

Parenting as Measured by the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire

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PREVIEW

A Doctoral Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Psychology
in the Department of Psychology at Pace University

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between parent behaviors, child development and subsequent child behavior outcomes has been examined. However, few tools have been developed and utilized to assess and quantify parenting behaviors in relationship to parent and child demographic characteristics. This study uses the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (PBQ), to examine whether parent and child backgrounds influence parents' perceptions of their parenting. Specifically, the present study examines the parenting characteristics identified in the Parent Development Theory (PDT) (i.e., bonding, discipline, education, general welfare and protection, responsivity and sensitivity) in relation to parent and child age, gender, ethnicity, and marital status.

Within this parent sample, findings reveal differences in parenting behaviors based on parental ethnicity. Specifically, discipline, general welfare and protection, responsivity and sensitivity, with regard to child rearing beliefs, appear less important to the Asian Pacific Islander population than to the African American/Black and Caucasian groups. In addition, this study suggests significant differences in parenting behaviors based on child gender. However, differences based on parent gender did not emerge. Specifically, both male and female parents in this sample place greater importance on being sensitive to and bonding with male rather than female children.

The findings of this study need to be examined with caution as limitations may stem from various sources. Although the percentage of respondents within each demographic group accurately reflect the occurrence of each ethnicity within the community sampled, the low number of actual surveys returned by Asian/Pacific Islander and Multi-Ethnic groups make it difficult to offer conclusions. A similar problem arises

when examining marital status given the low number of respondents identifying themselves as divorced or separated. The cohort is too small to offer conclusions regarding marital status.

Further, the distribution process utilized may have resulted in fewer research packets reaching parents than expected. Additionally, reduced interest by parents to respond to research related matters, in conjunction with the fact that the questionnaire was distributed late in the school year, may have impacted the low response rate. The limitations impact the results and implications of this study suggesting that further research is needed. Implications of this study and suggestions for future research are offered.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Families greatly influence children's development. Within the family structure parents assume the primary social role of encouraging and nurturing child socialization and development. Parenting knowledge regarding the parent role is acquired through education and experience (Lessuck-Namer, 1998) over the course of a lifetime (Mowder, 2005). Being a parent is considered one of the most demanding and complicated aspects of adulthood (Turiano, 2001).

The parent role is a somewhat subjective, learned social role that evolves as a person develops and engages in life experiences (Donnelly, 1994). These experiences mold and shape parent views and perceptions (Mowder, 2005). The dynamic and reciprocal nature of the parent-child relationship also significantly contributes to the socialization and development of both child and parent (Belsky, Lerner & Spanier, 1984). Belsky et al. (1984) maintain that child responsiveness to a parent influences the care that children elicit from parents and the reverse is true as well. Equally important is how parents feel about the relationship with their children and how they perceive their parent role. As a result, parents' perceptions of parenting impact children's overall development.

There are many complex dynamics influencing parent development which lead to the potential for variation and inconsistency in parenting (Turiano, 2001). Despite agreement regarding the challenges of parenting, the parent role, and the influence of parent perceptions on parent behavior, little research has been conducted to better understand parent perceptions of parenting (Turiano, 2001). A greater understanding of how these perceptions are formed may assist mental health professionals, educators, and school psychologists in providing services to

families. More specifically, mental health professionals could provide informed parent recommendations, regarding, for example, educational goals and discipline strategies.

According to Belsky et al. (1984), the study of family and parenting transformed between the 1970s and 1980s, initially focusing exclusively on the parent-child relationship before shifting focus to the interrelationship between parenting, marriage and child development. Some parenting theory (e.g., family systems, psychoanalytic theory) focuses on the interrelationship between multiple family subsystems (e.g., father-daughter relationship, mother-daughter relationship) (Gable, Belsky & Crnic, 1992) and the multiple family and non-family factors that influence parenting and child development (Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bronstein, 2000). During the last few decades of the twentieth century researchers produced an abundance of data on the concept of parenting, specifically examining parental influence on child behavior.

The relationship among parent behaviors, child development, and subsequent child behavior outcomes has been the subject of lengthy discussion in psychology (e.g., Barone, Hersen & Van Hasselt, 1998; Engler, 1995) and thoughts on this issue and subsequent theories have evolved over time. For example, personality theorists emphasize that personality evolves as a result of interactions with others (Barone, et al., 1998) while developmental theorists focus on how a child learns from individuals who shape their environment (Cook, 2000). More specifically, psychodynamic theorists indicate that behavior is a result of how an individual passes through and resolves underlying anxieties and specific developmental stages that emerge with maturity, consolidating the development of perspectives on social roles, including the parent role (Engler, 1995).

Social learning theory explains the adaptation of social behaviors through the principles and process of learning (Miller, 1993). Cognitive development perspective explains the acquisition of behavior as a subjective, life long process that is shaped by interaction with people, events and the environment (Turiano, 2001). The theoretical basis for the current study is the Parent Development Theory (PDT) (Mowder, 2005), which examines parenting from a cognitive developmental perspective. PDT was selected as the theoretical basis for this study because it considers parenting a life long learning process in which parents adapt their views to meet the needs of each child they parent (Mowder, Harvey, Moy & Pedro, 1995). PDT asserts the most common parent role characteristics include bonding, discipline, education, general welfare and protection, responsivity, and sensitivity (Mowder, 1993). These parenting characteristics are differentially implemented by parents to meet the developmental needs of their children (Mowder, 1993).

Since parents, their backgrounds and contextual factors, remain the critical element to understanding parent behavior, examining assessment tools quantifying parents' perceptions of parenting is useful. That is, measures that lead to an increased understanding of parents' perceptions of parenting and, ultimately, the parent role could inform professionals in their clinical work. However, a review of the professional literature reveals that few psychometrically sound parenting assessment measures exist. Those parenting measures that are available tend to be limited to specific aspects of parenting behavior, to specific uses such as parent training, and to determining parent efficacy and competence (e.g., The Parent Behavior Inventory (Lovejoy, Weis, O'Hare & Rubin, 1999), The Parent Behavior Scale (Ortiz, 1999), The Parenting Stress Index (Heinz & Grisso, 1996), The Ackerman-Schoendorf Scales of Parent Evaluation of Custody (The Separated Parenting Access and Resource Center, 2004)).

Seeking to improve upon this absence of parent assessment material, Mowder (1991) created the Parent Role Questionnaire (PRQ) which subsequently was examined psychometrically (Mowder, Harvey, Pedro, Rossen & Moy, 1993). The PRQ was developed through extensive research conducted with parents to determine parent views on parenting characteristics and is based on the theoretical framework of the Parent Role Development Model (PRDM), now called the Parent Development Theory (PDT) (Mowder, 2005). Consistent with the research literature, the PDT organizes parent perceptions of parenting into six basic characteristics: bonding, discipline, education, general welfare and protection, responsivity, and sensitivity. The outcome of research resulted in the development of the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (PBQ), a 38-item self-report questionnaire, based on the six basic PDT parenting characteristics (Mowder, 2000).

Being an effective mental health professional for children and families would seem to require knowledge of parenting and parenting beliefs. However, this information alone is not sufficient preparation for working with children and families in the United States (US) or elsewhere. The US is often referred to as a melting pot comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds (Levine & Perkins, 1997). However, the implications of diversity on parenting and how diversity may impact individuals' parenting beliefs have not been examined. Specifically, the relationship of variables such as age, ethnicity, and gender to parenting beliefs is unclear.

Understanding diversity in the context of parenting behaviors requires an examination of diversity in the US. Diversity in this country varies on national, state and city levels, and often changes from neighborhood to neighborhood (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003). According to the 2000 U.S. Census (US Bureau of the Census, 2003), the population in the US is 284,796,887.

Of that population, approximately 75% of respondents identify themselves as White, 12.3% identify as Black or African American, 12.5% identify as Hispanic or Latin, and 3.6% as Asian.

According to the US Bureau of the Census, (2003), these diversity statistics differ when examining responses of New York City (NYC) residents. With a population of approximately eight million, NYC tends to be a more diverse population than found nationally. Of respondents reporting in NYC, 44% identify as White, 26% as Black or African American, 27% as Hispanic or Latin, and 9.8% as Asian. On a national level, 11.1% identify as foreign born and 17.9% speak a language other than English at home, while in NYC 35.9% identify as foreign born and 47.6% speak a language other than English at home.

And, the diversity characteristics of specific communities, such as one Westchester County community, range between the national and city averages, more closely resembling the national statistics than NYC (US Bureau of the Census, 2003; New York State Education Department, 2004). One school in Westchester County, the one selected for this research study, reveals a profile resembling that of NYC. According to the New York State Education Department (2004), families in this school identify as 49.9% White, 26.0% identify as Black, 18.9% identify as Hispanic, and 5.2% identify as Asian/pacific/Islander.

Each of the diversity statistics (e.g., national, NYC) provide an indication of the diversity within the US. These statistics, indicating significant ethnic diversity at all levels (US Bureau of the Census, 2003; New York State Education Department, 2004), reinforce the need for cultural sensitivity and understanding of those working within diverse communities. The purpose of this study is to examine parenting behaviors in relation to parent and child demographic background information, including diversity. Of particular interest is whether parent and child characteristics, such as diversity and gender, influence parents' parenting perceptions. These

differences might be reflected in types of activities parents select for their child to participate in and vary according to both parent and child gender (Leaper, 2000; McHale et al., 1999). Indeed, the results of this study may clarify some of the connections between parent and child background and individuals' parenting perceptions. Thus, the results of this research may improve mental health professionals' understanding of parenting perceptions and behaviors, influencing their services to parents and children within diverse communities. With increased sensitivity to parents' views of parenting, professionals may help improve parents' parenting strategies in areas such as discipline, responsivity, and sensitivity, assisting parents in meeting their parenting goals.

More specifically, the purpose of the present study is to build upon the work done by Mowder (2000; 2005) regarding parenting behaviors, by utilizing the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire (PBQ) to examine similarities and differences in parenting perspectives. More specifically, the six basic parenting characteristics of bonding, discipline, education, general welfare and protection, responsivity and sensitivity are examined in relationship to a number of demographic variables. Thus, this research investigates parents' views of parenting, as measured by the PBQ, based on six different demographic variables (i.e., parent and child age, ethnicity, gender, and marital status). In addition, this research examines parents' perceptions of the six parenting characteristics' importance relative to child development (i.e., child's developmental level). Thus, examining parenting beliefs in light of parental and child characteristics forms the basis for this research.

Statement of Purpose

This study examines parenting behaviors as measured by parent responses to the PBQ based on the PDT. The responses are considered in light of parent and child age, ethnicity, gender, and marital status.

Research Questions

1. Are there significant differences in parenting behaviors, based on parental ethnicity, as measured by the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire?
2. Are there significant differences in parenting behaviors, based on gender of the child and parent, as measured by the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire?
3. Are there significant differences in parenting behaviors, based on age group of child and age group of parent, as measured by the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire?
4. Are there significant differences in parent behaviors, based on marital status, as measured by the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire?
5. What is the relationship among parenting characteristics and child age, ethnicity, and gender, as measured by the Parenting Behaviors Questionnaire?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of the research literature examining parent and child development, parent behaviors, and parent-child relations. Parent characteristics, parent perceptions and the development of the parenting role are explored. Research addressing parent and child demographic background information is presented as well as the relationship between parent characteristics and parent and child demographic background information.

The literature review provides an overview of the historical context for parenting research that lays the foundation for understanding the evolution and intricacies of the parent role. This is followed by a brief description of some prominent theoretical models describing parent-child relations and development including, for example, social learning theory, and attachment theory. In addition, a number of other perspectives on parenting (e.g., Galinsky, 1987) are discussed. Mowder's Parent Role Development model (PRDM) (Mowder et al., 1995), now termed the Parent Development Theory (PDT) (Mowder, 2005), considers parenting a life long learning process and is presented as the basis for this study. The six specific parent characteristics (i.e., bonding, discipline, education, general welfare and protection, responsiveness and sensitivity) forming the PRDM and PDT are then reviewed. Next, an examination of parenting behavior measures including information regarding the development of the Parenting Behavior Questionnaire (PBQ), and a review of alternative parenting behavior measures is presented. The concluding section presents literature on parent and child age, ethnicity, gender, and marital status and how these variables may relate to parenting behavior.

Historical Perspectives on Parenting Theories

The institution of family greatly influences child development. Although variations in what constitutes a family exist, families remain the structural unit in which nearly all children are raised (Belsky, Lerner & Spanier, 1984). According to Belsky et al. (1984), children are primarily socialized within families; the family provides children with emotional support, protection, education, and contributes to identity formation. Specifically, parents assume the social role of encouraging and nurturing child socialization and development. According to one point of view, parenting is a skill achieved through a combination of education and experience (Lessuck-Namer, 1998). As a result, parenting is one of the most demanding and complicated aspects of adulthood (Turiano, 2001) and many parents feel confused by the prospect of parenting (Chang & Ritter, 2004).

According to Belsky et al. (1984), parenting is a learned social role that evolves as a person develops. Parent development is subject to numerous influences including the parent-child relationship, family dynamics, sibling interactions, and culture. The dynamic and reciprocal nature of the parent-child relationship contributes to the socialization and development of both child and parent. The parent role is shaped by the world the individual inhabits and is influenced by the norms and expectations of the associated culture (Turiano, 2001). Parents' views and perceptions are also shaped through their own experiences of being parented as a child as well as being a parent (Mowder, 2005; Mowder et al., 1995). Mowder (1991) describes the parent role less in terms of acceptance and interpretation of parenting but rather as an individually understood role. As a result, parenting tends to be somewhat subjective, depending upon the nature and life experiences of those who parent (Donnelly, 1994).

The parent-child dynamic has additional implications with regard to the parent role. Belsky et al. (1984) referred to this dynamic as bidirectional, meaning the parent and child mutually influence their relationship. He explains that child responsiveness to a parent influences the care that child elicits from a parent and that the converse holds true. Equally important is how a parent feels about the relationship with the child, how they perceive the child, and how they perceive their parent role. As a result, a parent's perception of parenting impacts the overall development of their child.

Throughout the 20th century psychologists have investigated the processes of personality development and socialization (Lamb, Hwang, Ketterlinus & Fracasso, 1999). These studies, as early as the 1920's and 1930's, examined parent development, parent behaviors and parent-child relations. This early research was primarily the domain of psychoanalysts/psychodynamic therapists.

Psychodynamic Theory

Psychodynamic Theory emphasizes that personality evolves as a result of early life experiences and that behavior is a result of how an individual passes through and resolves underlying anxieties and specific developmental stages that emerge with maturity (Barone, et al., 1998). For a child, these early experiences are shaped by the interaction between their own libidinal needs and family environment, which are often at odds with each other (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Lamb, et al., 1999). In contrast, developmental theorists focus on how a child learns from individuals who shape their environment (Cook, 2000).

The psychodynamic perspective on parenting is anchored in the work of Freud (1923, 1940). Freud's personality development theory describes the early years of childhood as focusing on the primary roles of self preservation and the establishment of the mother and child

bond. This is followed by parental identification and related conflict resolution that impacts a child's future identity and relationships.

Freud explained "human psychological development to be a gradual progression from an initial state of undifferentiation and primitiveness to a final one of differentiation and structure" (Grotstein, 1973, p. 203). Through this process, Freud (1923, 1940) identified three aspects of personality that work in unison to move a child from a primitive to a more structured state, the id, ego and super-ego. Freud explained that the id follows the pleasure principle, the source of passion and impulse, while the ego represents common sense. The parent role is to facilitate the evolution of undifferentiated state to differentiated state by replacement of the pleasure principal with the reality principal (Grotstein, 1973). According to Freud (1923, 1940), the dependent nature of childhood increases parental influence and enables parents and substitute parents (eg., teachers, therapists) to accomplish this transition. Parents interpret morals of society that their children integrate as the super-ego part of their personality which functions as ones' conscience.

By the 1950's object relations theorists changed the focus of personality development by placing significance on relationships a child has with people and objects in their world (Grotstein, 1998). W.R.D. Fairbairn (1954) rejected Freud's major premises, believing the ego exists from birth. In fact, contrary to Freud's notion that the id follows the pleasure principle, Fairbairn posits that the id seeks to relate to others. Instead, Fairbairn emphasizes the impact of the experience a child has with the object/parent. The parent-child interaction is critical to the parent role and subsequent personality development of the child (Grotstein, 1998).

Contemporary Perspectives on Parenting Theory

Throughout the past three decades researchers have examined parenting and marriage in an effort to better understand their impact on child development, creating theories based on these

theoretical perspectives. According to Belsky et al. (1984), the study of family and parenting during the 1970's was divided between sociologists, who focused on the marital relationship, and psychologists, who focused on the parent-child relationship. As a result, parenting research from the 1970's (e.g., Belsky, 1981; Emery, 1982) focused on child development in the context of family, culture and community. Parenting research from the 1980's brought about greater focus on the interrelationship between parenting, marriage and child development. Some parenting theory (e.g., family systems, psychoanalytic theory) focuses on the interrelationship between multiple family subsystems (e.g., father-daughter relationship, mother-daughter relationship) (Gable, et al., 1992) and the multiple factors that influence parenting, family and child development (Collins, et al., 2000). For example, Gable et al. (1992) reported that troubled marriages are often associated with child behavior problems. Specifically, Gable et al. (1992) found infant behavior was intrusive when marital conflict occurred in the presence of the child while infant compliance was associated with marital accord.

Baumrind's Parenting Styles

One researcher that examined parent behavior and its impact on child development was Baumrind (1966, 1991, 1996). She presents four distinct parenting styles that integrate emotional and behavioral elements of parent beliefs and behaviors. Baumrind (1996) asserts the goals of childrearing are to "foster moral character and optimal confidence. Character is what it takes to will the good, and competence is what it takes to do good well" (p. 406). Baumrind (1991, 1996) identifies four parenting styles including authoritative, authoritarian, rejecting-neglecting, and permissive. She describes authoritative as the most effective parenting style; parents simultaneously implement highly responsive and demanding behavior by using rational explanations to foster independence and the ability to connect to others. Authoritarian parenting

focuses more on demanding obedience rather than responding to child demands. Permissive parenting focuses on responding to the needs of children without appropriate limit setting. Rejecting-neglecting parenting style describes disengaged parents who ignore childrearing responsibilities. Baumrind asserts that children's needs change according to their developmental level. For example, preschool children might require more structure from parents than adolescents and adolescents might respond better to a balance of parental demands and responsiveness.

Attachment Theory

John Bowlby (1969) observed that infant attachment to a caretaker is a biologically predetermined critical aspect of normal child development and is considered a life-long process. Certain instinctive behaviors such as a baby's smiles, babbling or cries are evidence of how a baby is naturally invested with behaviors will evoke a mother's instinctive attachment behaviors and innate caretaking responses. The aim of the infant is to be near the caretaker and this desire for closeness may also occur with someone other than the caretaker, particularly someone who feeds the baby.

According to Bowlby (1969), this close emotional bond to caretaker is essential during the first year of life. The work of Erik Erikson (1968) also supports this notion. Erikson, in the context of his stage theory of development, believed that the first year of life was the trust versus mistrust stage. According to Erikson, healthy attachment fosters a sense of trust regarding one's own self and the world. These attachment behaviors toward the caretaker intensify between six to nine months and continue through the end of the child's third year, when a child is better able to tolerate separation from the caretaker (Bowlby, 1969). While a school age child can tolerate being out of a caretaker's presence, they will still seek their caretakers comfort in times of both