Race/Ethnic Differences in Father Involvement in Two-Parent Families: 
Culture, Context, or Economy

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ABSTRACT

Race/Ethnic Differences in Father Involvement in Two-Parent Families: Culture, Context, or Economy

This paper examines the contribution of economic circumstances, neighborhood context, and cultural factors to explaining race/ethnic differences in fathering in two-parent families. Data come from the 1997 Child Development Supplement to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics, a nationally representative sample of children under age 13. Black children’s fathers exhibit less warmth but monitor their children more, Hispanic fathers monitor their children less, and both minority groups exhibit more responsibility for childrearing than white fathers. Economic circumstances contribute to differences in paternal engagement and control, while neighborhood factors contribute to differences in warmth and responsibility. Cultural factors such as intergenerational fathering and gender-role attitudes contribute to explaining control and responsibility on the part of both blacks and Hispanics.
INTRODUCTION

The lag in academic achievement of minority compared with nonminority students is a critical national problem (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). While the substantial socioeconomic difference between their families is a key factor in achievement differentials, the gap between minority and white students is present or even greater among middle-income than low-income families (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Contributing factors other than income may involve parenting practices. While at least one study has examined maternal behavior (Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov & Crane, 1998), few have examined the paternal side. A father’s emotional investment, attachment, and provision of resources are associated with children’s cognitive development, and social competence (Lamb, 1997; Pleck, 1997), and such investment varies widely. Differential achievement among various groups may result from differential father involvement (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Yet, in spite of the growing body of research examining fathers and fathering, research focuses primarily on majority, not minority, families (McAdoo, 1988).

In addition, research often focuses on father involvement by fathers outside the home rather than by coresidential fathers (Mott, 1990; Seltzer & Bianchi, 1988). Minority children are especially likely to grow up without a father present (Hernandez, 1993). While the part played by absent fathers is important, it is also important to assess fathering behavior in two-parent families; research has found pre-divorce behavior to explain much of the relationship between divorce and children’s outcomes, particularly for boys (Cherlin & et al., 1991). Fathers who are more involved with children predivorce may remain more involved postdivorce. Including remarriage families is important; little research exists on fathering after divorce and remarriage.
Fathering patterns may vary by race/ethnicity for several reasons. Different fathering patterns by race/ethnicity may be due to different economic circumstances and neighborhood environments. Differential paternal involvement may also result from attitudes and values which are cultural in origin, since parenting occurs in a social context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Given that fathering plays an important part in children’s development, research is needed to determine whether economic conditions, cultural beliefs, or other factors are more important in explaining majority-minority fathering differences. Each has very different implications for public policy efforts to increase father involvement.

This paper examines factors associated with differential involvement with fathers among black, white, and Hispanic children in two-parent families, using data drawn from a new study of children and their parents conducted in 1997. This paper takes advantage of a rich set of parenting measures compared to those used in past studies, a new set of measures of the time parents spend with individual children, and attitude and behavior data obtained directly from both mothers and fathers. While many studies of fathers and fathering are based upon small selective samples, this study is based upon a large nationally representative data base which can be generalized to all children living in two-parent families in the United States.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Key Parenting Practices

Children learn through interacting with and observing parents (Bandura, 1969), and such learning is affected by the level of interaction or engagement (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov & Levine, 1985). Parents also vary in the degree of responsibility they assume for their children.
Responsibility encompasses a father’s contribution to his family in his role as economic provider (McAdoo, 1988; Pleck, 1997), and employment and work hours are key indicators of this dimension. However, responsibility also encompasses a degree of management of the child’s welfare—making sure that the child is fed, clothed, housed, monitored, managed, examined by physicians, and cared for when needed, a dimension which has not been examined in the context of race/ethnic differences.

Additionally, most developmental psychologists argue that the quality of parenting and of the parent-child relationship are crucial to developing competent children. According to Baumrind's typology (1967; 1978; 1991), parents are characterized as using one of four disciplinary styles: authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent, and uninvolved, based upon the cross-classification of demandingness and responsiveness (Maccoby & Martin, 1983). In the present study, warmth measures responsiveness by providing information on the emotional content of the interaction between parent and child. Parental monitoring, which includes setting rules and enforcing them, measures demandingness.

Cultural Differences in Parenting

Since parenting occurs within and interacts with that context, socialization practices in race/ethnic minority families may differ from those of white families (Garcia-Coll, Crnic & et al., 1996). Ogbu (1981), Kohn (1977) and others have proposed that childrearing is oriented toward the development of instrumental competencies that are adaptive for the settings in which children are expected to develop and participate. Minority parents may teach skills to assist their children navigate ethnic and racial barriers. As suggested by previous research (Bartz & Levine, 1978;
Baumrind, 1968; Garcia-Coll, 1990), black parents may exhibit more control and less warmth than white parents, perhaps as a reaction to a more dangerous and hostile environment. Latino families have consistently been shown to endorse warm parenting practices, and to emphasize collective forms of obligation over individualism (Fuller, Holloway & Liang, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Latino fathers may exert less control over their children in the context of shared extended-kin responsibility for childrearing (Baca Zinn, 1994). The greater familism of minority groups may increase the responsibility of fathers for children.

While research has examined interactions and control attempts of fathers, little research has examined the time minority fathers spend with children. A recent study shows a puzzling picture of black fathers spending less time in meals but more time talking, reading, and doing homework with their children than white fathers (Cooksey & Fondell, 1996). However, time expenditures to date are based upon single item reports rather than diaries and may be inaccurate. The greater familistic orientation in many Hispanic communities could increase the value to fathers of spending time with children (Baca Zinn, 1994; Vega, 1990), but, again, little is known about the value to fathers of raising children and the time they spend with them.

Differences in Intergenerational Experiences. Learning theory posits that motivation, enjoyment of raising children, and appropriate skills are learned and sustained through a variety of mechanisms (Pleck, 1997; Lamb, et al., 1985). For example, growing up with a father who was very involved could be related to exhibiting more involved fathering behaviors as an adult. Taking parenting classes could be linked to more involvement. Finally, learning parenting from one’s father could be linked to fathering behaviors in later life. To the extent that blacks, whites and Hispanics differ in exposure to father involvement while growing up, their own fathering
behaviors will differ. The smaller proportion of childhood black children spend living with a father could contribute to differential involvement of black men with children.

**Gender Role Attitudes.** Differences among black, white, and Hispanic parents in gender role and parenting attitudes may explain differences in fathering behaviors. Traditional gender role theory argues that mothers' and fathers' attitudes and values will determine how much time they spend with their children. Traditional fathers provide instrumental support, including financial support and discipline, but less emotional support. Consequently, they are likely to exhibit less warmth with children than non-traditional fathers. From a role perspective, fathers who hold traditional values with regards to marriage and parenthood are likely to be less involved, whereas fathers who endorse gender equity are likely to be more involved with their children. To the extent that fathers endorse the importance of fathers in children’s lives, they should be warmer in their relationships with their children and take more responsibility for them.

Based upon the strong financial role of the black mother, black children’s fathers are likely to have less traditional attitudes towards marriage and motherhood than do white children’s fathers. Black fathers may espouse more gender equitable and more individualistic attitudes than white fathers as well. Hispanic children’s fathers are likely to have more traditional attitudes towards marriage and mothering. However, the research on Latino families suggests that machismo is more a stereotype than an accurate depiction of the Hispanic male (Baca Zinn, 1994), and maternal employment has increased equity in Mexican families. Less traditional attitudes may be associated with more warmth and responsibility for children. Different beliefs about the appropriate roles of men and women may also alter the parenting of various groups, but, again, little is known about gender-role attitudes of minority fathers.
Economic Differences among Race/Ethnic Groups.

Differences in parenting among different race/ethnic groups may result from such economic differences as lower labor earnings, lesser employment, and fewer hours of work. Differences in educational levels between blacks, Hispanics and whites may help explain differences in parenting practices as education affects the human capital of parents and, therefore, their wage rates. There are several ways income and work hours could influence parenting practices. First, fathers who contribute to the family economically may feel that they have made their contribution and that they do not need to contribute in other ways. The more hours they work, the less time they have to participate, as well. In contrast, fathers who do not work and who do not contribute economically to the family may attempt to make up for this lack of responsibility in the traditional sense by becoming involved in other ways.

However, not only are there differences in socioeconomic status vis a vis the outside world, but minority and majority families also differ in the relative status of spouses within the marital relationship. Division of labor theory (Becker, 1991) suggests that earning more is associated with doing less household work, including caregiving. Bargaining theory attends to the spouse’s earnings as well (Blau, Ferber & Winkler, 1998). Earnings of husbands and wives are more equal in black families than in either white or Hispanic families. As a result, we would expect black fathers to spend more time caring for children than white fathers. Black husbands have lower rates of employment and work hours than white husbands, while black wives have higher rates of employment and work hours than white wives. According to bargaining theory, in families in which their mothers work more, children should spend more hours with their fathers.
Differences in Residential Neighborhood Characteristics.

Previous research suggests that parenting varies by context. Since blacks, whites and Hispanics live in very different neighborhoods, these contexts may explain race/ethnic differences in fathering. Social characteristics of neighborhoods have been shown to be at least as important as family economic characteristics in containing negative youth behavior (Sampson, Raudenbush & Earls, 1997). We anticipate that the extent of control fathers exert over their children’s behavior will be a function of two aspects of neighborhood—the overall quality of the neighborhood and its race/ethnic composition. Parents may parent their children differently in an ethnically homogeneous community than one in which they are a minority of the population (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn & Klebanov, 1994). In particular, an ethnically homogeneous community may support ethnic traditions which maintain a sense of community cohesion and pride, leading to greater familial involvement by fathers and less control. In contrast, fathers are expected to exert more control in neighborhoods that are less than ideal for raising children.

Other Explanations for Race/Ethnic Differences in Fathering

Differences between blacks and whites or between Hispanics and whites may be due to a number of factors other than economic, neighborhood, and cultural differences. It is important to control for these possible confounding factors in examining race/ethnic differences in parenting.

Child Characteristics. The present analysis adjusts for differences between race/ethnic groups in age and gender of the child. Fathers spend less time with children as they grow older (Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth, 2000). Since their higher fertility levels imply more
young children, black and Hispanic fathers may appear more involved if we do not control for child age.

**Family Structure and Composition Differences.** Adjustment for differences in family types between race/ethnic groups is important. The most important distinction we make is whether the child’s residential father is the biological or nonbiological parent. The latter tend to be less involved with children (McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Among two-parent families, black children are more likely than white children to live with a nonbiological father, while Hispanic children are similar to whites in the proportion living with a biological father.

The age of the father and number of children are also controlled. The age of the parents may influence their interaction and parenting style. In addition, controlling for the number of children in the family is important; with more children, parents are expected to spend less time with each one (Zajonc & Markus, 1975).

**DATA AND METHODS**

Data: The Child Development Supplement to the Panel Study of Income

The study sample comes from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID), a nationally representative sample of U.S. men, women, children, and the families in which they reside which has been followed for more than 30 years. Until 1997, measures were collected annually from interviews with one adult respondent about all family members, but only limited information was available on children and parental interaction. During the spring and fall of 1997, information on up to two randomly selected 0-12-year-old children of PSID respondents was collected from the primary caregivers, from other caregivers, and from the children themselves (Hofferth, Davis-
Kean, Davis & Finkelstein, 1999e). The Child Development Supplement (CDS) completed interviews with 2,394 child households and about 3,600 children. The response rate was 90 percent for those families regularly interviewed in the core PSID and 84 percent for those contacted the first time in 1997 for an immigrant refresher to the sample, with a combined response rate for both groups of 88 percent. When weights are used, as is done throughout this paper, the results have been found to be representative of U.S. individuals and their families (Fitzgerald, Gottschalk & Moffitt, 1998a). Weights are also applied to adjust for differential nonresponse across instruments. Case counts represent actual sample sizes.

The sample used in this paper consists of 1,229 children living with two parents and for whom information reported by each parent was available. The sample for analysis of parental time with children consists of 1,172 children, since the majority but not all families completed time diaries. The sample size including those with complete information on the control variables ranges from 937 to 1,077 children, depending upon the number of complete responses to the parenting measure and on the ages of the children measured.

Measurement of Race/Ethnicity

While ethnic groups exhibit different cultural traditions and practices, groups defined by racial or physical characteristics may differ in cultural characteristics as well (Taylor, 1994a). For this reason, both black and Hispanic fathers may differ from white fathers in parenting practices. In this paper race/ethnicity is categorized as non-Hispanic white, non-Hispanic black, Hispanic, and “other” based upon the report of the household head on a set of Census Bureau questions about race and about Hispanic origin that were standard up until 1999. The reports
were compared with the report of the race/ethnicity of the child; in cases of inconsistency, the head’s report takes precedence. In 1997, black children represented about 15 percent of the U.S. population and Hispanic children another 15 percent. As a result of the selection of children living with two parents, in our sample 8 percent were black, 11 percent were Hispanic, 5 percent were of other race/ethnicities, and 76 percent were white.

In the United States, about 62 percent of Hispanics in the United States are of Mexican descent. While a considerable proportion of persons of Mexican descent have lived in the United States for generations, recent immigration increased the Mexican-origin population by one-third since the 1980s and, thus, first and second generation groups in the United States (Taylor, 1994c). Our sample reflects this reality. Eighty percent of the 98 Latino families in our sample arrived post-1968. Of these 75 percent are of Mexican descent, with most of the remainder from Central America and a few from South America. More than 80 percent of the immigrant children are second generation. Thus our Hispanic sample describes a primarily Mexican population, in which most families arrived within the past 30 years. The “other category” includes children of Asian, Native American, and “other” backgrounds; there are too few to analyze separately.

Measures of Parental Involvement and Parenting

Time Children Spend Engaged with their Fathers. The CDS collected a complete time diary for one weekday and one weekend day for each child age 0-12 in the family. The data obtained are generally considered superior to those obtained using standard questions asked in most surveys because of internal consistency and reduced social desirability (Juster & Stafford, 1985; Hofferth, 1999). The time diary, which was answered primarily by the mother or by the
mother and the child, asked several questions about the child’s flow of activities over a 24-hour period beginning at midnight of the randomly-assigned designated day. These questions ask the primary activity that was going on at that time, when it began and ended, and whether any other activity was taking place. An additional question—“Who was doing the activity with child?”—when linked to activity codes such as “playing” or “being read to,” provides unbiased details on the extent of one-on-one interactions of others with the child. For this analysis, times in which the father (biological father, stepfather, foster or adoptive father) was engaged in activities with a child were coded as father engaged. Times engaged were summed over all activities for weekdays and weekends for each child. Weekly time was computed by multiplying weekday time by 5 and weekend day time by 2. Variables indicate whether time was spent with that parent and the total number of hours, with “0” for none. To test results from previous research, we also examined the time children spend with their fathers in two specific activities—reading with the father and eating meals together.

**Responsibility.** The responsibility items used here focus upon the care of children—bathing children, buying them clothes, selecting a child care program or pediatrician, and driving them to activities. Response categories are: 1) I do this, 2) another household member does this, 3) I share this task, and 4) someone else does this task. If the respondent did the task, the response was coded 2, if the respondent shared it, it was coded 1; otherwise the task was coded 0. Scores were summed over all items. Overall scale reliability using Cronbach’s alpha was 0.73.

**Parental Warmth.** Parental warmth is a 6-item scale developed by Child Trends for use in measuring the warmth of the relationship between child and parent. The questions, asked of each parent about all children, ask how often the parent hugged the child, told the child they love
him/her, spent time with child, joked or played with child, talked with child, and told child they appreciated what he/she did. The response categories range from 1) not in the past month to 5) every day. A scale was created by summing the number of behaviors that the parent said they did with the child in the past month. Scale reliability was 0.77.

Parental Monitoring and Control. Parental monitoring is measured by a set of 9 items asking each parent of children 3 and older whether they have rules setting limits on their children’s activities, their schedules, their food, their whereabouts, and their homework, and whether they discuss these rules with their children. In contrast to the other scales, this scale measures control across all children. The response categories (reverse coded) range from 1) never to 5) very often, with 45 the highest possible score. The reliability coefficient was 0.73.

Measurement of Key Variables

Economic Characteristics. Economic variables are measured, first, by the employment of mother and father. Employment status is a 4-category variable describing the employment of both parents—male breadwinner-female homemaker family; dual earner family; female breadwinner-male non-employed family; and two parent-neither employed family. White and black children are most likely to live in a dual earner family; Hispanic children (and “other races”) are most likely to live in a male breadwinner-female homemaker family. Black children are also more likely than white children to live in a female breadwinner-unemployed male family. Work hours vary, with black women working more hours than any of the others. In contrast, black men work the fewest hours, resulting in only a 5-hour difference between black husbands and wives. Consistent with the small hourly difference in time, mothers and fathers’ earnings are the most similar in black families, with black mothers earning $17,000 on average
and black fathers $20,000. Hispanic mothers earn only $5,400, compared with $18,000 for Hispanic fathers. White fathers earn the most, $41,000, with $14,000 for mothers.

**Neighborhood.** The quality of the neighborhood is measured by how the respondent would rate the neighborhood the family lives in as a place to raise children. Of responses ranging from excellent to poor, excellent was coded 1, the rest 0. Neighborhood racial composition was obtained from questions asking whether none, less than half, about half, more than half and almost all the residents were black, Hispanic, and White. From the means, it is clear that each group is highly likely to live in close proximity to others of the same race/ethnicity.

**Gender Role Attitudes.** Attitudes towards gender roles are measured by 20 standard items included in national surveys since the early 1960s (Mason, Czajka & Arber, 1976). Four response categories range from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with items (re)coded so that a high score indicates agreement with the item. Mean values were substituted for a small number of missing items. Using principal components analysis, these 20 items were factored into four main factors separately for primary and secondary caregivers and then rotated using varimax rotation into four orthogonal factors. These represent 1) traditional marriage values—“Most of the important decisions in the life of the family should be made by the man of the house,” 2) traditional mothering values—“Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed,” 3) equity—“If a husband and wife both work full-time they should share household tasks equally,” and 4) individualism—“Personal happiness is the primary goal in marriage.” Factor scores assigned to each individual child’s father have a mean of 0 and a standard deviation of 1. Scale reliabilities calculated using Cronbach’s alpha were 0.75, 0.77, 0.63 and 0.47 for fathers’ attitudes towards marriage, traditional mothering, gender equity, and individualism.
Fathering Attitudes and Skills. Questions on fathering were drawn from the “Being a Father” scale (Pleck 1997b) and from the “Role of the Father” questionnaire (Palkowitz, 1984), tapping the belief that the father role is important in child development. Items include: “A father should be as heavily involved in the care of his child as the mother.” and “In general, fathers and mothers are equally good at meeting their children’s needs.” The responses were scored from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). These eight items were factor analyzed using principal components analysis, but one factor was sufficient to describe these data. Consequently, after recoding so that a high score indicates a positive attitude towards fathering and substituting mean values for individual missing items, the total score on the 8 items was then obtained by summing. The reliability coefficient was 0.70 on this scale.

Intergenerational Learning. The sources of knowledge of the father and mother about parenting were also explored, including the extent to which the respondent’s own father was involved in raising him/her, and whether they use their own father as a role model in their own parenting. The parent was asked whether he/she had ever taken a parenting class and from whom they most learned to parent.

RESULTS

Mean Differences in Paternal Involvement

In two-parent families, children average 14.93 hours per week engaged with their fathers (Table 1). Black children’s fathers are significantly less engaged than are white children’s, 12.76 hours compared with 15.35 for white children’s fathers (p<.01), a difference of 2.59 hours per week. There is no significant difference between Hispanic and white children’s fathers’ engagement. Consistent with previous research, black children’s fathers spend marginally less

1 A complete list of the items in the attitude scales used in this paper is available from the author.
time eating meals with them; however, in contrast to that research, they spend less time reading to children. This difference may be due to differences in the methodology used to collect data on time with children. Because of the lack of significance of meal time and reading time in both bivariate and multivariate models, we do not pursue these measures further.

(Table 1 about here)

Consistent with the literature, black children’s fathers rate themselves lower on warmth than do white fathers, while Hispanic children’s fathers do not differ significantly from white’s. Again, consistent with expectations, black children’s fathers are more controlling than white children’s fathers, while Hispanic children’s fathers are less controlling. On responsibility for caring for children, both black and Hispanic children’s fathers rank higher than white children’s.

As expected, black children’s fathers hold less traditional mothering attitudes compared with white fathers, while Hispanic and “other race” fathers’ mothering attitudes are more traditional. While Hispanic fathers and fathers of other race/ethnicities hold more traditional marriage attitudes than white fathers, as expected, black fathers are unexpectedly also more traditional. Other research has pointed to discrepancies between the marriage expectations of black males and females (Taylor, 1994b). Compared with whites, and in contrast to the stereotype, Hispanic fathers are the stronger believers in gender equity. Finally, black, Hispanic and “other” fathers all hold more individualistic attitudes than whites.

Overall, only 27 percent of children’s fathers said they ever had a parenting class. This is lowest for black fathers of whom only 17 percent ever had such a class. The proportion who said they learned to parent from their mother is high for all groups — 7 out of 10. In contrast, the proportion of fathers who learned from their own father varies substantially by race/ethnicity.
While 63 percent of white fathers learned from their father, 45 percent of black, 44 percent of “other” and 38 percent of Hispanic fathers did so. Fathering attitudes are generally positive, with black, Hispanic, and “other race” fathers holding less positive attitudes than whites.

This analysis shows considerable race/ethnic differences in father involvement with their children. Some, such as the greater control and less warmth expressed by black fathers, were expected. Others, such as the greater responsibility shown by black and Hispanic children’s fathers, were not. Some of these differences may be explained by differences in the economic situations and living arrangements of these different groups. Differences in attitudes, such as the espousal of more traditional mothering among Hispanics and less traditional mothering attitudes among blacks, were expected. Unexpected were traditional marriage attitudes among blacks, high levels of equity among Hispanic fathers and high levels of individualism among all three minority groups. Attitude differences may explain race/ethnic differences in parenting.

**Hierarchical Regressions**

To examine the extent to which race/ethnic differences in fathering remain after controlling for family and neighborhood factors and gender role or fathering attitudes, we use a set of hierarchical models (Table 2). In the first step, measures of parenting are regressed on race variables only. In the second step our control variables—age, and gender of the child, father’s age, family structure, and number of children—are added. The third step adds economic characteristics of the family—each parent’s earnings, education of father, employment status, and hours of mother and father. Measures of neighborhood are added in step 4 and measures of fathering attitudes are added in step 5. Finally, fathering attitudes are dropped and gender role
attitudes substituted in step 6, since one of the gender role attitudes (equity) is strongly associated with positive fathering attitudes. We test the significance of the change in the effect of being in a particular racial or ethnic group on parenting due to the addition of each set of variables (Clogg, Petkova & Haritou, 1995)(Table 3).

(Table 2 about here)

(Table 3 about here)

**Children’s Time Engaged with Fathers**

Table 2, panel A, column 1, shows that the coefficient for children’s time engaged with their father is negative, reflecting a 2.4-hour lower weekly father engagement time for black compared with white children, but this effect is only marginally statistically significant (p<.10). Even though the black-white difference in engagement is relatively small, we examine what factors explain this important component of parenting.

With controls for children’s age and gender of child, family structure, father’s age and family size (column 2), the effect of black race declines significantly and is no longer associated with children’s time with their father. Black families in our sample tend to be older, to have slightly older children and to have a larger number of children. Fathers spend less time with them in these circumstances. Black children are twice as likely as white children to be living with a nonbiological father, and children receive less paternal attention in such families. Controlling for factors that reduce time with children lowers the negative association of black race/ethnicity and time with the father. We do not examine further changes in the coefficient, since it is not significantly associated with paternal engagement in later models.
Parental Warmth

Consistent with the unadjusted means, black children’s fathers report significantly fewer warm behaviors with them than white children’s fathers (Table 2, Panel B, Column 1). This finding is consistent with previous research and suggestive of more traditional fathering behavior in black than white families. This result holds adjusting for all variables, though it declines or increases slightly at each step. About ¼ of the variance is explained in the full model.

The effect of being black declines significantly with control for family structure and other background factors (column 2). This is because black children’s fathers are more likely to be stepfathers or cohabiting, and such fathers tend to be less warm with their stepchildren. Controlling for these differences in family structure reduces the differential in warmth between white and black fathers.

Controls for economic status reduce the black-white warmth differential, but the reduction is not statistically significant. Black children’s fathers’ and mothers’ wages are lower, and lower wages are associated with reporting fewer warm behaviors.

Controlling for neighborhood increases the black-white differential in warmth substantially and the increase is significant at p<.10. Black children tend to live in black neighborhoods, in which locations fathers tend to be warmer. Not adjusting for living in these neighborhoods masks the fact that black fathers tend to show less warmth than white fathers.

Adding intergenerational fathering and fathering attitudes (column 5) increases the effect of being black on warmth slightly, but not significantly, even though there are significant relationships between fathering attitudes and warm behaviors. Black children’s fathers have a less positive attitude towards fathering than white children’s and having a less positive fathering
attitude is also associated with fewer warm behaviors. While having a grandfather involved in raising one’s own father is associated with warm behaviors, black children’s fathers do not differ from those of whites on grandfather involvement.

Adding gender roles attitudes is associated with no change in the black-white difference in warmth (column 6 vs. 4), which remains significant. Black fathers espouse more individualistic attitudes, which are associated with less warmth. Believing in gender equity is associated with greater warmth, but on this attitude blacks and whites do not differ.

Parental Monitoring and Control

Race/ethnic differences in control are shown to be highly significant in Table 2, with 2.4 points greater control by black fathers and 2.4 points less control by Hispanic fathers compared with white fathers (Panel C, column 1). The black-white difference in control/monitoring declines significantly when we adjust for background characteristics of the child and family. Blacks have more 6-8 year olds than whites, and parents control such children more. Blacks also have more children, and having more children increases the amount of control exerted. The Hispanic-white difference, in contrast, increases significantly. Hispanic children are more likely to live with a biological father, which is associated with more control. Adjusting for differences in living arrangements increases the negative relationship between Hispanicity and monitoring.

Controlling for economic status results in increasing the black-white difference in monitoring by a small and nonsignificant amount while decreasing the Hispanic-white monitoring difference by a large and significant amount. Black families are more likely to have no breadwinner, and that is associated with less monitoring. Adjusting for this increases the
black-white difference over what it was in the previous step. Economic differences explain some 
of the Hispanic-white monitoring difference. Hispanic men earn less money, which is associated 
with lower monitoring. When this is taken into account, the monitoring difference is reduced. 

Our data show that black and Hispanic families report living in less desirable areas for 
raising children than white families. Under these circumstances, we would expect parents to 
monitor and control children’s behavior more, as black fathers do. However, controlling for 
neighborhood reduces only slightly and insignificantly the black-white difference in monitoring 
because the neighborhood rating is not linked to monitoring. The Hispanic-white monitoring 
difference increases when neighborhood is controlled, though the increase is not statistically 
significant. Hispanics live in majority Hispanic neighborhoods; monitoring is more common in 
such neighborhoods. Hispanics monitor less, given the types of neighborhoods they live in. 

Adding attitudes does not significantly change the effect of black race on monitoring 
while it significantly increases the effect of Hispanicity. Hispanic fathers are less likely to have 
learned parenting from their father than white fathers. Not having learned from their father is 
associated with more monitoring. In addition, Hispanic fathers are more likely to have had an 
involved father. Having had an involved father is associated with more monitoring. Adjusting 
for these two factors, Hispanic fathers monitor even less than white fathers. 

Finally, adding gender role attitudes significantly increases the strength of black 
race/ethnicity and significantly reduces the effect of Hispanicity on monitoring. Hispanic and 
black children’s fathers are more likely to express individualistic attitudes than white children’s, 
and greater individualism is associated with lesser monitoring and control. When these 
differences are adjusted, the effect of being Hispanic on monitoring and control is reduced and
the effect of being black is increased. Hispanics also express more gender-equitable attitudes, and gender-equitable attitudes are associated with greater monitoring.

**Parental Responsibility**

Consistent with mean differences, both Hispanic and black children’s fathers report themselves significantly more likely than white children’s fathers to take responsibility for their care (Table 2, Panel D, column 1). However, while the coefficient for Hispanicity remains significant over all models, the coefficient for black declines to insignificance as variables are added. The sizes of the coefficients in column 1 are consistent with the sizes of effects in Table 1; the effect of Hispanicity is considerably larger than the effect of black race.

In column 2, controls added for background characteristics reduce both effects, significantly for Hispanics but not for blacks. Black children are much more likely to live with a nonbiological father, which is associated with fathers taking less responsibility. Hispanic and black children tend to have more siblings, which is associated with greater father responsibility. Controlling for these variables reduces the effect of black race and Hispanic ethnicity.

Controlling for economic status significantly (p<.10) reduces the black coefficient and it is longer significant. This is because Black families are characterized by lower fathers’ earnings and work hours, higher mothers’ earnings, and by being more likely to have no breadwinner, which are all associated with fathers taking greater responsibility for children. The Hispanic coefficient is not significantly reduced but retains a significant association with paternal responsibility. Mothers’ wages are lower, leading to less responsibility taken by fathers, but fathers’ low wages are associated with fathers taking more responsibility.
Controlling for neighborhood (column 4) significantly reduces the effect of Hispanicity. This is because Hispanic children are highly likely to live in Hispanic neighborhoods, and fathers in majority Hispanic areas are more likely to take responsibility for children than families in other neighborhoods. Adjusting for neighborhood reduces the Hispanic effect.

Controlling for attitudes further reduces the effect of Hispanic ethnicity. Though they are less likely to have learned to parent from their father, Hispanic fathers are more likely to have had a father involved with them, and that is associated with greater responsibility for children. Additionally, having a positive attitude towards parenting is associated with greater responsibility. Controlling for these Hispanic-white differences reduces the effect of Hispanic ethnicity on responsibility, though it is still statistically significant.

Finally, adjusting for gender roles significantly reduces the effect of Hispanicity on parental responsibility over column 4. Hispanics exhibit more gender-equitable values, which are associated with fathers taking more responsibility for their children.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper has focused upon black-white and Hispanic-white differences in fathering behavior in two-parent families. Several differences were identified—black-white differences in engagement time and warmth and black-white and Hispanic-white differences in monitoring and responsibility. Cultural, economic, and contextual explanations appear to contribute, depending upon the particular form of paternal involvement.

Black children’s fathers spend slightly less time directly engaged in activities with them than do white children’s fathers. However, the difference is small—about 2.4 hours per week.
After controlling for characteristics of the families in which children live, the difference in engagement is greatly reduced and is no longer statistically significant.

Two differences that are consistent with the literature include the lesser degree of warmth and greater control expressed by black children’s fathers. Family structure and background characteristics are clearly important contributors to this difference. However, even after adjusting for them, neighborhood characteristics also appear to contribute to black-white differences in warmth. Black families tend to live in black neighborhoods and fathers tend to be warmer in such neighborhoods. This fact appears to mask their lower overall levels of warmth. Perhaps living in a racially homogeneous community is less stressful than living in a heterogeneous one (controlling for desirability), and this contributes to greater warmth in the former. Alternatively, black fathers with interpersonal styles that are less warm may select heterogeneous neighborhoods.

After adjusting for family characteristics, black-white differences in monitoring and control are not explained by either family economic circumstances or, surprisingly, by neighborhood conditions. Rather, the analysis identified strong ties to gender role attitudes which served to mask the relationship rather than explain it. We found that Black fathers have more individualistic attitudes regarding marriage, which are associated with lower control. Adjusting for differences in attitudes significantly increased the black-white difference. This is not surprising, since control is a major aspect of parenting practices and a major differentiator of parenting patterns. Apparently there are very strong cultural bases for these patterns.

Hispanic children’s fathers monitor and control their children less than white children’s. This difference does not disappear, but declines as economic conditions and gender role/fathering
attitudes are added. On the economic side, Hispanic fathers’ incomes are lower, and lower incomes are associated with less monitoring, thus explaining some of their lesser monitoring and control. Cultural factors are very important in explaining differential monitoring. Although they have more gender-equitable attitudes, which are associated with more control, they are also highly individualistic in attitudes towards marriage and have less positive fathering attitudes, both of which are associated with less control. Adjusting for these factors explains some of the lesser monitoring of Hispanic fathers. The fact that Hispanic fathers are more individualistic inconsistent with the expected greater familism of Hispanic fathers. However, given the greater responsibility shared by a variety of extended kin, individual control may not be necessary.

Finally, black, Hispanic, and other minority fathers all show more responsibility for their children than do white fathers. The difference is smaller for black than Hispanic fathers and is no longer statistically significant after controls are introduced for employment and wages. Greater similarities in the relative economic contribution of fathers relative to mothers explain fathers’ greater responsibility in caring for children in black compared to white families.

Differences in responsibility between Hispanic children’s fathers (and those of other races) and white children’s remain strong even with controls for other factors. Differences in neighborhood composition and in culture between Hispanics and whites explain much of the variation in responsibility between the two groups of fathers. Fathers take much more responsibility for their children in Hispanic neighborhoods, and (in analyses not shown) this effect is greater for Hispanic fathers. Hispanic fathers also live in less desirable neighborhoods, and living in such neighborhoods is associated with more responsibility. Hispanic fathers report their own fathers were more involved in rearing them, and that increases their involvement with
their own children. In addition, more gender equitable attitudes, which are held by Hispanic men, are associated with more responsibility towards children. The potential strength of minority families regarding fathering should be examined more thoroughly.

Though it could not examine every possible parenting behavior, this paper showed that, of the behaviors we studied, minority fathering in two-parent families varies in only a few respects from that of majority families. The stereotype of a macho, noninvolved minority father is not typically true; black and Hispanic, primarily Mexican, males are as involved as are majority fathers, and they share greater responsibility for childrearing with their partners. Unfortunately, our study does not describe the fathering experiences of all black, white, and Hispanic children. While it included a variety of relationships, our study of children in coresidential two-parent families represents only about half of black, 75 percent of Hispanic, and 80 percent of white children in the United States. Nonresidential fathers are typically less involved. Research which examines the involvement of noncoresidential fathers in the lives of children is an important next step for fully evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of majority and minority families for the United States of the 21st century.
References


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