been largely understudied (Graham, 1992), and early investigations that did focus on the parenting practices of African Americans typically portrayed them as expecting unrealistic levels of obedience, engaging in high levels of power assertion, expressing low levels of reasoning, and having low tolerance for child input (e.g., Baumrind, 1972). Such findings often were based on investigations that compared African American parenting practices with those of European American families. This comparative approach often has resulted in a limited and inaccurate picture of ethnic minority parenting, particularly because ethnicity and socioeconomic status are often confounded (Garcia-Coll, 1990; Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990). That is, the parent-oriented characterization of African American families has derived largely from studies of low-income families (e.g., Kamii & Radin, 1971) due to the fact that African Americans are disproportionately represented in lower socioeconomic strata (McLoyd, 1990). Consequently, investigators have

stressed the importance of either including ethnicity as a variable in analyses of parenting styles or of examining parenting practices in, rather than across, ethnic groups (Dana, 1986; Phinney, 1996).

Recently, investigators have attempted to disentangle ethnicity and socioeconomic status by focusing on parenting practices in specific ethnic groups. These studies have confirmed a complex relationship between socioeconomic status, psychological variables, and parenting in African American families. For example, McLoyd and colleagues (1994) investigated the impact of unemployment on parenting practices in a group of single, African American mothers. They found that unemployment and financial strain contributed to increased levels of maternal depression, which in turn predicted greater punitiveness toward their adolescent children. In addition, the availability of instrumental support decreased mothers' levels of depression, their negativity about their maternal role, and their tendency to use harsh punishment.

Elder, Eccles, Ardel, and Lord (1995) examined the effects of economic hardship on both emotional distress and parenting behaviors in African American and European American parents of adolescents. They found that unstable work situations and low income were associated with increased emotional distress and negative parenting behavior. Moreover, low-income African American families had fewer economic resources to begin with and thus were more directly affected by economic instability than were European Americans. The findings, then, suggest that relations between sociodemographic factors and parenting depend on the specific ethnic group and contextual variables being assessed.

Kelley and colleagues (1992, 1993), in an effort to describe and explain variability in the parenting styles of African Americans, examined the parenting practices of lower- and middle-class African-American mothers using the PDI (Slater & Power, 1987). In one study, they combined scores on scales of the PDI with coded interview data to reveal three factors underlying parental report of disciplinary styles: the use of material or social consequences (e.g., sending a child to his room), the use of physical punishment (e.g., spanking), and restrictiveness (e.g., inflexibility or insensitivity to the developmental needs of the child). They identified a number of meaningful relations between sociodemographic variables and these parenting factors, including an inverse relation between maternal education and the use of physical punishment. Hence, their findings under-

scored the individual differences that exist in African American mothers in how they react to children's misbehavior, and they furthered the notion that parenting differences are best understood in the context of broader sociodemographic factors.

In the investigation presented here, we advance this line of inquiry by focusing on correlates of reported parenting styles in a predominantly working, middle-class sample of African Americans of school-aged children. The main purpose of this investigation, in accord with models of parenting determinants, is to examine the confluence of psychological and contextual factors on the parenting factors identified in these mothers. Specifically, mothers' sociodemographic status, childhood history, and depressive symptomology were examined in relation to factor scores of general parenting practices and specific disciplinary strategies.

As a first step to correlational analyses and in light of the limited research conducted on the parenting strategies of this underrepresented group, we sought to describe the nature and factor structure of African mothers' reported parenting and disciplinary strategies. We compared the structure of the parenting factors with those of Kelley and colleagues (1992, 1993) and Power (1991), who also used the PDI in their studies of parenting. Sociodemographic, experiential and psychological variables then were related to identified parenting factors.

Mothers with higher levels of education and incomes, warm and accepting childhood histories, and lower levels of depression were expected to report more child-centered parenting (i.e., to be more responsive to and accepting of their children's needs) and use of inductive reasoning when disciplining their children. We also expected these mothers to be less likely to report engaging in harsh punishment or letting a situation go in reaction to their children's misbehavior. Finally, given the centrality of mental health factors in extant models of parenting (e.g., Belsky, 1984; Downey & Coyne, 1990; Teti, O'Connell, & Reiner, 1996), we expected maternal depression to be the strongest predictor of parenting practices, and to explain variation in mothers' reported parenting over and above mothers' socioeconomic status, education, and perception of childhood history.

METHOD

Participants

One hundred and fourteen African American mothers of 54 male and 60 female children aged

5–12 participated in this investigation. Because the purpose of the investigation was to assess determinants of parenting in an ethnic group, inclusionary criteria meant that participants identify themselves as African American and as born in the United States. The mean age of the children was 9.38 years ($SD = 2.02$). Participants were recruited from the New York City metropolitan area from public schools, colleges, and community centers. After obtaining approval of various institutions, a letter explaining the study was circulated to prospective families. Interested families were asked to contact the principal investigator using a self-addressed envelope or by calling her.

Our recruitment efforts focused on female primary caregivers generally (that is, we welcomed participation from caregivers other than mother), given the importance of extended family and kin relations (e.g., grandmothers, aunts) for the development of African American children (Flaherty, Facticeau, & Garver, 1987; Hunter, 1997). A total of 180 female caregivers initially consented to participate in the study and returned the screening form. Of those, 39 did not meet eligibility criteria due to the age of the child or because they did not identify themselves as African American. Of the remaining 141 potential participants, 16 did not complete the study. The majority of these individuals could not be contacted after we received their consent forms (e.g., phone was disconnected). Because only 11 of the 141 primary caregivers identified themselves as grandmothers, aunts, or other relations to the child—a sample that was too small to enable comparisons between mothers and others—these individuals were excluded from the final analyses. However, before doing so, statistical analyses were conducted with and without nonmaternal caregivers. Results did not differ, so the final participation pool of 114 mothers is represented in the reported results.

The mean age of the mothers was 37.4 years ($SD = 6.42$). Approximately 29% of the mothers reported that they were currently married; 71% were single, divorced, or separated. The participants in this sample were relatively well educated and were largely in middle income strata. For example, about 53% of the mothers reported family incomes between \$25,000 and \$65,000, with the modal income being \$25,000 to \$35,000. Approximately 3.5% of mothers reported incomes over \$75,000, and about 8% reported incomes under \$5,000. Although 18% of the mothers reported earning a high school degree or the equivalent and 4% did not graduate from high school, nearly

47% of all mothers attended college from 1–3 years, 21% were college graduates, and about 10% reported some graduate training.

Measures

Parenting styles and disciplinary strategies. Mothers' reports of parenting styles and specific disciplinary practices were assessed using the revised version of the PDI (Power, 1991). This is a self-report instrument that uses items drawn from several existing childrearing measures, such as the Parent Attitude Inquiry (Baumrind, 1971) and the Questionnaire on Parental Attitudes (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984). The PDI assesses multiple dimensions of parenting practices and has been used with a range of diverse populations, including African American mothers (Kelley, 1988; Kelley et al., 1992, 1993). Initial validity for the scale was established in several studies of both two-parent and single-parent families (Slater & Power, 1987). In each of these studies, the PDI predicted parent ratings on the Child Behavior Checklist. Coefficient alphas in this sample for each of the subscales were modest to strong and ranged from .68 to .83.

Our investigation used PDI items and subscales specifically related to general parenting styles and specific disciplinary strategies as suggested by Kelley and colleagues (1993). The nine subscales in our analyses were responsiveness to child input, which is based on five items reflecting a mother's willingness to consider her child's point of view (e.g., "I encourage my child to express his/her opinions"); nonrestrictive attitude, which is based on seven items reflecting a mother's willingness to allow her child to express his or her opinions and try new things out on his or her own (e.g., "I allow my child to get angry at me"); consistency, which is based on eight items reflecting a mother's firmness about disciplinary rules (e.g., "my child convinces me to change my mind after I have refused a request"); and six subscale scores obtained from the 42 items that make up the type-of-control scales. For the subscales of responsiveness, nonrestrictive attitude, and consistency, each mother was asked to indicate on a 6-point Likert scale how much each statement applies to her. For the disciplinary items, each mother was presented six different vignettes describing her child's potential misbehavior and was asked how likely she was to use one of seven specific disciplinary strategies: material consequences, social consequences, spanking or hitting, reasoning, scolding, reminding, or

letting the situation go in response to each of the misbehaviors. For scoring purposes, the strategies of material and social consequences are combined and considered one type of control, thereby resulting in six primary disciplinary strategies (Power, 1991). Although the option of letting a situation go is sometimes not scored, this strategy was included in all our analyses because empirical evidence suggests that depressed mothers often are inconsistent in their use of discipline and may be unwilling to enforce limits (e.g., Goodman & Brumley, 1990).

Depression. The Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D) developed by Radloff (1977) was used to measure mothers' reported levels of depression. The CES-D is an index of depressive symptomology and mood. We selected it because of the ease of administration and scoring, as well as its demonstrated reliability across a range of populations, including African Americans (Okwumabua, Baker, Wong, & Pilgram, 1997; Roberts, 1980; Weissman, Sholomskas, Pottenger, Prusoff, & Locke, 1977). A score of 16 or above is considered an indication of risk of depressive symptomology. Investigations of the reliability and validity of the CES-D have demonstrated that the scale has good internal consistency and test-retest reliability. The coefficient alpha obtained in the current sample was .84.

Sociodemographic variables. Socioeconomic status was calculated using the Nam-Powers Socioeconomic Status Scores (Nam & Powers, 1983; Terrie & Nam, 1990). The Nam-Powers Index is a composite measure based on recent census data on income, occupation, and level of education, which are averaged to form an overall estimate of socioeconomic status, ranging from 1 to 100. The Nam-Powers Index relates strongly to other measures of socioeconomic status (Miller, 1991), provides a full description of socioeconomic status (see Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif, 1995), uses updated and objective criteria for obtaining occupational status scores, and is one of the few indicators of socioeconomic status that includes direct consideration of the problems of racial discrimination and measures of socioeconomic status.

Mothers' childhood history. Mothers' childhood history was assessed using the adult version of the Parental Acceptance-Rejection Questionnaire (Rohner, 1984). This is a self-report instrument that asks the mother about her perceptions of how she was treated by her mother during childhood.

The initial validation studies were conducted on a sample of 147 college students ranging in age from 18 to 43 years. Internal reliabilities for the various subscales ranged from .86 to .95. Validation of the instrument was established by Rohner, Saavedra, and Granum, in several investigations in 1978. Since its initial validation, this instrument has demonstrated good reliability and validity across a range of ethnic and cultural groups worldwide and with African Americans specifically (R. Rohner, personal communication, February 27, 1998). The 60 questions on the scale permit separate scoring of four indices or subscales of maternal childhood experiences. Three of the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire subscales reflect negative childhood experiences (i.e., rejection, neglect or indifference, and hostility), and one reflects positive childhood experiences (i.e., warmth). In our study, we computed two childhood history scores for each mother, given the conceptual distinction between positive and negative childhood experiences. Warmth was calculated based on the warmth subscale, and negative childrearing history was calculated based on a sum of the subscales rejection, neglect or indifference, and hostility. A high total score, as well as high scores on the negative subscore, indicated that the mother recalled her early experiences with her mother as negative. Although norms have not yet been established, a large body of data collected using various forms of the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire suggests that among nonclinical populations, typical composite scores fall between 90 and 110. Coefficient alphas in the sample presented here ranged from .87 to .97.

Procedures

Participants were interviewed over the telephone by the principal investigator or by one of five trained graduate students. Interviews lasted from 1/2 to 1 hour. All interviewers followed a common protocol. The interviews began with the administration of a demographic questionnaire consisting of information about maternal age and marital status, and family income, maternal education, family size, and maternal occupational status required for obtaining Nam-Powers socioeconomic status scores (Nam & Powers, 1983; Terrie & Nam, 1990). Then the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire, the Centers for Epidemiological Studies Depression scale, and the Parenting Dimensions Inventory, were administered in order. After the interviews were completed, mothers received \$25. When re-

TABLE 1. DESCRIPTIVE DATA ON MOTHERS' REPORTED PARENTING AND DISCIPLINARY STRATEGIES

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Subscale		
Nonrestrictive attitude	27.25	6.25
Responsiveness	23.72	3.91
Consistency	35.80	6.72
Disciplinary Subscale		
Material and social consequences	8.36	3.90
Physical punishment	2.24	2.06
Reasoning	9.11	2.80
Reminding	8.03	1.93
Letting situation go	1.74	2.58
Scolding	6.22	2.48

sponding to the PDI, mothers with more than one child were asked to provide responses related specifically to a target child (the oldest child they had in the 5- to 12-year-old age category).

RESULTS

As a first step to analyses, variability in mothers' reported parenting practices was examined. The top half of Table 1 presents descriptive data on mothers' parenting styles. Disciplinary practices are presented in the bottom half of the table.

Mothers reported considerable variability on most of the measures. With respect to disciplinary strategies, physical punishment was the least frequently reported strategy, and reasoning, the most frequently reported strategy.

Descriptive statistics and relations among the predictors are presented in Table 2. With regard to level of depression, mothers demonstrated a mean score of 10.90, which is similar to ranges of 7.94 to 9.25 reported for nonclinical samples (Radloff, 1977). Mothers' perceptions of their childrearing history, assessed by the composite PARQ score, reveal that, as a group, mothers experienced more rejection than acceptance during their childhoods.

We next examined zero-order correlations among the predictors. The data reported in Table 2 indicate a positive correlation between mothers' childhood history and depression. Negative childhood histories are associated with higher levels of depression. This is consistent with prior findings (Rohner, 1984) and in line with our expectation. Depression was inversely related to socioeconomic status.

Factor Analyses

As a first step toward examining relations between the psychological and contextual factors and reported parenting styles, two sets of factor analyses were conducted. In the first, we specified a three-factor solution in an attempt to replicate the broad dimensions of parenting style initially identified by Kelley and colleagues (1993). In the second, we specified a six-factor solution to examine mothers' reported disciplinary practices more specifically in an attempt to replicate the six practices identified by Power (1991).

In all factor analyses, varimax rotations were performed prior to interpretation. We then examined relations between sociodemographic and psychological variables and the identified factors. Variables that related significantly to the extracted factors were then entered in hierarchical regression equations to test their unique contributions to reported parenting and disciplinary styles.

In the three-factor solution, scores from the nine subscales of the Parenting Dimensions Inventory were used, as suggested by Kelley and colleagues (1993), in an attempt to replicate the three factors of parenting styles that they obtained. The three-factor solution accounted for 68% of the variance in the nine subscales. Table 3 contains the scales and their rotated factor loadings. The first factor, use of material and social consequences, reflects disciplinary

TABLE 2. DESCRIPTIVES FOR AND CORRELATIONS AMONG MOTHER'S CHILDHOOD HISTORY, DEPRESSION, EDUCATION, SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, AND MARITAL STATUS

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	2	3	4	5	6
1 Positive history: warmth ^a	63.93	15.53	-.85***	-.35**	.03	.07	.18 [†]
2 Negative history ^b	75.27	25.56	—	.36**	-.09	-.13	-.18 [†]
3 Depression score ^c	10.90	9.68	—	—	-.13	-.21*	.02
4 Education level ^d	73.87	17.58	—	—	—	.74***	.14
5 Socioeconomic status score ^e	63.63	20.99	—	—	—	—	.16
6 Marital status	29% married		—	—	—	—	—

^aFrom the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire—warmth scale. ^bFrom the Parental Acceptance and Rejection Questionnaire—hostility, neglect, indifference and rejection scales. ^cCenters for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale score. ^dFrom the Nam-Powers. ^eFrom the Nam-Powers.

n = 114

[†]*p* < .10. **p* < .05. ***p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

TABLE 3. FACTOR ANALYSIS OF MOTHERS' REPORTED PARENTING STRATEGIES (VARIMAX ROTATION)

Subscale Score from Parenting Dimensions Inventory	Factor		
	Material or Social Consequences	Child-Centered Parenting	Scolding
Uses reasoning	-.73	.42	
Uses isolation	.79		
Removes privileges	.71		
Has nonrestrictive attitude		.84	
Uses reminding	.82		
Is responsive		.71	.34
Scolds			.87
Is consistent			.38
Uses physical punishment		-.60	

Note: Data are based on nine subscales from the Parenting Dimensions Inventory.

practices in which the mother reports isolating her child or taking away a privilege. The second factor, child-centered parenting, reflects responsiveness to her child's point of view, the use of reasoning for discipline, nonrestrictive beliefs about childrearing, and a negative loading on the use of physical punishment. The third factor was less interpretable because it mostly reflected the single item of scolding. The first two factors closely replicated Kelley and colleagues' structure in that their first factor strongly loaded on material and social consequences, as did ours. Our second factor, child-centered parenting, reflected the use of reasoning, responsiveness, and nonrestrictive attitudes, with a strong negative loading on physical punishment, and was also similar to the second factor of Kelley et al. However, our third factor did not replicate the dimension identified by Kelley et al. The difference between the third factor identified in this analysis and that found by Kelley et al. may be attributable, in part, to the differences between the new version of the Parenting Dimensions Inventory (Power, 1991) and the version (Slater & Power, 1987) used by Kelley and her colleagues, as well as their inclusion of additional interview items.

In the next factor analysis, we examined mothers' disciplinary styles more specifically by focusing on mothers' responses to the 42 disciplinary items. We specified a six-factor structure based on the fact that these 42 items of the Parenting Dimensions Inventory probe for six different disciplinary strategies that mothers might select in response to the six vignettes (i.e., letting the situation go, material or social consequences, spanking or hitting, reasoning, scolding, and reminding). The six-factor solution accounted for 51% of the variance in the 42 items. In general, the factors and item loadings were consistent with the a priori strategies mothers could select. Specifically, the six factors repli-

cated those of Power's (1991) scale and were labeled material-social consequences, physical punishment, scolding, reminding, letting situation go, and reasoning. Table 4 contains the items and their rotated factor loadings.

Zero-Order Correlations Between Sociodemographic and Psychological Variables and Parenting Factors

We next examined relations between sociodemographic and psychological variables and the factors identified in the two sets of factor analyses. With respect to the 3-factor solution, we obtained consistent relations only between the sociodemographic and psychological predictors and the child-centered parenting factor. Those results are presented in the first column of Table 5. Mothers who were more educated, less depressed, and who reported less rejection, hostility, and neglect during their childhoods were more child-centered in their parenting styles.

With regard to the six disciplinary factors, sociodemographic and psychological variables significantly related to the factors of reasoning and letting a situation go but showed only sporadic relations to the other four factors. These results are presented in columns 2 and 3 in Table 5.

Mothers who were less educated and from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds and who reported negative childhood histories were more likely to report letting a situation go as an option in response to the vignettes. A different pattern of relations was identified for the factor of reasoning. Mothers who were more depressed and who reported more negativity and less warmth during their childhoods tended not to use the strategy of reasoning. Education and socioeconomic status were not related to the strategy of reasoning.

TABLE 4. FACTOR ANALYSIS OF MOTHERS' REPORTED DISCIPLINARY STYLES (VARIMAX ROTATION)

Vignette and Response	Factor ^a					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Child won't pick up toys						
Let situation go					.54	
Take away privilege or add chore	.54					
Isolate child	.53					
Spank	.57					
Discuss						
Scold			.66			
Remind				.56		
Child hits playmate						
Let situation go					.71	
Take away privilege or add chore	.70					
Isolate child	.59					-.40
Spank	.65					-.38
Discuss						
Scold			.71			
Remind				.44		
Child is sassy to parent						
Let situation go					.37	-.64
Take away privilege or add chore	.57					
Isolate child	.62					
Spank		.76				
Discuss						.48
Scold			.77			
Remind				.63		
Child disruptive in class						
Let situation go						
Take away privilege or add chore	.47	.44				
Isolate child	.71	.68				
Spank						
Discuss			.62			.73
Scold				.73		
Remind						
Child lies						
Let situation go					.80	
Take away privilege or add chore	.60					
Isolate child	.67					
Spank		.74				
Discuss						.73
Scold			.77			
Remind				.77		
Child plays in forbidden busy street						
Let situation go					.70	
Take away privilege or add chore	.60					
Isolate child	.67					
Spank		.52				
Discuss						
Scold			.76			
Remind				.68		

Note: Based on 42 discipline items on the Parenting Dimensions Inventory.

^aFactor labels based on loadings: (1) Material or social consequences, (2) Spank, (3) Scold, (4) Remind, (5) Let situation go, (6) Reason.

TABLE 5. ZERO-ORDER CORRELATIONS BETWEEN SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VARIABLES AND EXTRACTED FACTORS

Sociodemographic or Psychological Variable	Child-Centered Parenting	Letting Situation Go	Reasoning
Maternal education	.31***	-.21*	.09
Maternal socioeconomic status	.14	-.21*	-.01
Maternal depression	-.36***	.16†	-.44**
Negative childrearing history	-.20*	.22*	.21*
Positive child-rearing history	-.05	-.10	-.20*

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Hierarchical Regressions

Hierarchical regressions were next conducted for the three factors that were consistently predicted by sociodemographic and psychological factors in the zero-order correlations. (See Table 6.) In these regressions, sociodemographic variables (i.e., maternal education and socioeconomic status) were entered as a block in the first step of the equation. Mothers' perception of positive childrearing history (i.e., warmth) and negative childrearing history (i.e., the sum of hostility, neglect and indifference, and rejection) were entered as a block in Step 2. Finally, maternal depression was entered in Step 3. This enabled us to examine whether psychological and experiential variables (i.e., childrearing history and depression) predict reported parenting styles over and above sociodemographic measures and whether maternal depression uniquely affects parenting above and beyond more distal measures of sociodemographic status and childrearing history. Table 6 provides R^2 and F change values for each of the three steps of the equations, as well as R^2 and F values for the overall models for each of three hierarchical regressions (i.e., based on each of the three dependent parenting factors).

As shown in Table 6, sociodemographic variables, childrearing history, and depression together accounted for 24% of the variance in the child-

centered parenting factor, and maternal depression accounted for 10% of the variance in this parenting factor, over and above the contributions of sociodemographic status and childrearing history. For the factor, letting a situation go, sociodemographic status, childhood history, education, and depression explained only 8% of the total variance, and the sociodemographic block, entered in Step 1, was the only significant predictor, explaining 5% of the variance in this factor. Specifically, mothers with lower levels of education were more likely to report letting their child's misbehavior go without any intervention. Finally, mother's childhood history and depression accounted for 20% of the variance in mother's use of reasoning. The socioeconomic block did not meet the .10 starting criterion that was established for variable entry and thus is not reported in the table. For the factor of child-centered parenting, depression predicted lower levels of reasoning, and accounted for 15% of the variance in this factor, over and above both sociodemographic and childhood history variables. Not shown is the finding that maternal childrearing history, when entered after depression in the third step of model equations, no longer contributed uniquely to mothers' child-centered parenting or reasoning. The fact that the initially significant contribution of maternal childrearing history was attenuated to nonsignificance after considering maternal depres-

TABLE 6. HIERARCHICAL REGRESSIONS FOR REPORTED PARENTING FACTORS

Dependent (Factor) or Predictor	R^2 Total	ΔR^2	ΔF	Model F
Child-centered parenting				
Step 1. Sociodemographics	.10	.10	11.81***	
Step 2. Childrearing history	.14	.05	3.04*	
Step 3. Maternal depression	.24	.0913	.23***	8.40***
Let situation go				
Step 1. Sociodemographics	.05	.05	6.36**	
Step 2. Childrearing history	.08	.03	1.75	
Step 3. Maternal depression	.08	.01	1.01	2.74*
Reasoning				
Step 1. Sociodemographics	—	—	—	
Step 2. Childrearing history	.05	.05	2.89†	
Step 3. Maternal depression	.20	.15	20.71***	9.17***

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

sion suggests that depression may mediate links between mothers' childrearing history and current parenting styles.

DISCUSSION

This investigation examined the sociodemographic and psychological determinants of parenting practices in a group of predominantly working- and middle-class African American mothers. As a first step, we sought to describe the nature of parenting practices in this underrepresented population. In accord with the findings of Kelley and colleagues (1993), we identified a range of parenting practices used by working- and middle-class African American mothers. We found that most mothers reported engaging in child-oriented approaches to discipline. These findings challenge prior characterizations of African American parents as primarily "power assertive," a view that is, in part, due to a prior focus on parents from lower socioeconomic status households and from dysfunctional families. Indeed, in our study, the disciplinary strategy that was most often reported was reasoning, a strategy characteristic of authoritative parenting. Physical punishment, a major component of power-assertive styles, was reported relatively infrequently.

Maternal depression and negative childrearing histories were inversely associated with child-centered parenting styles, and maternal education was positively associated with this style of parenting. These findings further support the suggestion that sociodemographic and psychological variables jointly contribute to variation in parenting behaviors (Elder, Nguyen, & Caspi, 1985; McLoyd, 1990). Moreover, the fact that these relations were obtained in a community sample suggests that parenting styles are influenced by sociodemographic factors and depression, even in relatively low-risk groups.

The fact that maternal education contributed uniquely to the factors of child-centered parenting and letting a situation go accords with the findings of others. In their review of the literature on socioeconomic status and parenting behavior, Hoff-Ginsberg and Tardif (1995) indicated that the education component of socioeconomic status plays a consistent role in explaining variance in parenting behaviors. Wilson, Kohn, Curry-El, and Hinton (1995), in their study of 382 African American families, concluded that there is a direct relationship between mothers' education and her childrearing behaviors.

Depression was an important correlate of reported parenting and disciplinary strategies, and this contributes to empirical research on relations between maternal depression and parenting during school-aged years, in particular. Much of the literature on maternal depression has focused on distressed mothers and infants, preschoolers or adolescents, with less emphasis on school-aged children. (See Field, 1995, for a review.) There is some empirical evidence that parenting practices that are authoritative and child centered are particularly challenging to parents during middle childhood, given the numerous transitions that occur at this time. Yet these practices are particularly crucial to positive outcomes in children (Collins, Harris, & Sussman, 1995). Further research on the influence of maternal depression on parenting styles during middle childhood in the context of mothers' socioeconomic status and their own upbringing seems warranted.

In this sample, depression appeared to compromise mothers' abilities to engage in more optimal forms of parenting—child-centered parenting and reasoning—but was not associated with negative forms of parenting, such as punishment or scolding. In accord with this finding, some investigators have suggested a deleterious effect of depression on more competent forms of parenting, such as responsiveness and communication (e.g., Breznitz & Sherman, 1987; Cohn et al., 1990), whereas others have identified associations between depression and harsher forms of interaction, such as yelling and physical punishment (Dumas & Wekerle, 1995; Jackson, 1993; McLoyd, 1990). Differences in these findings may be attributable to different developmental stages of children assessed across studies, different approaches to the assessment of parenting, or to different contextual backgrounds of study populations. For example, positive forms of parenting may be mostly affected in populations in which risk factors are low, as in the study presented here which focused mostly on educated, working-class or middle-income families. In contrast, depression, in the context of other risk factors, may exacerbate harsher, more negative forms of parenting. Thus, these findings point to an intriguing point of inquiry—to understand when, why, and how distinct forms of parenting are affected by measures of parents' psychological functioning, such as depression.

In addition, these findings extend the literature on the determinants of parenting by considering the role of depression with mothers' own childrearing history, a variable that has been considered less

often in the parenting literature, although intergenerational models of attachment highlight such histories as central. Here, the mother's childrearing history was associated with mothers' use of reasoning and child-centered parenting. However, the fact that childrearing history did not uniquely predict either reasoning or the child-centered factor after controlling for depression suggests that its influence may be explained by more proximal levels of maternal mental health. In contrast, depression related to reported parenting strategies, over and above childrearing history. In addition, sociodemographic variables, although not directly predicting the reasoning factor, predicted the factor of child-centered parenting that included reasoning. These findings complement the rather complex picture of how sociodemographic factors influence parenting practices. The effect of such factors on parenting is thought to vary with the dimension of parenting being assessed, as well as with the sociodemographic variables being examined (Hoff-Ginsberg & Tardif, 1995).

One of the limitations of this investigation is its reliance on maternal reports to assess parenting practices. Although there is evidence that self-report data about parenting practices relate to actual behaviors (Kochanska, Kuczynski, & Radke-Yarrow, 1989), the nature of these relations remains unclear (Tein, Roosa, & Michaels, 1994). Further research is needed to examine the extent to which self-report measures relate to parents' actual behavior with children and to children's report of the specific behaviors of their parents. Another limitation of this study is the self-selective nature of our sample. Although our recruitment efforts targeted diverse community agencies and institutions in the metropolitan area and although the final sample represented a wide range of working-class and middle-class African American mothers in New York City, all participants volunteered to be a part of our investigation. It is possible that mothers who volunteer for this type of study might be less likely to endorse physical punishment than those who do not volunteer. Alternatively, they might be more hesitant to report harsh disciplinary practices to an investigator.

The variability of parenting practices identified in this sample and the prevalence of inductive strategies and child-centered parenting styles highlight the importance of including working-class and middle-class, nonclinical samples in further investigations of the disciplinary practices of ethnic and minority parents. Nonetheless, despite the fact that these mothers were not, on average, a particularly distressed group, modest to moderate relations

were obtained among the measures of socioeconomic status, depression, childrearing history, and reported parenting styles. These findings underscore the importance of extending research on the determinants of parenting to both low- and high-risk minority populations to gain a fuller understanding of the factors that contribute to diverse parenting styles in underrepresented groups.

NOTE

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