

Parenting in West Indian families: Relationship to their literacy beliefs and practices

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Abstract

This study explored whether authoritarian parenting may help explain the poor literacy outcomes among USVI children. Forty-one West Indian mothers of young children were interviewed and completed questionnaires assessing authoritarian childrearing attitudes; warm parent-child relationships; and literacy beliefs and practices. High adult control and warmth were not significantly related in this sample, and each dimension differentially predicted literacy variables. Mothers endorsing higher levels of adult control believed that children learn to read at a later age, and engaged in more direct reading instruction. Mothers who reported warmer relationships were more likely to read with their child for fun. Future research that directly examines how general and domain-specific features of parenting relate to literacy outcomes in VI children is needed.

Crianza en las familias de Las Antillas: relación con sus creencias y prácticas de alfabetización

Abstracto

Esta investigación explora si los estilos de crianza autoritarios se relacionan con los pobres resultados de alfabetización entre los niños de las islas vírgenes estadounidenses. Cuarenta y un madres virgen isleña norteamericanas de niños pequeños fueron entrevistadas y completaron cuestionarios que evalúan estilos de crianza autoritarios; las relaciones cariñosas entre padres e hijos; y las creencias y prácticas sobre la alfabetización. Ni los altos niveles de control del adulto ni el cariño resultaron estar relacionados significativamente en esta muestra, y cada dimensión predijo de manera diferenciada las variables de alfabetización. Las madres que respaldaron niveles más altos de control adulto, creen que los niños aprenden a leer a una mayor edad y se dedicaron a una enseñanza de lectura más directa. Las madres que reportaron relaciones más cariñosas, resultaron más propensas a leer con su hijo por placer. Más investigación es necesaria para examinar la relación entre aspectos generales y específicos de las características de la crianza y los resultados de alfabetización en los niños de las islas vírgenes.

Although children living in the United States Virgin Islands (USVI) enjoy the same rights and citizenship as children living in the continental United States, they have worse outcomes than their mainland counterparts. The 2011 USVI Kids Count Data Book, part of a national report on the well-being of children, paints a bleak picture. Those born and raised in the Virgin Islands have a greater chance of being involved in juvenile violent crime, dropping out of school, and becoming detached youth – those between the ages of 16-19 years that are neither in school or employed

(Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands [CFVI], 2011). Additionally, they are not performing well academically. In 2009, 73% of seventh grade students performed below grade-level expectations in reading; in 11th grade, 61% of students scored below grade-level.

It is likely that the trajectory for such poor educational and social outcomes begins before children in the USVI even enter school. For example, studies have shown that reading abilities in middle childhood are predicted in part by language abilities in early childhood (Harlaar, Hayiou-Thomas, Dale, & Plomin, 2008). Young children in the USVI are not performing well in this regard either. According to the 2011 USVI Kids Count Data Book, an assessment of children's school readiness skills at kindergarten entry revealed that 44%

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of students performed below age level in the language domain and 33% performed below age level in the cognitive domain (CFVI, 2011). The reasons for such outcomes remain unclear as limited relevant research has been conducted with children living in the Virgin Islands or in other parts of West Indies.

The purpose of the present research was to begin to investigate factors that may contribute to poor language and literacy outcomes found in children living in the USVI. More specifically, this study examined the possible contribution of parenting style, which has been linked with literacy and language outcomes in other populations (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta & Howes, 2002; Landry, Smith, Miller-Loncar & Swank, 1997; Taylor, Hinton, & Wilson, 1995). In this study, we examined the relationship of parenting style to parental beliefs and practices related to early literacy in the hopes of elucidating possible pathways through which these outcomes occur in VI children.

The Relationship of Parenting Style to Language and Literacy Outcomes

Research with families in the U.S. suggests that an authoritarian parenting style, which is characterized by high levels of adult control that emphasize obedience to authority and low warmth (Baumrind, 1966), is linked with poor language and literacy outcomes (Burchinal, et al., 2002; Landry, et al., 1997; Taylor, Hinton, & Wilson, 1995). For example, Burchinal et al. (2002) examined the factors contributing to academic skills, including language development, in children from preschool-age to second grade. In a sample of 511 families, the researchers administered standardized assessments of academic abilities and receptive language four times over a five-year period and asked parents to complete Schaefer and Edgerton's (1985) Parent Beliefs Scale as an assessment of an authoritarian parenting style. They found that parenting style was moderately correlated with both academic achievement and receptive language, such that children of authoritarian parents scored lower on these assessments than did the children of parents who style was described as authoritative.

Descriptions of the prevailing parenting style in English-speaking Caribbean countries is consistent with the concept of authoritarian parenting. Parenting in West Indian families is often described as very harsh, controlling, and lacking in communication and the use of reasoning (Brown & Johnson, 2008; Evans & Davies, 1997; Mathurin, Gielen, & Lancaster, 2006; Smith & Mosby, 2003). For example, Mathurin et al. (2006) reports that corporal punishment from a caregiver is culturally acceptable and considered the norm in St. Croix, USVI. In support of this conclusion, 92%

of children between the ages of 11 and 17 years of age have experienced physical punishment. The findings of Mathurin, et al. are consistent with the descriptions of parenting in other Caribbean countries (Brown and Johnson, 2008; Evans and Davies, 1997; Smith and Mosby, 2003), which also emphasize the importance parents place on obedience of children to their parents and the parents' lack of reasoning and discussion with their children over disciplinary measures. The roots of this parenting style are attributed to the Christian belief widely-held among West Indian parents of "spare the rod and spoil the child."

No direct evidence linking parenting styles to language and literacy outcomes in Caribbean children living in the Caribbean currently exists. However, Roopnarine, Krishnakumar, Metindogan, and Evans (2006) studied language and literacy development in children born to Caribbean parents who immigrated to the United States. Seventy English-speaking Caribbean immigrant parents living in and around New York City, all of whom had children of pre-kindergarten or kindergarten age who were born in the United States, were interviewed for the study. Information gathered included parenting styles of the mother and father and early academic and language skills of the children. The results indicated that the authoritarian parenting style was associated with poor language and literacy development. More specifically, fathers' authoritarian parenting style was negatively correlated with children's receptive language skills, vocabulary, and an overall academic skills composite score. Interestingly, mothers' parenting style, whether it was authoritarian or authoritative, had no relationship to language and literacy skills of their children. Roopnarine et al. (2006) suggested that an authoritarian parenting style negatively effects children's literacy and language development in two ways. First, this parenting style may influence development directly, through the lack of verbal give-and-take between parents and children. Second, it could have an indirect effect because the rigidity and emphasis on order and obedience may reduce potential gains from in-home literacy and language activities because the children do not feel free to experiment and question.

The results reported by Roopnarine, et al., (2006) may also extend to mothers' childrearing styles in the VI due to a number of differences between the population of families living in the VI and the sample studied by Roopnarine, et al. Of the 70 parents interviewed in the study, 64 resided together with their children. Additionally, the majority of families earned between \$50,000 and \$99,999 annually. These statistics, however, are substantially different from those of families living in the USVI where the median income is \$43,691

and 42% of children live in single mother families (CFVI, 2011). In fact, in the Caribbean, many fathers do not live in the same household as their children and their children's mother (Evans & Davies, 1997; Roopnarine, et al., 1995; Roopnarine, Clawson, Benetti, & Lewis, 2000). Thus, mothers assume the role of disciplinarian in such households. This additional role may affect parenting practices and ultimately, child outcomes.

Applicability of Previous Research to West Indian Families Living in the Caribbean

Although the existing research suggests that an authoritarian parenting style may be a possible explanation for the poor language and literacy outcomes observed for children living in the USVI, it is important to first consider whether the concept of authoritarian parenting style has the same meaning in West Indian families. Questions have been raised about the universality of parenting styles, especially the authoritarian type (Chao, 1994; Querido, Warner, & Eyberg, 2002). In addition, the authoritarian parent style is not always associated with poor academic outcomes in non-European American populations (Chao, 2000; McWayne, Owsianik, Green, & Fantuzzo, 2008; Sue & Abe, 1988).

Concerns regarding the traditional conceptualization of authoritarian parenting style may also be relevant for families in the Caribbean. For example, Brown and Johnson (2008) studied parenting among rural, urban inner city, and urban middle class Jamaican families and found that despite commonalities in descriptions of harsh corporal punishment and the importance of obedience to authority, middle class parents also described having conversations with their children and that their children's opinions were important when making family decisions particularly in *nondisciplinary* contexts. Such results call into question whether the notion of authoritarian parenting truly captures the essence of West Indian parenting, at least among Jamaicans.

Part of the difficulty of adequately researching the impact of various parenting styles on children's development, particularly in non-U.S. contexts, may stem from a problem with measurement. Both the control and warmth dimension underlying the various parenting styles identified by Baumrind (1966) are supposed to be orthogonal yet measures tend to conflate the restrictive type of adult control with low warmth. (Conversely, high democratic control, where parents exert authority over children but children are invited to have input into family rules and can discuss misbehavior associated with the authoritative type is similarly assumed to be associated with high warmth). Thus, restrictive control, characteristic of authoritarian parenting, is assumed to be associated with low warmth. If indeed it is not always the case, then the separate contributions of both the control and warmth dimensions to children's

outcomes merits investigation.

Considering the impact of control and warmth separately might elucidate the specific pathways through which global parenting styles impact language and literacy development. Perhaps it is not the high adult control dimension that limits verbal give-and-take but rather low warmth that restricts the overall amount of verbal interaction between the parent and the child. Warmth may be indicative of a more global parenting strategy that emphasizes responsiveness to, and involvement with, the child which has also been found to positively impact language and literacy skills (Landry, et al., 1997; Roopnarine, et al., 2006). So far, in studies demonstrating negative impacts of the authoritarian style on language and literacy outcomes, it has been impossible to tease apart the influence of high control and low warmth. If conventional notions of authoritarian parenting do not hold among West Indian families, it becomes even more important to consider such dimensions separately.

The Current Study

The current study had two goals. The first was to consider the applicability of the authoritarian parenting style to parents living in the USVI. Thus, independent measures of adult control styles and warmth and closeness in the parent-child relationships were included and the relationship between them explicitly examined. The second goal was to examine the relationship of these parenting dimensions to parental beliefs about literacy and parenting practices. Parental beliefs about child development are culturally derived values about a child's needs for maturation as a competent individual within the community (Super & Harkness, 1986). These beliefs in turn, inform parenting practices. With regard to literacy, parental beliefs, such as the age at which children begin learning to read and how children learn to read, have been found to relate to parenting practices, including book reading, in families from different cultures (e.g., Meagher, 2008; Reese & Gallimore, 2000). If dimensions of parenting are found to be related to beliefs and practices in our sample, it would merit the expenditure of resources to determine how such parent styles, beliefs and practices relate directly to child outcomes.

Method

Participants

Participants were 41 mothers between the ages of 18 and 42 years ($M = 28.10$, $SD = 5.68$) of young children between the ages of 10 and 72 months ($M = 40.65$, $SD = 16.63$) living in the USVI on the islands of St. Thomas and St. John. Twenty-two children (53.7%)

were male. Almost half (46.3%) of the children had no siblings. Of the remaining 22 children, 9 were the oldest, 4 had both older and younger siblings, and 9 were the youngest child. All mothers were born and/or raised in the USVI or on another English-speaking island in the Caribbean². Participants were volunteers responding to fliers that solicited parents to take part in a study of experiences raising children in the USVI or were notified of the study by other participants. Fliers were posted in public locations, such as laundromats, grocery stores, and post offices. The study took approximately one hour to complete and mothers received a compensation of \$25 for their participation.

Procedure

Participants were interviewed at a time and place convenient to them, such as their home, a playground, or a community resource center. Each mother was given an informed consent form that explained the purpose of the research and the minimal risks involved; it also explained that they had the ability to decline to participate or to answer any question without any penalty. Additionally, participants were asked if they consented to audio-taping the interview. If they agreed, the tape recorder was then turned on at the beginning of the interview. Seventeen mothers were audio-taped. Of the 24 mothers who were not audio-taped, three mothers declined and the interviews of the remaining mothers took place in a noisy location (e.g. at a park, in a mall) where recording was not feasible. Participants completed a semi-structured interview, which included both open-ended and close-ended questions that solicited information about the participant and her family, her childrearing beliefs, and her childcare preferences³. Mothers also completed three questionnaires. Upon completion, mothers were thanked for their time and given their compensation.

Measures

Family Demographic Information. Through a semi-structured interview, demographic information on the participant and her family was collected, including age, marital status, education level, work background, family member's educational and employment information. Information was also gathered on all the children currently living in the mother's home included the child's age, gender, birth order and birthplace.

Authoritarian childrearing beliefs. The Modernity Scale by Schaefer and Edgerton (1985) consists of 30 items that measure traditional, authoritarian beliefs and progressive, democratic beliefs. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The progressive subscale consists of eight items and the traditional subscale contains 22 items. This measure has predicted parent behavior and child outcomes in other samples (e.g., NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 1998). In other studies, the overall scale has shown very high internal reliability (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1996; $\alpha = .90$) and adequate reliability of both subscales (Appelbaum, Batten, & Bland, 1993; traditional: $\alpha = .90$, progressive: $\alpha = .60$). In this sample, the traditional subscale showed good internal consistency ($\alpha = .79$). The reliability of the progressive subscale was low ($\alpha = .47$), and therefore, was not used in any analyses.

Warmth/closeness. The Child-Parent Relationship Scale by Pianta (1995) consists of 15 items that assess aspects of the mother-child relationship. The scale includes seven questions that indicate the amount of closeness and dependency in the relationship (e.g. If upset, my child will seek comfort in me; My child openly shares his/her feelings and experiences with me) and eight that indicate the amount of conflict (e.g. My child and I always seem to be struggling with each other; My child's feelings toward me can be unpredictable or change suddenly). Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale from "definitely does not apply" to "definitely applies." Good internal consistency has been shown in other studies (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; positive: $\alpha = .72$; negative: $\alpha = .83$). Scores on this measure have been shown to be strongly negatively associated with behavioral and emotional problems (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Kiernan & Huerta, 2008). In the current sample, both the positive and the negative subscales demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .601$ and $\alpha = .691$, respectively). The internal consistency of the overall scale (negative subscale items reflected) was strong ($\alpha = .854$) so the total score was used in the analyses.

Reading Age. Mothers were asked, 'At what age do you think children begin learning to read? Why this age?' Ages fell nearly evenly into two categories (two years and under, and three years and older) and were coded as such.

How children learn to read⁴. To determine mother's ethnotheories regarding the way young children learn best how to read, each participant was asked, "What do you think is the best way that a child learns how to read?" Responses were coded according to whether the answer was constructivist or skills-based. As described in Lynch, Anderson, Anderson, and Shapiro (2006), a

² Four mothers were born in the US. However, all had at least one parent born in the West Indies, and had lived in the VI for their whole life or for more than 25 years.

³ Not all questions asked in the interview were analyzed as part of the current study.

constructivist answer refers to a holistic approach to language learning and responses including ideas such as supporting, guiding, or helping the child, as well as reading to the child. An example of a constructivist response is "...reading to them and show them what you are reading." A skills-based approach refers to the view that children need to be taught how to read through first teaching them the basic skills, such as knowing letters and sounds. An example of a skills-based answer is "seeing objects with words on them and going over words with children over and over." Two researchers independently coded 75% of the responses. Any discrepancies were resolved by consensus. Inter-rater reliability was acceptable ($Kappa = .76$).

Reading frequency. Participants were asked *'How often do you read or look at books with your young children'* and were given a list of six responses. These included 'never,' 'several times per year,' 'one to two times per month,' 'one to two times per week,' 'three to four times per week,' and 'five to seven times per week.'

Reading for enjoyment. Mothers were asked 'When you manage to find time, how do you like to spend it with your young children?' Responses were coded based on whether they contained a literacy-related activity. All responses coded as 'literacy-related' specifically mentioned reading. Examples of literacy-related responses included "read, watch educational DVDs, play games (throwing, run around outside), sing alphabet and numbers," and "reading a lot, playing games (puzzles, board games), watch TV." An example of a response that did not contain reading is "go to the movies, take them out to eat at a restaurant, go to the park, beach, water park, go on drives, have a pool party, watch cartoons/movies." Inter-rater reliability for 75% of the cases was good ($Kappa = .94$).

Reading practices². The Parent Reading Belief Inventory (DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994) consists of 42 items divided into seven subscales, which assess parents' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding reading aloud to their preschool-age children. Only the subscales that assessed reading practices were used in the present study. These two subscales included encouraging verbal participation while reading (8 items), and engaging in reading instruction during book reading (4 items). An example of an item from the verbal participation subscale is, "When we read, we talk about the pictures as much as we read the story." An example if a reading instruction item is, "I read with my child so he/she will learn the letters and how to read simple

words." Items are rated on a four-point Likert scale from to "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Both subscales have demonstrated adequate to good reliability in other samples (reading instruction, $\alpha = .63$; verbal participation, $\alpha = .83$; DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994). In previous research, it was reported that the total score of this scale highly correlates with many aspects of the in-home literacy environment (DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994) in addition to global approaches to children's literacy development (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2006).

The reliability of each subscale was examined within the current sample. Any items that reduced the alpha coefficient by more than .05 were removed. The verbal participation subscale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency after removing five weak items ($\alpha = .72$). As designed by DeBaryshe and Binder (1994), the reading instruction scale includes four items, three of which are reverse scored. However, when analyzed as suggested by the scale authors, the alpha level was negative ($\alpha = -.77$). When conducted without any items reversed scored, the reliability was very low ($\alpha = .33$). The weakest item was removed and resulted in an alpha coefficient of .72.

Statistical Analyses

Relationships between demographic variables and the variables of interest (parenting dimensions, literacy beliefs and practices) were examined first using Pearson's r correlations, independent samples t -tests, and Pearson's chi square tests of independence so that any potential confounding variables could be controlled for in subsequent analyses. Hypotheses were tested using Pearson's correlations, independent samples t -tests, and an ANCOVA.

Results

The relationship between demographic variables, including participant age, child age, years of schooling, hours worked per week, having a partner in the home, have one or more than one child in the home, the gender of the child, and whether or not the child had older siblings, to the parenting variables were examined first. Only one analysis was significant: years of mother's schooling was negatively associated with authoritarian attitudes ($r = -.321, p = .041$). The relationship between demographic variables to the literacy beliefs and practices variables was also examined. None were found to be significant. Thus, none of the substantive analyses controlled for any covariates. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics of study variables.

² This measure and the measure on reading practices was added to the study after data collection began. Therefore, the sample size for these variables is smaller ($N = 24$).

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables for the Full Sample

	M (SD) / N	Range
Adult control	76.41(10.96)/41	45-101
Warmth	4.14(.64)/38	2.79-5.00
Reading age		
Two years old or less	15	
Three years old or older	14	
Best way to learn to read		
Constructivist	10	
Skills-based	14	
Reading frequency		
Several times per year	4	
1-2 times per month	2	
1-2 times per week	8	
3-4 times per week	11	
5-7 times per week	13	
Reading for fun		
Yes	17	
No	23	
PRBI direct reading instruction average score	3.75(.35)/24	2.00-4.00
PRBI verbal participation average score	3.31(.64)/24	3.00-4.00

Parenting Dimensions

The mean score on the authoritarian parenting measure suggests that, on average, mothers strongly endorse attitudes consistent with an authoritarian parenting style. As a means of comparison, the mean score on this same measure in a large, diverse sample of mothers of young children in U.S. was 56.12(13.12), and the range was 26-80 (Appelbaum, Batten, & Bland, 1993).

Inspection of the average score on items on the warmth scale also suggests that parents on the whole shared warm relationships with their children. Contrary to typical conceptions of authoritarian parents, a Pearson's correlation revealed a non-significant, modest, positive relationship between authoritarian parenting attitudes and warmth in the parent-child relationships for this sample of mothers. ($r = .212, p = .201$).

Relationships between parenting dimensions and literacy beliefs and practices

Because beliefs related to adult control and warmth were not related in this sample, we considered the contributions of each dimension to literacy beliefs and practices separately. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the relationships between the parenting dimensions and the literacy variables.

A parenting style which emphasizes high levels of adult control demonstrated some expected relationships to both literacy beliefs and practices. An independent samples t-test revealed that mothers who believed that children begin to read at a later age (3 years old or older) tended to endorse higher levels of adult control than those who believed children begin to read at an earlier age, $t(36) = -1.90, p = .065$. High adult control was also strongly, positively associated with scores on the direct reading instruction subscale ($r = .62, p = .017$). And although there were no significant differences in adult control between mothers who endorsed a constructivist method of learning to read versus those that endorsed

Table 2.
Relationships Between Parenting Dimensions and Literacy Variables

	Parenting Dimension	
	Adult Control	Warmth
	<i>M(SD)/r(p)</i>	<i>M(SD)/r(p)</i>
Reading age		
Two years old or less (<i>N</i> = 15)	72.67(11.04)a	4.06(.64)
Three years old or older (<i>N</i> = 14)	79.44(10.91)	4.24(.63)
Best way to learn to read		
Constructivist (<i>N</i> = 10)	74.20(9.65)	3.93(.80)
Skills-based (<i>N</i> = 14)	79.20(7.88)	4.06(.73)
Reading frequency	.001(.995)	.234(.177)
PRBI direct reading instruction	.429(.036)	.359(.092)
PRBI verbal participation	-.036(.866)	.201(.357)
Reading for fun		
Yes (<i>N</i> = 17)	73.53(13.99)	4.48(.41)b
No (<i>N</i> = 23)	78.73(7.95)	3.93(.68)

a = $t(36) = -1.90, p = .065$.

b = $t(35.43) = -3.011, p = .005$.

a skills-based method of learning how to read, results were in the expected direction, $t(22) = -1.40, p = .176$. No significant relationships were observed between adult control and using verbal participation as a reading strategy, frequency of book reading, or reading books for enjoyment ($t(23.56) = 1.38, p = .181$).

Although warmth did not directly predict the age at which mothers thought children began learning to read ($t(33) = -.806, p = .426$) or how they best learned how to read ($t(20) = -.385, p = .704$), it did predict reading for enjoyment. Those who read more for enjoyment with their children had warmer relationships with their children than those who did not report reading for enjoyment, $t(35.43) = -3.011, p = .005$. As can also be seen in Table 2, warmth was also unrelated to reading frequency generally or encouraging verbal participation while reading. Contrary to predictions, there was a positive trend noted for the relationship between warmth and direct reading instruction.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to begin to explore whether the authoritarian parenting style, which has been linked to poor outcomes in US samples (Burki-

na, et al., 2002; Landry, et al., 1997; Taylor, et al., 1995) and in children of Caribbean-born immigrants (Roopnarine, et al., 2006), might help explain why many children in the Virgin Islands enter kindergarten with poor language skills (CFVI, 2011). Existing research supports the hypothesis that these poor outcomes may be attributed to an authoritarian parenting style (Roopnarine, et al., 2006). The first goal of the study was to assess the validity of this construct to describe parenting in West Indian families and then to examine how dimensions of control and warmth may relate to literacy beliefs and practices.

Although the results of this study confirm previous research that describes West Indian parents as holding strong beliefs in adult control and obedience to authority (Evans & Davies, 1997; Maturin, Gisele, & Lancaster, 2006; Smith & Mosby, 2003), they also call into question the validity of the construct of an overall authoritarian parenting style in this population. Specifically, the level of warmth and closeness reported in the parent-child relationship in our sample was unrelated to how strongly the mother endorsed authoritarian childrearing attitudes.

The results reported here support the findings of Brown and Johnson (2008), whose study might also help

elucidate why these dimensions are unrelated in West Indian families. Brown and Johnson (2008) found that most Jamaican parents in their sample employed harsh discipline, but the parents' interactivity with their children *outside of discipline contexts* varied according to socioeconomic status and was not dependent upon the level of control exerted in discipline situations. Perhaps in some cultures harshness in a disciplinary context does not necessarily preclude warmth and verbal give-and-take in other contexts. If true, this could lead to quite different predictions about how child language and literacy outcomes are affected in cultures where a parenting style varies across contexts.

Perhaps the high adult control and emphasis on obedience and respect for authority found in this population may be better characterized as a "traditional" parenting style rather than authoritarian. Traditional and authoritarian parenting have many overlapping characteristics including an emphasis on child obedience to authority figures, limited participation of the child in family discussion and decision-making, and the use of discipline without reasoning. In fact, given their overlapping attributes, these two types of parenting may be erroneously confounded, or used interchangeably, especially when attempting to measure and differentiate these two categories. For example, Schaefer and Edgerton's (1985) Modernity Scale was designed to measure traditional and progressive parental beliefs about childrearing and education. However, it is commonly used as a measure of authoritarian parenting (e.g. NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 1998; Shears, Whiteside-Mansell, McKinley, & Selig, 2008; Campbell, Goldstein, Schaefer, & Ramey, 1991), despite having no questions pertaining to the amount of warmth present in the parent-child relationship, an essential element in the definition of authoritarian parenting. In the population for which Baumrind's constructs were conceptualized, it is possible that traditional parenting and authoritarian parenting co-occur, such that most traditional parents are indeed authoritarian. In other populations, including West Indian families, however, these two styles may be distinct. For the remainder of this discussion, the construct of high adult control as assessed by the Modernity scale will be referred to as a traditional parenting style.

Relationship of Parenting Dimensions to Literacy Beliefs and Practices

Consistent with the findings that traditional parenting attitudes and warmth separate dimensions, are our overall findings that each predicted literacy beliefs and/or practices in different ways. Traditional attitudes towards adult control were found to be related to a belief that children begin learning to read at later ages

and the use of direct instruction when reading with children. However, holding more traditional attitudes was not predictive of how much a West Indian mother read with her young child. This suggests that in this sample traditional parenting beliefs in general, and more conventional beliefs about children learning to read at later ages (i.e., at the age when school typically begins), may not necessarily translate into fewer parent-child activities, such as book reading, as it has in other samples (e.g., Burkina Ballymore). Rather, a strong belief in traditional parenting might be more predictive of *how* a parent reads to a young child among West Indian parents.

Interestingly, a traditional parenting style and the use of a strategy in which a parent is directive when engaging her child in literacy activities seem to fit well with a more traditional attitude towards the role of schools in children's education. West Indian parents' attitudes toward adult control generally and toward literacy, specifically, might be rooted in a more traditional culture wherein parents and schools possess distinct roles. Under this belief system, it is the school's responsibility to teach children to read (Mason, 1986; Reese & Ballymore, 2000). This is also consistent with Reese and Ballymore's (2000) findings that Latino parents more often believe children begin to learn to read after age 5, learn to read in school, and that the activities parents do engage in are most often adult-directed and focused on teaching discrete, basic literacy-related skills.

The implications of the beliefs and practices of VI parents for children's outcomes warrant further investigation. As research has demonstrated (Stipek, Feiler, Daniels & Milburn, 1995; Sonnenschein, Brody, & Munsterman, 1996), a skills-based approach and direct reading instruction may not be optimal for language and literacy development. Perhaps then the prevalence of this traditional style is indeed contributing in some negative way to literacy outcomes in young VI children. On the other hand, our findings do not paint as bleak a picture as might be expected given that the amount of book reading is also strongly related to language and literacy development (Hood, Conlon, & Andrews, 2008; Sénéchal, Pagan, Lever, & Ouellette, 2008; Wallace, Roberts, & Lodder, 1998; Zimmerman, Gilkerson, Richards, Christakis, Xu, Gray & Yapanel, 2009). The frequency of book reading was not correlated with high adult control. Thus, it remains an empirical question then as to whether such attitudes and practices necessarily lead to worse literacy outcomes for children in the VI.

Consistent with an approach advocated by Hyndman and Morrison (2012), our results suggest that literacy outcomes for young VI children also need to be considered within the context of other parenting dimensions.

Similar to the findings with adult control, warmth did not predict how often parents reported engaging in literacy activities, but rather in what context they reported reading with their children. Mothers who reported reading with their children for fun rated their relationships with them as warmer than mothers who did not mention reading for fun with their child. This could ultimately influence language and literacy outcomes in children in multiple ways. For example, children who come to see reading as a pleasurable activity may be more likely to engage in independent reading as they grow older. Moreover, this could potentially moderate any negative impact associated with a more adult-directed reading strategy.

In this sample, warmth in the relationship was also mildly related to using direct instruction during shared reading. This was contrary to what might be expected; a warm interaction during shared reading seems likely to have been associated with more verbal participation. However, in a culture that values traditional roles between home and school, perhaps even warm parents feel that they are doing their part most when they engage in direct reading instruction with their young children. Thus, even a multi-faceted perspective on parental influences needs to consider what particular outcomes parenting is being geared towards (Hyndman & Morrison, 2012), and how these goals might vary by cultural context (Super & Harness, 1986).

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study sheds light on the possible mechanisms that influence children's literacy and language outcomes in the USVI, the conclusions should still be read with caution. The small sample size posed a number of limitations. First, this sample may not be representative of all West Indian parents, or even of all West Indians living in the USVI, given that no parents were from St. Croix and that participants were not randomly sampled. The exclusive use of self-report measures is also a limitation of the current study. Because many mothers were less educated, it is possible that they may have given more socially desirable answers because they were talking with more educated researchers who were not raised in the Virgin Islands. Furthermore, since parental behavior was not directly observed, the information reported by mothers may not be completely accurate. Future research should attempt to observe parental behavior, so that childrearing strategies, amount of reading, and type of reading behaviors can be more accurately measured.

The exact psychometric properties of the measures used are also unknown within this West Indian sample. Future research should attempt to directly observe parent-child interactions to more accurately measure

the amount of warmth and the use of a traditional control style and also to avoid a self-report bias. The PRBI subscales of reading instruction and verbal participation also had had problems when we attempted to use it in a manner described by the scale authors (DeBaryshe & Binder, 1994). These measures, particularly the score for verbal participation during reading, had a restricted ranges which might account for the lack of significant relationships with this variable. Direct observations of parental reading practices would be ideal.

This study also was unable to account potential gender differences in the impact of parenting on literacy and language outcomes. Boys in the VI score substantially lower on the school readiness test results reported in the Kids Count Book (CFVI, 2011). That alone is a concern, but research has also established that males and females in West Indian society are socialized differently from childhood, such that girls are more protected and encouraged to be obedient, while boys are encouraged to be more independent and strong (Evans & Davies, 1997). The impact of these socialization differences on literacy outcomes merits further investigation. Similarly, the research by Brown & Johnson (2008) points to the need for future research to also consider possible differences related to social class.

Given the exploratory nature of this study, directly measuring outcomes was beyond its scope; therefore, definitive conclusions about how these might be affected should not be drawn yet. Certainly when interpreted in the context of previous research, some reasonable implications for outcomes could be drawn from the results reported here. However, it is still important to treat these as hypotheses to be tested since so little is known about how family and other factors influence literacy and language outcomes in West Indian children in general.

Finally, future research should also investigate the quality of children's early experiences outside of the home. Since research has linked these experiences with language and literacy outcomes (Campbell, et al., 2002; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002), these should be examined simultaneously with parental beliefs and practices, as well as the characteristics of the home literacy environment, to gain a complete picture of all factors that might be influencing VI children's language and literacy development.

Conclusion

West Indian parents have typically been depicted as authoritarian (or worse); however, these results suggest that their parenting style may simply reflect a more traditional approach to childrearing that can exist in

relationships high in warmth. Further, it is important to keep in mind that an emphasis on high adult control might function independently of warmth/closeness in the relationship. In this study both adult control and warmth predicted aspects of parental literacy beliefs and practice, albeit different ones. Interestingly, strong attitudes in favor of adult control were related to literacy beliefs and practices, which, on the whole, could also be described as “traditional.” Future research needs to examine whether parenting dimensions predict children’s literacy outcomes in West Indian families, and to replicate these findings in larger, more representative samples. Research that illuminates how the larger cultural context has shaped relationships among more general dimensions of parenting and domain-specific practices, and how external pressures to change affect them, is also needed. Despite a number of methodological limitations, the current study suggests that it is important to consider how parenting may be contributing to literacy outcomes in young Virgin Islanders.

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