



The role of parenting and personal characteristics on deviant peer association among European American and Latino adolescents

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ABSTRACT

This study examined both mothers' and fathers' parenting (positive and negative) and adolescents' personal characteristics (religiosity, social initiative, aggression, depression) in relation to perceived deviant peer association for European American and Latino adolescents. Using structural equation modeling, adolescents' reports of positive or negative mothering and fathering were found to be related to adolescents' personal characteristics, and these characteristics were, in turn, related to perceived deviant peer association. Ethnic differences in means were found in both parenting and outcome variables, with European American adolescents reporting higher levels of positive parenting and social initiative, and lower levels of perceived deviant peer association than Latino adolescents. Despite these mean differences, no ethnic differences were found in the overall measurement or structural model, suggesting that this process functions similarly for these two ethnic groups.

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1. Introduction

When examining precursors to adolescent problem behaviors, it is valuable to take a social-psychological approach, considering both personal and situational variables that interact to increase risk for, or protection against, negative outcomes. Problem behavior theory, for example, suggests that adolescents' socialization contexts (e.g., parents and peers) and personal characteristics (e.g., personality, behavior, beliefs) interact to form a web of causation that collectively contributes to adolescents' tendency toward risk behaviors (Jessor, 1998). Although this framework is helpful, additional process models (e.g., Patterson, 1986) have clarified the possible direction of effects between these variables by suggesting that tumultuous parent-child relationships often lead to noncompliant child behaviors, which continue to exacerbate these family interactions. Then, these children seek out peer contexts with similar patterns of noncompliance, which often is associated with problem behaviors in adolescence.

Despite strong support for these complex or circular theories of problem behavior, a large portion of the research literature has focused on peers' unidirectional impact on adolescent behaviors, while ignoring the simultaneous contributions of various factors to adolescent risk behaviors. In addressing this limitation, the purpose of the current study was to examine the role of parenting and youth characteristics as they relate to adolescents' deviant peer association. In addition, given the relative dearth of information on this process for ethnic minorities, the current study addressed this limitation by examining this process for both

European American and Latino adolescents, as Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the United States and among the fastest growing minority populations (Guzmán, 2001).

2. Literature review

2.1. The role of parenting on adolescents' personal characteristics

Numerous studies support the continued importance of parenting on youth outcomes, including behaviors that are important predictors of adolescents' association with deviant peers. For the purposes of this study, discussion of parenting will focus on both positive and negative aspects of parenting that have been found to be particularly salient during adolescence (Steinberg, 2001). Because research has consistently highlighted the importance of parental support, autonomy, and behavioral control (often measured as parental knowledge), and the detriment of parental psychological control and authoritarian parenting (especially during adolescence; Barber, Stolz, & Olsen, 2005; Steinberg, 2001), the current study focused on parental acceptance, autonomy granting, and knowledge as measures of positive parenting; and on psychological control, and inconsistent and harsh discipline as measures of negative parenting. In addition, in light of continued research highlighting the unique roles of mothers and fathers on child and adolescent outcomes (e.g., Barber et al., 2005; Day & Padilla-Walker, 2009), we examined these aspects of parenting separately for mothers and fathers.

In examining how these aspects of parenting are related to characteristics and behaviors in European American and Latino youth, research suggests that parental support is negatively related to adolescents' aggression (Carlo, Roesch, & Melby, 1998; Martinez & Eddy, 2005) and depressive symptoms (Allen, Porter, McFarland, McElhaney, & Marsh,

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2007; Dearing, 2004), and is positively related to adolescents' religiosity (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999) and social initiative (Barber et al., 2005; Bradford et al., 2004). Parental autonomy granting is related to less rebellion and less negativism, and more maturity and closeness to parents in European American and Latino adolescents (Bomar & Sabatelli, 1996; Fuligni, 1998), while parental knowledge is related to lower levels of adolescent externalizing and internalizing behaviors (Kerr, Beck, Shattuck, Kattar, & Uriburu, 2003; Stattin & Kerr, 2000).

Similarly, for both European Americans and Latinos, research has demonstrated that parental psychological control is positively related to adolescent depression and antisocial behaviors (Barber et al., 2005; Bradford et al., 2004; Loukas, Paulos, & Robinson, 2005), while coercive and authoritarian parenting is positively related to delinquent behavior and deviant peer association (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Wu, 1991). Research findings for Latino and European American populations demonstrate that inconsistent discipline is related positively to conduct problems (De La Rosa, Rice, & Rugh, 2007; Gardner, 1989) and aggression (Sawin & Parke, 1979); and that harsh discipline is related positively to children's aggression (Weiss, Dodge, Bates, & Pettit, 1992) and externalizing behaviors (Eamon & Mulder, 2005; Nix et al., 1999).

Previous research has also shown a consistent trend of healthy parenting practices/styles being negatively related to a variety of deleterious adolescent behaviors such as aggressive behavior and disobedience (Kandel, 1990), and general child behavior problems (Linville et al., 2010). Kandel (1990) found that harsh parenting disciplinary actions, or even parental discrepancies over discipline, correlates with aggressive adolescent behavior and adolescents who were at a higher risk of being disobedient to their parents. In addition, Linville et al. (2010) analyzed the relationship between parenting practices and couple satisfaction with child behavior problems and found that marital couple dissatisfaction predicted child behavior problems longitudinally. Taken together, this body of research is well-established in suggesting the salience of both positive and negative parenting, and highlights these aspects of parenting as playing a central role in the personal characteristics of adolescents.

2.2. Personal characteristics as predictors of deviant peer association

Although research suggests that parenting has a strong, direct correlation with adolescent deviant peer association (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Conger, 1991; Weaver & Prellow, 2005), many studies have examined the topic without concurrently examining the individual characteristics that might incline youth toward, or away from, associations with antisocial peers. Indeed, research suggests that adolescent behaviors, interests, beliefs, personalities, and tendencies relate to their propensity to select or associate with peers who are similar to themselves (Maggs & Galambos, 1993; Patterson, 1986; Simons et al., 1991a; Snyder et al., 2005). For example, Brown, Mounts, Lamborn, and Steinberg (1993) found that adolescent characteristics such as grade-point average, drug use, and level of self-reliance mediated the relation between parenting and adolescents' peer group affiliation. In addition, a longitudinal study by Maggs and Galambos (1993) found that adolescents' own problem behaviors mediated the relation between parent-adolescent conflict and deviant peer association. Other studies have also found that conduct problems during kindergarten (Snyder et al., 2005) and problems at school (Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Conger, 1991) correlated with later deviant peer association.

To further support the role of adolescents' personal characteristics on their subsequent deviant peer association, research has found that maladaptive characteristics such as self-rejection, deviance, substance use, and problems at school are positively related to deviant peer association (Kaplan, Johnson, & Bailey, 1987; Murguia, Chen, & Kaplan, 1998; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Conger, 1991). Although this body of research is relatively well established, there is much less research examining *positive* personal characteristics that might decrease the

probability that adolescents will associate with deviant peers. Although the literature regarding positive characteristics is lacking, existing studies identify personal religiosity as a protective factor mediating relations between parenting and children's risky outcomes (e.g., Kogan et al., 2008). Additionally, religiosity (e.g., Hardy & Raffaelli, 2003) and social competence/initiative (e.g., Lansford et al., 2006) are consistently and negatively associated with negative adolescent outcomes. Thus, in an effort to study the topic utilizing a balanced approach, we examined the role of adolescents' personal characteristics that might decrease (i.e., religiosity, social initiative) or increase (i.e., aggression, depression) adolescents' tendencies to associate with deviant peers.

2.3. Ethnicity

The vast majority of studies examining the concurrent role of parents and peers on adolescents' deviant behavior have been conducted with European American samples, to the exclusion of Latinos (Bámaca & Umaña-Taylor, 2006) and other ethnic groups. Although there are few studies to guide hypothesis development, research does suggest that parenting and family-level support (as a function of the cultural value of *familismo*) may be particularly relevant as a protective factor in helping decrease the influence of delinquent peers in the lives of Latino youth (Bámaca & Umaña-Taylor, 2006; Frauenglass, Routh, Pantin, & Mason, 1997).

In previous studies of Latino and European American samples, ethnicity-based mean differences have been noted both in terms of parenting (e.g., Finkelstein, Donenberg, & Martinovich, 2001; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007) and outcomes (e.g., McLaughlin, Hilt, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2007). However, although findings are somewhat mixed (see Murguia et al., 1998), studies have demonstrated comparable findings between these two ethnic groups in terms of the strength and significance of relationships between specific parenting behaviors and youth outcomes (e.g., Barrera, Biglan, Ary, & Li, 2001; Duncan, Duncan, Biglan, & Ary, 1998), suggesting the possibility that the role of parenting and personal behaviors on deviant peer association may function similarly across these two ethnic groups. It is also important to note that mean differences, based on ethnicity, may not translate to differences that make a difference. This can be seen in studies where significant mean differences were found in scale scores for Latinos and European Americans but the associations between variables were found to be similar and even invariant across ethnic groups (e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2001; Hovell et al., 1994; Vazsonyi & Keiley, 2007). Although we did not expect differences in associations as a function of ethnicity, because findings in this regard are somewhat mixed, in the current study we initially ran separate statistical models for European Americans and Latinos to allow us to examine the potential for both mean differences and process differences across the two ethnic groups.

2.4. Hypotheses

Given research suggesting the importance of both parental socialization and personal characteristics on adolescents' peer associations (Brown et al., 1993; Maggs & Galambos, 1993; Patterson, 1986), the current study used structural equation modeling to examine how adolescents' reports of positive and negative mothering and fathering were related to adolescents' personal characteristics (positive and negative), and how these characteristics, in turn, were related to adolescents' perception of deviant peer association. First, based on existing research (Barber et al., 2005; Simons, Whitbeck, Conger, & Conger, 1991; Weiss et al., 1992), it was expected that positive parenting would be positively related to adolescents' religiosity and social initiative, and negatively related to adolescents' aggression and depression. In turn, it was expected that negative parenting would be negatively related to adolescents' religiosity and social initiative, and positively related to adolescents' aggression and depression. Second, we hypothesized that adolescents' religiosity and

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