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Fostering Prosocial Behaviors in Mexican and European American Adolescents: Parenting and Gender Roles Considered

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Abstract

Research demonstrates that parents influence the prosocial development of their children (Carlo & De Guzman, 2006). Parents engage in a number of practices that socialize and shape the pro-social and moral tendencies of their children. Particular styles of parenting have been the focus of prior scholarly research, namely responsive and demanding parenting (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Furthermore, there is research suggesting that parenting styles might be associated with prosocial behaviors in different ways across distinct ethnic groups (Carlo & DeGuzman, 2006). Cultural values might mediate the relations between parenting styles and pro-social behaviors (Carlo & DeGuzman, 2006), and that parenting styles might be related to different forms of helping (Carlo et al., in press). The current study will examine the relationship between parenting and pro-social behaviors and the moderating effect of gender roles. Participants included 314 Mexican American and European American adolescents (206 Mexican Americans, 50% girls, mean age = 10.97 years).

Participants completed measures of parental responsiveness and demandingness, traditional gender roles, and pro-social behaviors. Preliminary structural equation modeling (models had adequate fit, CFI>.95, RMSEA<.08) indicated that responsive parenting negatively predicted traditional gender roles. Traditional gender roles were positively associated with public and anonymous prosocial behaviors and negatively associated with altruistic prosocial behaviors. Further analyses will examine the moderating effects of gender and ethnicity. Discussion will focus on the role of parenting styles and cultural values in moral development among Latino youth, and the importance of studying different forms of helping behaviors.

Keywords: prosocial behavior, parenting styles, cultural values

Introduction

Parents engage in a number of practices that socialize and shape their children's social development. Two dimensions of parenting that have been examined are "responsiveness" and "demandingness" (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Responsive parenting is parenting that is characterized by high levels of warmth and support. Responsive parents meet their children's needs appropriately and are actively involved in their lives (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). High levels of control and high expectations characterize demanding parenting. Demanding parents expect their children to follow the regulations that they provide and to meet their expectations (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). Responsiveness and demandingness are both associated with positive social behaviors in children and adolescents (Carlo, McGinley, Hayes, Batenhorst, & Wilkinson, 2007).

One specific behavioral outcome of responsive and demanding parenting is prosocial behaviors. Prosocial behaviors are defined as actions intended to benefit others. These positive behaviors include: 1) helping others; 2) comforting others when they are upset; and 3) engaging in any other oriented actions (Carlo & Randall, 2002). Specifically, responsive parenting is thought to facilitate prosocial behaviors through modeling and guidance. Responsive parenting has been positively linked to social competencies and prosocial behaviors (See Carlo, 2006). Demandingness is also hypothesized to facilitate these prosocial behaviors when levels of such parenting are moderate. Parents who are moderately demanding provide reasonable standards for moral actions. In contrast, parents who are highly demanding tend to be harsh and strict in punishing children, which undermines moral development and models aggressive behaviors. High levels of demandingness have been negatively linked to prosocial behaviors (Carlo, Fabes, Laible, & Kupanoff, 1999; Janssens & Dekovic, 1997).

Despite the evidence on the importance of parenting and prosocial behaviors, there are several limitations in this research. First, the majority of the current research has been conducted with European

or European American samples (Janssens & Dekovic, 1997, Laible, Carlo, Torquati, & Ontai, 2004). Research with ethnic minority groups is lacking, including research with Mexican American adolescents. It is important to examine these relations in minority groups because little is known about positive development in these groups. A second limitation is that in the current research, the potential mediators examined have been sociocognitive variables, such as moral reasoning and sympathy. Culture-specific values have not been examined as potential mediators between parenting and prosocial behaviors. Finally, previous research has considered pro-social behaviors as a unidimensional construct rather than a multidimensional construct composed of different types of prosocial behaviors. It is important to examine the unique types of prosocial behaviors and how parenting differentially impacts these behaviors (Carlo et al., 2007). These limitations will be addressed in the proposed study.

Although there is substantial research on prosocial development, studies of prosocial development in Latinos are lacking. The lack of research on positive social outcomes, such as prosocial behaviors, may contribute to deficit approaches and pathologically focused theories on Latino youth development (Coll, 1995). Conducting research on prosocial development in Latino adolescents could inform traditional theories of prosocial development. There is limited research with Latino adolescents on parenting and prosocial behaviors. One longitudinal study with adolescents in Spain found that parental warmth, sympathy, and prosocial moral reasoning predicted youth prosocial behaviors (Carlo, Mestre, Samper, Tur, & Armenta, 2011). However, strict control was not significantly related to prosocial behaviors over time. This may be slightly related to negative prosocial behaviors (Carlo et al., 2011). A study was conducted with Mexican American adolescents, examining parenting and prosocial behaviors (Carlo, Knight, McGinley, & Hayes, 2011). The results demonstrated that parental inductions that are positive discipline practices were positively associated with sympathy. Sympathy was positively associated with specific types of prosocial behaviors (Carlo et al.,

2011). Therefore, limited research evidence suggests that parenting is related to prosocial behaviors in Mexican American adolescents. The present study was designed to further examine relations between parenting and prosocial behaviors in Mexican American adolescents.

A potential mechanism for examining the role of culture in Mexican American adolescents and prosocial behavior is to examine specific cultural values. According to cultural socialization theories (Knight, Bernal, & Carlo, 1995; Raffaelli, Carlo, Carranza, Gonzales-Kruger, 2005), cultural and social experiences impact individual sociocognitive variables, personal beliefs and values in adolescents, causing an impact in their behaviors. When applying this model, acculturative stress may impact cognitions, such as values, impacting prosocial competencies (Knight, Bernal, & Carlo, 1995; Raffaelli, Carlo, Carranza, Gonzales-Kruger, 2005). These culture-specific models are important to consider when examining prosocial behaviors among Mexican American adolescents.

Latino families traditionally endorse specific cultural values that may mediate the relations between parenting and prosocial behaviors and lead to different developmental outcomes (Carlo & DeGuzman, 2009). Scholars have identified several specific cultural values, including: 1) familism; 2) respect; and 3) traditional gender roles (Knight et al., 2010). One cultural value that may be relevant when examining prosocial behaviors among youth is traditional gender roles. Traditional gender roles can be defined as endorsing the idea that men and women have different roles and should behave accordingly (Knight et al., 2010). Traditional gender roles may facilitate or inhibit certain types of prosocial behaviors. Although there is no specific research examining traditional gender roles and prosocial behaviors, researchers have demonstrated that other cultural values such as familism, are related to prosocial behaviors in Mexican American adolescents (Armenta, Knight, Carlo, & Jacobson, 2011).

The proposed study will examine traditional gender roles as a potential mediator of the relations between parenting and prosocial behaviors. Research

has indicated that Latino families tend to endorse traditional gender roles. Latino children also tend to show gender role differentiation at earlier ages than their European American peers (Salomon, 1995). The concepts of Marianismo and Machismo are traditional gender roles in Latino culture. Marianismo is characterized by attitudes and behaviors such as acting as a source of emotional strength for the family, maintaining harmony in the family, remaining subordinate to authority, and remaining virtuous (Castillo, Perez, Castillo, & Ghosheh, 2010). Machismo is the stereotypic male role characterized by a man who demands respect and engages in aggressive and dominant behaviors (Falicov, 2010). This construction of masculinity is a simplification of the Latino male gender role and has recently been questioned in research because of the limitations it places on Latino men. It has still remained a consistent stereotype and should be considered when discussing the value of traditional gender roles in many Latino families. Research demonstrates that feminine orientation is related to more internal moral reasoning as opposed to approval-oriented reasoning. Masculine orientation was associated with higher levels of approval-based reasoning (Carlo, Koller, Eisenberg, DaSilva, & Frohlich, 1996). These results indicate that moral reasoning differs depending on the gender roles the individual identifies with. If adolescents are socialized towards traditional gender roles, these differences may be more pronounced than adolescents who are socialized in more androgynous or undifferentiated manners. This reasoning also may translate into differences in prosocial behaviors. It is important to consider how parenting impacts the development of traditional gender roles in Latino families. Those adolescents who endorse these gender roles may be encouraged to engage in prosocial behaviors differently depending on their gender. It is also important to consider how parenting and cultural values may impact specific prosocial behaviors in different ways.

Recent research suggests that prosocial behaviors are multidimensional and should not be examined as a unidimensional construct. The prosocial “tendencies-measure” was developed based on

theory and prior research and was administered to a sample of college students (Carlo & Randall, 2002). The results yielded six subscales of unique types of prosocial behaviors: 1) altruistic; 2) public; anonymous; 3) emotional; 4) dire; and 5) compliant prosocial behaviors. Altruistic behaviors are actions that benefit others with no expected gain to the self. Helping behaviors done in the presence of others are referred to as public prosocial behaviors. Anonymous behaviors include actions conducted without the knowledge of others. Emotional prosocial behaviors are expressed in emotionally evocative situations, such as comforting another individual. Dire prosocial behaviors refer to helping in crisis situations. Finally, compliant prosocial behaviors include helping when directed, such as helping the family when asked (Carlo & Randall, 2002). Therefore, an additional purpose of the present study was to examine whether parenting styles are related to specific forms of prosocial behaviors.

To summarize, the proposed study will address the current gaps in the research by examining mediating actions of traditional gender roles in relation to demanding parenting and different forms of prosocial behaviors, and to compare those relations in a sample of Mexican American and European American adolescents.

Method & Participants

The current study is a secondary analysis project using data from the NSF funded Arizona Family CARE project [to Gustavo Carlo (BNS 0132302) and George Knight (BNS 0132409)]. The participants were 314 Mexican American and European American adolescents. The study consisted of 206 Mexican Americans, 50% of girls and boys, both with a mean age of 10.97 years. The adolescents were from public schools in the Southwest region of the United States. The average years of education for the parents of the adolescents were 11 for fathers and 10.5 for mothers.

Measures

Participants completed measures of “responsiveness” and “demandingness” (Darling &

Toyokawa, 1997). An example of an item assessing demandingness is, “My mother really expects me to follow family rules.” An example of a responsiveness item is, “My mother spends time just talking to me.”. The responsiveness and demandingness subscales are each made up of five items.

Students also completed a measure of their endorsement of traditional gender roles (Mexican American Cultural Values Scale; Knight et. al, 2010, 15 items, $\alpha=.84$ for Mexican Americans/.85 for European Americans). An example of an item is, “Men should earn most of the money for the family so women can stay home and take care of the children and the home.”

Students also reported on their tendency to engage in three common types of prosocial behaviors: 1) dire; 2) emotional; and 3) compliant (Carlo et al., 2003). Dire prosocial behaviors ($\alpha=.69/.63$) included helping others in emergency situations. An example of an item assessing dire prosocial behaviors is, “I tend to help people who are in real crisis or need.”. Emotional prosocial behaviors ($\alpha=.76/.75$) include any helping behaviors in emotionally evocative situations. An example of an emotional item is, “It makes me feel good when I can comfort someone who is really upset.” Compliant behaviors ($\alpha=.52/.57$) included obeying orders and following directions. An example of a compliant item is, “I never wait to help others when they ask for it.”.

Results

Structural equation modeling was conducted using AMOS to examine the models for each group (models had adequate fit, $CFI>.95$, $RMSEA<.08$). The results indicated that responsive parenting negatively predicted traditional gender roles (Mexican Americans $=-.30$ /European Americans $=-.36$). Demanding parenting was not associated with traditional gender roles for either group. For both groups, traditional gender roles was positively associated with public (Mexican Americans $=.32$ /European Americans $=.46$) and anonymous (Mexican Americans $=.17$ /European Americans $=.28$) prosocial behaviors and negatively associated with altruistic (Mexican Americans $=-.32$ /European Americans $=-.40$) prosocial behaviors.

Discussion

Overall, findings suggest that responsive and demanding parenting were associated with prosocial behaviors in both Mexican American and European American adolescents. Furthermore, parenting styles were related to traditional gender roles, and traditional gender roles were associated with prosocial behaviors for both ethnic groups. Specifically, the results indicated that for both Mexican American and European American adolescents, responsive parenting was negatively associated with traditional gender roles. In contrast, demanding parenting did not predict traditional gender roles for either group. These findings suggest that responsive, warm parenting may foster endorsement of less traditional gender roles; perhaps exposure to nurturing parents nullifies differences in this value between boys and girls. However, traditional gender role values were also associated with prosocial behaviors. Specifically, adolescents who endorse traditional gender roles are more likely to engage in public and anonymous types of prosocial behaviors. They are also less likely to engage in altruistic prosocial behaviors. Perhaps adolescents who value more traditional gender roles view helping anonymously and in public as traditional forms of service to others. However, such individuals may also be more likely to expect self-reward for their actions.

To summarize, these findings also further illustrate the importance of examining prosocial behaviors as distinct and multidimensional. These results can inform previous theories of prosocial development because they contribute to the understanding of the complexity of these behaviors and the importance of examining cultural values as mechanisms in the developmental process.

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