Associations between Parental Disciplinary Practices, Familism, and Prosocial Behavior in European- and Mexican-American Children

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Introduction

Empirical findings suggest that parental disciplinary practices focused on explaining rules and punishment (i.e., positive induction) are linked to positive developmental outcomes (Macoby & Matia, 1983). The effectiveness of parental disciplinary practices on prosocial behaviors may further be contingent upon the quality and support of the parent-child relationship (Grieser & Goodnow, 1994; Koshanska, 1995). Responsive parenting, which encourages open communication, emotional sensitivity, and warmth, has been found to predict prosocial behaviors (Eisenberg et al., 2006).

Despite the growing interest in research on prosocial development, much of this research has focused on understanding discipline styles while considering potential influences such as familism (i.e. strength of ties and obligation towards kin), a value which is promoted differently across cultures (de Guzman & Carlo, 2004; Knight et al., 1995). For many Latinos, the priority of familism may explain parents’ influence on children’s behavior. Thus, to better understand the relations between parenting and prosocial behaviors across different cultures, the role of cultural values needs to be considered.

Current research also suggests the need to study specific forms of prosocial behavior (Carlo et al., 2010). Although studies of primarily White European American adolescents have indicated that parental disciplinary practices predict prosocial behaviors, research examining the role of parenting in predicting specific forms of prosocial behaviors across different cultures is nonexistent. Given that Latinos report higher levels of familism than European Americans (e.g., Fuligni et al., 1999), parenting may better predict prosocial behaviors commonly exhibited towards family members in Mexican American youth as compared to European American youth.

The present study was designed to examine the role of parental responsiveness and familism in the associations between positive inductions and prosocial behaviors in Mexican American and European American youth.

Method

Participants: Participants included 207 Mexican-American (MA) children (102 boys, M age = 10.91 years, SD = 8.4) and 108 European-American (EA) children (54 boys, M age = 11.07 years, SD = 7.7). Participants were interviewed in English at home or another location of their choosing using a structured interview format and received $25 compensation.

Measures: For all measures, items were coded so that higher scores indicate more of the construct. Items were summed and averaged to obtain scale scores.

Positive Induction: The positive induction subscale of the Parental Disciplinary Styles Inventory (Inglisborty et al., 2003) measure has 11 items (MA Cronbach’s u = .83, EA Cronbach’s u = .80). Sample item is “This parent says nice things about you.”

Responsiveness: The Parental Inddisciplinary II responsiveness subscale (Darling & Toyokawa, ND) has five items (MA Cronbach’s u = .40, EA Cronbach’s u = .61). Sample item is “My mother spends time just talking to me.”

Familism: The value and centrality of the family was measured by combining three familism subscales—Support and Emotional Closeness, Obligations, and Family as Reference—of the Mexican American Cultural Values Scale (Knight et al., 2010; MA Cronbach’s u = .84, EA Cronbach’s u = .85). Sample item is “When it comes to important decisions, the family should ask for advice from close relatives”.

Prosocial Behavior: The three subscales of the Positive Induction Tendency Measure (Carlo & Randall, 2002) were used to construct composite scores (MA Cronbach’s u = .52, EA Cronbach’s u = .57). Sample items are “When people ask me to help them, I don’t hesitate,” “I help others especially when they are really emotional,” and “I help others especially when they are really emotional”.

Results

Variables were mean-centered before creating the interaction term. A series of joint-identified models, estimated using SEM analysis in Mplus 5.1 and bootstrapping, first fit moderation models then added familism as a potential mediator (i.e., mediated moderation; Muller et al. 2005). Overall, for the Mexican-American children, parent responsiveness moderated the relation between positive induction and compliant prosocial behaviors in the Mexican American sample, indicating a mediated moderation. For the European American sample, the path from positive induction to emotional prosocial behavior became nonsignificant after adding familialism to the model, indicating full mediation.

Discussion

Results indicate consistent cultural differences in the moderating effect of parental responsiveness on the relations between positive induction and prosocial behavior, and the mediating effect of familialism on these moderating effects. For Mexican American youth, higher levels of responsiveness and induction multiplicatively predicted high levels of compliant and emotional prosocial behaviors, and familialism explained the predictive effect of these parenting variables. In contrast, for European American youth, induction nonsignificantly predicted these forms of prosocial behaviors but there were no significant moderating effects. These findings underscore the importance of the family affective climate and familial values in accounting for the influence of parenting on prosocial development in Mexican American children.

For the Mexican-American sample, the path from positive induction to emotional prosocial behavior was expressed multiplicatively, positive induction, and the interaction between responsiveness and positive induction (1a). For Mexican American adolescents, the positive relationship between positive induction and emotional prosocial behavior was even stronger for those with higher positive responsiveness. For the European American subgroup, the interaction term was nonsignificant. Model 1b included familialism as a predictor, which washed out the interaction of responsiveness and positive induction for the Mexican American sample, indicating a mediated moderation. For the European American sample, the path from positive induction to emotional prosocial behavior became nonsignificant after adding familialism to the model, indicating full mediation.

Model 2: Model 2a had compliant prosocial behavior as the outcome, and model 2b included familialism as a predictor. The same pattern of findings emerged as Models 1a-b, except for the European American sample, familialism was not a mediator.

Model 3: Model 3a (not depicted) had dir prosocial behavior as the outcome, and model 3b included familialism as a predictor. For Mexican Americans, the path from positive induction to dir prosocial behavior became nonsignificant upon adding familialism to the model, otherwise, the pattern of findings was similar to the previous models. For European Americans, familialism was not a mediator.

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