

## *Parenting in Puerto Rican families: Mothers and father's self-reported practices*

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### **Abstract**

Little information is available on parenting practices of families living in Puerto Rico. In order to fill this gap, 55 two-parent families with a 6 to 11 year old child were surveyed on contextual stressors known to impact parenting (i.e., depression, subjective economic status, parenting stress, marital satisfaction), parenting practices (i.e., skills building, positive involvement, problem solving, monitoring, and effective discipline), as well as child externalizing behavior problems. Data revealed a sample with relatively low self-reported stressors, high endorsement of parenting practices, and subclinical child externalizing behaviors. All measures were reliable, indicating potential for future use in Puerto Rican samples. All relationships were in the expected direction. Specifically higher reports on stressors were negatively related to endorsement of effective parenting practices, and effective parenting practices were negatively correlated to problematic scores in child outcomes. Maternal problem solving fully mediated the relationship between marital satisfaction and child externalizing behaviors. Implications for future research are provided.

*Keywords:* parenting, Puerto Rican families, young children

### **La crianza de los hijos en la familias puertorriqueñas: prácticas de auto-reportadas de madres y padres**

#### **Resumen**

Existe poca información disponible acerca de las prácticas de crianza en familias que viven en Puerto Rico. Ante esta necesidad, 55 familias con dos figuras parentales en el hogar y un/a niño/a entre 6 y 11 años de edad fueron encuestados acerca de estresores contextuales conocidos por su impacto en los modos de crianza (i.e., depresión, situación económica subjetiva, estrés parental, satisfacción marital). Igualmente, fueron encuestados acerca de las prácticas de crianza empleadas (i.e., desarrollo de nuevas destrezas, involucramiento positivo, solución de problemas, supervisión y disciplina efectiva), así como de problemas de conducta externalizante presentes en los/as niños/as. Todas las medidas fueron confiables, lo que indica el potencial uso de las mismas en futuras investigaciones con muestras puertorriqueñas. Todas las relaciones fueron en la dirección esperada. Específicamente, las altas puntuaciones en estresores se relacionaron de forma negativa con el respaldo de prácticas de crianza efectivas, mientras que las prácticas de crianza efectivas correlacionaron negativamente con puntuaciones problemáticas en los resultados de los/as niños/as. Las destrezas de solución de problemas en la figura materna medió la relación entre satisfacción marital y conductas externalizante en los/as niños/as. Se proporcionan implicaciones para investigaciones futuras.

*Palabras claves:* prácticas de crianza; familias puertorriqueñas; niños jóvenes

Parenting is a ubiquitous activity across cultures. General human development provides a structure for parenting tasks and skills, and the ways those are

carried out across the lifespan are deeply impacted by culture (Rogoff, 2003). Conversely, parenting practices shape children's social, psychological, and academic outcomes. This impact can be observed in short- (e.g., today's behavior) and long-term (e.g., college completion) outcomes. Scholars have spent considerable time examining parenting practices around the

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globe and trying to determine which practices lead to optimal outcomes. At present there is a robust literature that recognizes the utility of evidence-based interventions to improve parenting practices, which in turn impact children's academic difficulties, mental health, delinquency, and drug abuse (e.g., DeGarmo & Forgatch, 2005; Niemeyer, Wong, Westerhaus, 2009; Reid, Eddy, Fetrow, & Stoolmiller, 1999; Stormshak, Bierman, McMahon, & Lengua, 2000).

With increasing globalization, evidence-based parenting interventions are being disseminated across national contexts (e.g., Forgatch & Patterson, 2010; Forgatch, Patterson, & Gewirtz, in press; Kumpfer, Pinyuchon, de Mello, & Whiteside, 2008; Phillips, Morgan, Cawthorne, & Barnett, 2008). These interventions have been developed based on research with mostly White American families and fully taking into account their sociocultural context. There was historically limited research on the effectiveness of these interventions across cultural groups within and outside the U.S. and ample warnings have been issued to consider psychotherapy as one of many culturally based healing practices (Wampold, 2001). However, recent research suggests the effectiveness of culturally adapted evidence-based interventions (Benish, Quintana, & Wampold, 2011; Smith, Domenech Rodríguez, & Bernal, 2011). In order to culturally adapt evidence-based interventions, myriad models are available to inform the areas in need of tailoring (Domenech Rodríguez & Bernal, 2012a). The observations needed to inform cultural adaptations require an integration of qualitative and quantitative data in local contexts that can inform the intervention itself as well as the acceptability of interventions into diverse contexts (Domenech Rodríguez & Bernal, 2012b). The present research provides data on self-reported parenting practices in Puerto Rican families that will help inform cultural adaptations to an evidence-based parenting intervention for Puerto Rican families.

### Puerto Rican Context

Puerto Rico is the smallest of the Greater Antilles and is an archipelago consisting of the *Isla Grande* (big island), Vieques, *la Isla Nena* (small girl island), Culebra, Mona, and a few smaller islands (Martínez Avilés, 2011). Puerto Rico has a strong colonial history and is purported to be the oldest colony in the world by noted jurist José Trías Monge (1997). Inhabited by indigenous groups prior to colonization, Puerto Rico was "discovered" in 1492. At that time it became a Spanish territory until the Spanish-American war. In 1898 Puerto Rico became a U.S. colony (Martínez Avilés, 2011). Puerto Rico was listed in the United Nations' list of colonies until 1953 when the U.S. peti-

tioned to have it removed following the establishment of the *Estado Libre Asociado* (ELA; Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; Martínez Avilés, 2011). Since that time Puerto Rico has remained under U.S. rule as a non-incorporated territory. Debates have been ongoing since 1953 on whether or not Puerto Rico should still be considered a colony. An in-depth analysis of this debate is beyond the scope of this manuscript, however, it is important to direct readers to further study and analyze colonialism and the colonial mentality in Puerto Rico as political structures and histories may be profoundly implicated in the psychological and social adjustment of the people of Puerto Rico.

Specific to this research, it is critical to note that in the process of colonization, the lifeways and thoughtways (Trimble, 2009) of the dominant group are imposed on a society as "right" and "true" to such a degree as to become an indelible part of the fabric of that society. In a perhaps perverse example, an important battleground for Puerto Ricans' identities has rested on language. In 1991, then-governor Rafael Hernández Colón signed the "Spanish only law" (New York Times, 1991). The move earned "the people of Puerto Rico" a *Príncipe de Asturias* award, which the governor accepted in an impassioned speech (Hernández Colón, 2001). Yet it is impossible to not notice that Spanish is the language of the previous colonizer.

It is critical to move forward carefully in examining the meaning of family, parents, parenting, and child rearing in a Puerto Rican context and to attempt to understand which aspects of these constructs and their behavioral manifestations are tied to cultural practices without imposing U.S.-based standards for what is "good" parenting. Significant changes in parenting practices are found even within U.S. ethnic groups (e.g., Domenech Rodríguez, Donovan, & Crowley, 2009). Scholars have warned about the dangers in importing models that are irrelevant to the cultural context (Domenech Rodríguez & Bernal, 2012b; Lucca-Irizarry, 1994). In that spirit this paper will present descriptive data from parents' self-reports while attempting to disengage value judgments on these findings.

### Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rican Families

The U.S. Census (2007-2011) population estimates for the island reflect over 3.7 million people living in Puerto Rico. Most report Puerto Rico or the U.S. as their place of birth (3.6 million; 96.9%). Only 2.8% ( $n = 105,878$ ) residents report foreign-born status. Most residents speak Spanish (3.3 million, 95.4%), with a sizeable number (2.8 million, 81.0%) that speak English less than "very well." Educational attainment for those over 25 years of age (2.4 million) is non-normally distributed with most persons reporting a high school

education (622,037, 25.5%), yet a sizeable number also reporting less than 9th grade (507,457; 20.8%), some college or an associate's degree (515,016; 21.1%) and college or graduate studies (535,157; 22.0%).

The U.S. Census (2007-2011) counted over 1.2 million households in Puerto Rico of which 73.6% were estimated to be family households ( $n = 905,467$ ). Nearly a third of those family households reported having at least one child under 18 (375,691; 30.5%). Family composition was varied, with households headed by married couples (193,224; 51.4%), single women (150,934; 40.2%) and single men (31,533; 8.4%). In addition, 118,353 grandparents reported living with grandchildren under 18. Fully 47.3% ( $n = 56,044$ ) of those reported being primarily responsible for their grandchildren. It is unclear from these census data whether grandparent-led households overlap with what the Census calls "family households." Potentially all the grandparents live in homes where there are three generations. It is also possible, if these households are counted separately, that a grandparent-led households represent another sizeable portion in the diverse array of family structures. Furthermore, the census does not offer an option for unmarried cohabiting partners. It is impossible to ascertain if those families are found under "single mothers" or "married couples." These data are critical as they point to who may benefit from parenting interventions and what contexts may require adaptation of evidence-based practices.

### Parenting and Child Outcomes in Puerto Rican Families

Surprisingly little is known about Puerto Rican parents' parenting practices or even child outcomes. In the parenting domain, there is little research on normative practices or interventions in published journal articles or book chapters. It is possible that there is information available in unpublished theses and dissertations and that there is merely an issue of access. It is also possible that some of the missing information in the literature on Puerto Rican parents is a function of confusion over operational definitions of the family, parenting, and an absence in clarity about the unit of analysis in examining "parenting" in relation to child outcomes. Indeed, the word "parenting" does not exist in Spanish but rather parents and experts alike use the term "crianza" (child rearing) to talk about the caregiver practices that are typically examined under the parenting concept in the U.S. In Mexico, our research team coined the term "parentalidad" to refer to parenting but it is not in mainstream use. Nonetheless, two empirical pieces are critical to the current effort (Lucca-Irizarry, 1994; Lucca-Irizarry & Pacheco, 1989).

Presenting on a decade of research on parenting, Lucca-Irizarry (1994) published ethnographic data on diverse samples of Puerto Rican parents, namely, low-income parents in a fishing village ( $n = 59$ ), suburban upper-middle-class parents ( $n = 50$ ), and low-income parents in an urban community ( $n = 30$ ). These data were collected cross-sectionally and highlight the importance of understanding parenting agents and parenting practices within neighborhood contexts. Findings suggest that parents across areas shift their expectations according to the developmental level of the child. In each community parents had clear ideas of what to expect from their children and who were the relevant socialization agents. Low-income urban parents were most concerned with controlling their children whereas upper-middle class suburban parents expected obedience, respect, and dependence on adults. Finally, low-income parents in a fishing village had more nuanced developmental observations, shifting expectations for 0-1, 1-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-11, 12-14, 15-17, and 18-20 year olds. These parents showed a strong shift between the expectations of the under 6 children as playful and funny to more culturally-based expectations for those over 6 to be disciplined, obedient, responsible, respectful, peaceful, studious, hard working, well behaved, and humble. Although parents' expectations for their children and their parenting role vary across communities, there were also notable similarities.

For parenting practices to be defined as "cultural" they must be transmitted through generations. Lucca-Irizarry and Pacheco (1989), offer findings from an examination the parenting practices of young Puerto Rican mothers ( $n = 84$ ,  $M_{age} = 30.5$ ) and their mothers (hereafter referred to as "grandmothers";  $n = 84$ ,  $M_{age} = 55.6$ ). The authors found some generational differences. For example, mothers were more likely to be employed than grandmothers (35% versus 19%) and were less likely than grandmothers to report being solely responsible for childrearing (56% versus 71.4%). Grandmothers had more children than mothers ( $M = 3.8$  versus 2.1). When asked to define parenting, both grandmothers and mothers did so in behavioral terms. The authors then categorized responses into the following three domains: teaching, providing, and caring. Lucca-Irizarry and Pacheco (1989) clustered responses into these three domains and placed participants into one of three categories following their predominant definition. There were no significant differences between grandmothers and mothers across these groups, with a majority defining parenting as caring (55.1% and 66.2% respectively), followed by teaching (34.7% and 28.3%), and finally, providing (10.2% and 5.7% respectively). Both agreed that different parenting practices were required for raising boys and girls (81.7% grandmothers; 69.6% mothers).

In the multi-generational study, participants reported on aspects of good parenting and specific parenting practices (Lucca-Irizarry & Pacheco, 1989). A good mother was one that physically cared for her children, taught socio-cultural values, led children down a “good path” and taught them ethical/religious values. A good father was reported to be a good provider and a good example (i.e., models good behavior) for his children. Three main parenting goals were reported: health, education, and good family relationships. Participants in this study reported learning about parenting from their own mothers as well as their spouses. Not a single participant reported using parenting manuals or books to inform their parenting. Participants taught their children mainly through the use of punishment-advice giving (*consejo*) or modeling-advice giving.

**Child outcomes.** The MECA study (Bird et al., 2001) included a sample of 301 Puerto Rican parents from the San Juan metropolitan area as one of four parent-child pair samples (189 African American, 52 US-based Latino, 668 White American). The authors found that island Puerto Ricans had the lowest prevalence reports of conduct disorder (4.1%), oppositional defiant disorder (3.0%), mild (level 1; 15.9%), moderate (level 2; 6.3%), and severe (levels 3, 4, 5; 17.6%) antisocial conduct of any of the samples. Island Puerto Rican parents reported the lowest levels of coercive discipline (6.6%) of any of the groups as well as the lowest levels (31.2%) of adverse events. When compared to the other groups, island Puerto Rican parents reported similar family environment, parental marital adjustment, child social competence, and parental monitoring. However, island Puerto Rican parents reported the strongest relationship with family (parents, siblings) of any group.

### Theoretical Orientation of the Present Study

Overall, the literature accessed reflects little available knowledge about the parenting practices of parents living in Puerto Rico. This knowledge is particularly limited in providing specific behavioral indicators that may be used to inform interventions to strengthen parents and families. No studies could be located that connected Puerto Rican parents’ parenting practices to child outcomes. We provide specific information on the parenting practices of mothers and fathers of young children living in Puerto Rico and the relationship between those practices and child outcomes. Furthermore, the present research and its broader international efforts (Baumann, Domenech Rodríguez, Amador, Parra-Cardona, & Forgatch, in press) are built from Social Interaction Learning (SIL) theory and its associated intervention, Parent Management Training – Oregon model (PMTO; Patterson, Forgatch,

& DeGarmo, 2010). The theory specifies that child outcomes are the direct result of caregiver’s positive involvement, skills building, problem solving, effective discipline, and monitoring practices. Social context, according to SIL theory, exerts its impact on children through its effect on caregivers’ ability to engage the proactive parenting strategies (Patterson et al., 2010).

PMTO has been tested, confirmed, and replicated (Forgatch & Patterson, 2010; Patterson et al., 2010). This intervention model has been implemented in the U.S. across diverse family contexts (e.g., divorce, foster care). Furthermore, it has been successfully tested in international settings such as Norway, Iceland, Denmark, and the Netherlands (e.g., Bekkema, Wiefferink, & Mikolajczak, 2008; Odgen, Forgatch, Askeland, Patterson, & Bullock, 2005; Odgen, Hagen, Askeland & Christensen, 2009; Sigmarðóttir & Björnsdóttir, 2012; Sigmarðóttir & Guðmundsdóttir, 2013). PMTO has been adapted for Latinos in the U.S. and Mexico (Baumann et al., in press; Domenech Rodríguez et al., 2011). Recent work has provided evidence for desirable outcomes for ethnic minorities in the U.S. (Parra Cardona et al., 2012) and Norway (Björknes, Kjølbli, Manger, & Jakobsen, 2012).

### Method

#### Participants

Fifty-five families were recruited in Puerto Rico primarily from the San Juan metropolitan area through local schools and the Puerto Rico Teacher’s Association, as well as the Ponce metropolitan area, through collaboration with the Ponce School of Medicine. Parents completed self-report measures and participated in 33 minutes of structured observational tasks. Families that participated had a paternal and maternal figure in the home, a child between 6 and 11 years of age, and an absence of severe conduct problems or developmental delays. The present study reports on self-report measures only.

Children in the sample were 6 to 11 years of age ( $M_{\text{age}} = 7.93$ ,  $SD = 1.75$ ). Mothers were 23 to 50 years old ( $M_{\text{age}} = 36.48$ ,  $SD = 7.67$ ) and the majority had completed an undergraduate degree ( $n = 38$ , 69.0%). Fathers were 22 to 56 years old ( $M_{\text{age}} = 37.81$ ,  $SD = 8.00$ ) and the majority had completed an undergraduate degree or higher level of education ( $n = 29$ , 52.7%). Children were mostly born in Puerto Rico ( $n = 52$ , 94.5%), as were their mothers ( $n = 44$ , 80.0%) and fathers ( $n = 47$ , 85.5%). In the final sample, most homes were comprised of two adults ( $n = 45$ , 81.8%) and one to three children ( $n = 51$ , 92.7%) and 75% ( $n = 42$ ) of parents reported that their child had “good” or “very good” relationship with siblings. Most families were intact

( $n = 40$ , 72.2%), that is, children were born of or adopted by both parental figures in the home; the remainder were stepfamilies.

### Sampling procedures

The final sample is a sample of convenience. Recruitment was handled in a variety of places (e.g., public and private schools), via word-of-mouth, community workshops, flyers, and newspaper columns (Sella-Nieves, Franceschi-Rivera, Felix-Fermin, & Domenech Rodriguez, 2011). Of 105 families screened, 70 qualified and 55 participated. Inclusion criteria were: (a) family with a child between 6 and 11 years of age, (b) two parents in the home, (c) absence of extremely problematic child behaviors (e.g., fire setting with the intention of destroying property), (d) absence of severe developmental problems (e.g., autism, intellectual skills deficit).

A total of 30 families were excluded from the study, most of them because of family structure (e.g., never married or divorced parents that were not cohabiting with a romantic partner). Participating families attended a one-time data collection session, completed questionnaires, and participated together in a series of behavioral observation tasks. Data were collected either at a community clinic at the Institute for Psychological Research, at a community clinic at the Ponce School of Medicine, or in participant's homes. Immediately after participating each parent received \$25 for their participation and children received a small item from a prize box. Parents also were invited to participate in a free parenting workshop following the study as an incentive for participation. Approval for this research was obtained through the *Comité Institucional para la Protección de Sujetos Humanos en Investigación* at the University of Puerto Rico prior to the beginning of the study. The Utah State University and Ponce School of Medicine Institutional Review Boards also approved the study.

### Sample size

The final sample was composed of 55 families. No power analyses were conducted at the outset for this pilot project. Sample size was determined based on prior research conducted in Logan, UT, which yielded sufficient information to inform a cultural adaptation of the same evidence-based intervention (see Domenech Rodríguez et al., 2011). Post-hoc power analyses were conducted to determine the adequacy of the sample size to predict child outcome from parenting practices. G\*Power 3.1.3 (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007). Power was adequate for the main effects test (i.e., predicting child outcome from parenting practices). The study was underpowered for mediation

analyses. For that reason, effect sizes were carefully examined in addition to statistical significance.

### Analytic Strategy

A criticism of published family research is the overreliance on mothers' reports in understanding parenting and child behaviors. We sought to address this limitation in the literature by collecting data on both mother and father reports on parenting as well as child behavior. Rather than combining parental reports into indices that create new problems for data analysis and interpretation, the present data were analyzed separately for mothers and fathers thus maintaining assumptions of data independence in each series of analyses. For example, in the mediation models tested, mothers' self-reports for contextual variables (i.e., parenting stress, depression, marital satisfaction, united parenting front), parenting practices, and the mother's report on child behavior. Analyses pertaining to fathers were conducted only utilizing those self-report measures provided by fathers.

### Measures

Self-report measures for this study included demographics (e.g., parental and child age, level of education, national origin, subjective economic status), parental depression, parental stress, marital satisfaction, united parenting front, the five core parenting practices (i.e., positive involvement, problem solving, effective discipline, monitoring, and skills building), and child outcomes. Parents filled out the demographic questionnaire together but reported separately on all other measures. All measures were administered in Spanish. All analyses were conducted using scale means.

**Subjective economic status.** An 8-item scale (Beauvais, 1996) was used to gather a sense of self-reported financial strain. Respondents assess their perception for the past year on whether the family had for expenses such as "enough money to buy food" on a scale of *always* (1) to *never* (4). Mothers and fathers answered these questions together and the scale showed adequate reliability for the present sample ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Parental depression.** Mother and father's depression symptomatology were measured with the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression (CESD) scale, a 20-item scale that asks parents to report on how they have felt over the past week on various depression symptoms such as "I felt depressed" on a scale of 0 (*rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)*) to 3 (*All of the time (5-7 days)*) (Radloff, 1977). Cronbach alphas for the present sample were adequate for mothers ( $\alpha = .84$ ) and fathers ( $\alpha = .78$ ).

**Parenting stress.** Stress specific to parenting tasks was measured through the Parenting Stress Index

(PSI; Abidin, 1995). The PSI is a 36-item scale that asks parents to report their agreement (1 = *strongly agree*, 5 = *strongly disagree*) on a series of statements such as “Since having this child, I feel that I’m almost never able to do things I like to do.” Cronbach alphas for the present sample were adequate for mothers ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and fathers ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

**Marital satisfaction.** This construct was measured with the marital satisfaction subscale of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (Nina Estrella, 1985; Spanier, 1976). The scale has 10 items that inquire about couple agreement on key issues (e.g., trusting partner on a scale of 0 = *never* to 5 = *always*), degree of marital satisfaction (0 = *extremely unhappy*, 6 = *perfect*), and the respondent’s future visualization for the relationship (0 = *my relationship can never succeed, and there is no more I can do to keep the relationship going*, 5 = *I want desperately for my relationship to succeed, and would go to almost any length to see that it does*). Cronbach alpha reliabilities for mothers ( $\alpha = .72$ ) and fathers ( $\alpha = .83$ ) in the present sample were good.

**United parenting front.** Self-reported united parenting was measured with an 18-item modified version of the Co-parenting Alliance scale (Dumka, Prost, & Barrera, 2002). The scale asks mothers and fathers to report on the frequency with which 18 events occurred during the past month relating to consistent parenting (e.g., “I did not like the way in which my partner treated the children”) on a 5-point scale ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5). Cronbach alpha reliabilities for mothers ( $\alpha = .86$ ) and fathers ( $\alpha = .81$ ) in the present sample were good.

**Core parenting practices.** The five core parenting practices—positive involvement, problem solving, skills building, effective discipline, and monitoring—targeted for intervention in the PMTO model were measured via parental self-report.

**Positive involvement.** Self-reported parental involvement was measured with a 10-item Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*) and developed for the present study and the larger PMTO Latino collaborative team, and partly based on a translation of the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (Donovick & Domenech Rodríguez, 2008). Items asked about the frequency with which parents engaged in positive involvement with their children (e.g., had a friendly conversation, or take kids to fun extracurricular activities). Mothers and fathers responded separately. Cronbach alpha reliabilities were adequate for mothers ( $\alpha = .79$ ) and fathers ( $\alpha = .81$ ) in the present sample.

**Problem solving.** Problem-solving skills were measured with an 18-item scale based on the original in Spanish by Domenech Rodríguez, Villatoro Velázquez, and Gutiérrez López (2007). The scale asks parents

to report how frequently (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*) they engage their children when they have a problem. For example, “I talk to my child about the problem.” Scales for mothers ( $\alpha = .77$ ) and fathers ( $\alpha = .83$ ) showed adequate reliabilities.

**Effective discipline.** An effective discipline scale was developed based on Martinez and Eddy’s (2005) 12-item scale. In the translation and back-translation process the research team added 6 items, for a final scale of 18 items. Scale items reflect on known effective parenting practices based on the PMTO model (e.g., use of fines, time out, and privilege removal) and ineffective practices (e.g., screaming, pinching, not following through on consequences). Parents reported the frequency with which they engaged in each of the 18 practices ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5). Because of the nature of the parenting practices, there is no reliability index. Data on these practices were reported individually.

**Monitoring.** Monitoring was measured with a 16-item self-report scale modified from Martinez and Eddy (2005). Items asked about how much parents know (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*) about the whereabouts of their child at home, school, and in the community. Initial analyses revealed a problematic item (i.e., In general, how often do you coordinate with other adults to supervise your kid’s activities?), which was dropped for both mothers and fathers. Cronbach alpha reliabilities for the 15-item scale were adequate for mothers and fathers (both  $\alpha = .74$ ).

**Skills building.** Self-reported skills building was measured with a 24-item modified from Martinez and Eddy (2005). The items asked parents to identify the frequency (1 = *never*, 5 = *always*) with which they engaged in specific behaviors (e.g., spent extra time) when a child did something well or was learning a new skill. Mothers ( $\alpha = .87$ ) and fathers ( $\alpha = .89$ ) showed adequate reliability.

**Child outcomes.** Child externalizing behaviors were measured with the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). The CBCL has 118 items that describe specific behavioral and emotional problems. Parents rate their child for how true each item is now or within the past 6 months on a three-point scale that ranges from 0 (*not true (as far as you know)*) to 2 (*very true or often true*). There are three index scores for internalizing, externalizing, and total problem behaviors. In a comprehensive analysis across multiple cultures, Crijnen, Achenbach, and Verhulst (1997, 1999) compared the CBCL scores of some 14,000 children from 12 cultures. Although there were some significant cross-cultural differences, CBCL scale scores from most cultures were remarkably close to the “omnicultural mean” obtained by averaging scores from all the cultures.

## Results

The purpose of this study was to gather information about normative parenting practices in a sample of two-parent families with a child between 6 and 11 years of age in Puerto Rico. We first report on family characteristics, including subjective economic status. We then report on parent variables, namely, parental mental health (depression, parenting stress), united parenting front, marital satisfaction, and self-reported parenting practices. We follow parent-focused variables with parents' report on child behavior. Finally, we report on the relationship between self-reported parenting practices and child outcomes.

### Family Characteristics

**Subjective economic status.** Parents were asked to report on subjective economic status through a scale and some key items. Families in the sample appeared to have some economic diversity. On the 8-item subjective economic status scale (Beauvais, 1996) mean responses varied from 1 to 3.38 ( $M_{SES} = 1.65$ ,  $SD = .64$ ) with

lower scores indicating minimal financial strain. This would suggest a relatively solvent sample. However, when asked "how often are there discussions / arguments because we don't have enough money," 54.5% ( $n = 30$ ) of the sample reported *sometimes*. Other items suggested these families lived within modest means. In the sample 32.1% ( $n = 18$ ) of children had access to a government sponsored health program and over half of the sample ( $n = 32$ , 58.2%) attended a public school. These numbers are slightly different from the general population as 76.8% of kindergarteners through eighth graders in 2009-2010 were enrolled in public schools in Puerto Rico (Disdier Flores & Marazzi Santiago, 2011). In about a third of the sample ( $n = 19$ , 34.6%) two adults contributed income to the family, and in 10.9% ( $n = 6$ ) of families neither adult worked. The overall picture that emerges is that of a sample where there is sufficient money to meet basic needs.

### Parent Variables

All means, standard deviations, and scale ranges for these measures are reported in table 1.

Table 1  
*Means and Standard Deviations for Study Scales*

	Mothers			Fathers			Scale Range	Sample Range
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
<b>Parent Variables</b>								
Parenting Stress	55	4.06	0.60	53	4.09	0.50	1 - 5	2.44 - 5.00
Parental Depression	55	0.47	0.38	55	0.46	0.36	0 - 3	0.00 - 1.84
Parental Dep. Sum	55	9.35	7.39	55	8.96	7.01	0 - 60	0.00 - 35.00
United Parenting Front	55	3.82	0.39	55	3.90	0.29	1 - 5	2.56 - 4.53
Marital Satisfaction	47	4.07	0.60	47	4.15	0.49	1 - 5	2.50 - 5.00
<b>Parenting Practices</b>								
Positive involvement	55	4.35	0.51	55	3.90	0.61	1 - 5	2.30 - 5.00
Problem solving	55	3.95	0.41	55	3.92	0.53	1 - 5	2.44 - 4.67
Skills building	55	4.06	0.46	55	3.94	0.47	1 - 5	2.50 - 5.00
Monitoring	55	4.41	0.31	55	4.26	0.36	1 - 5	3.21 - 4.79
<b>Child outcomes</b>								
Child externalizing	54	57.54	10.36	54	55.59	8.95	1 - 100	33 - 76
Child internalizing	54	54.72	10.72	54	53.39	8.59	1 - 100	33 - 74
Child total	54	56.87	10.41	54	54.83	9.04	1 - 100	34 - 75

**Parent mental health.** Mothers and fathers self-reported on depressive symptomatology and parental stress. Parents reported low levels of depression. There were no significant differences between groups,  $t(108) = .245, p = .807$ . The CES-D has a published cutoff score of 16. This number is similar to CES-D cutoff in a Puerto Rican sample (Bernal & Bonilla, 2003). Ten mothers (18%) and seven fathers (12.6%) were at score of 16 or higher. Levels of parenting stress were also relatively low in this sample for both mothers and fathers with no significant differences between the two,  $t(106) = -.330, p = .742$ . Fully 60% of mothers and 50.9% of fathers reported a mean at 4 (*agree*) or higher for the parenting stress scale indicating agreement with high levels of efficacy in their role (lower scores were indicative of stress).

**United parenting front.** Parents reported medium to high levels of united front. There were no

statistically significant differences between the two,  $t(108) = -1.22, p = .227$ .

**Parental marital satisfaction.** Parents showed agreement on their reports of marital satisfaction,  $r(55) = .286, p = .035$ . They reported relatively strong satisfaction. There were no significant mean differences between the two,  $t(92) = -0.72, p = .475$ .

**Parenting practices.** All parenting practices were reported on scales from 1 to 5 with greater values indicating higher endorsement of the practice. Mothers reported statistically significant higher levels of monitoring,  $t(108) = 2.32, p = .022$ , and positive involvement,  $t(108) = 4.14, p < .001$ , than fathers. There were no significant differences in mothers and fathers reports on problem solving,  $t(108) = .376, p = .707$ , or skills building,  $t(108) = 1.30, p = .197$ . Within mothers and fathers, parenting practices correlated positively as expected (see table 2).

Table 2  
*Correlation Between Parenting Practices: Mothers Below and Fathers Above the Diagonal*

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Positive Involvement	--	.504***	.406**	.576***
2. Skills Building	.589***	--	.546***	.533***
3. Problem Solving	.530***	.600***	--	.480***
4. Monitoring	.526***	.351**	.454**	--

\*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

When examining specific practices, we found that 80% or more of mothers endorsed the following positive involvement items as occurring “always”: I ask my child about his or her day at school, I help my child with schoolwork. In monitoring, we found that 80% or more of mothers endorsed the following items as occurring “always”: during a regular school day, I know where my child is, during a typical weekend, I know where my child is, and during a typical weekend, I know who my child is with. Over 80% of fathers reported knowing where and who their child was with during a typical weekend, and not ever allowing the child to be without the supervision of an adult (weekend). Nearly all parents ( $n = 54, 96.4\%$ ) reported that their child was never alone without the supervision of an adult.

Mothers reported being very involved with schoolwork with over 80% of mothers reporting they do not become desperate and give up when helping their children with homework, they assign a specific time and place to do homework, they accompany the child while he or she completes homework, help when the child gets stuck or needs to rehearse material for tests,

and prompt the child that it is time to do the work. Over 80% of mothers reported reviewing homework, providing access to educational materials, and limiting noises and distractions during homework time. Over 80% of fathers reported that they do not become desperate and give up when helping their children with homework, help child do homework, help when the child gets stuck or needs to rehearse material for tests, prompt the child that it is time to do the work, provide access to educational materials, and limit noises and distractions during homework time. This level of involvement may not be surprising when considering that overwhelmingly ( $n = 55, 98\%$ ) parent dyads reported that their child’s primary responsibility was “to study.”

Finally, parents reported on effective discipline strategies. Table 3 presents information on the number of mothers and fathers that endorsed each practice almost always or always. A review of the data shows that mothers have higher endorsement than fathers in general. *T tests* were conducted to examine mean differences between mothers and fathers on each item. Of the more frequently endorsed parenting practices, mothers



reported on average talking with the child about the misbehavior and its consequences more than fathers,  $t(95.21) = 2.75, p = .007$ , and asking the child to correct or fix what he or she did,  $t(108) = 2.48, p = .015$ . Mothers reported removing privileges more often on average than fathers,  $t(107) = 2.56, p = .012$ . The differences between mothers and fathers on "stop" commands approached significance with mothers having higher means than fathers,  $t(107) = 1.95, p = .054$ . For least frequent behaviors, mothers reported higher means on engaging in

shouting or screaming,  $t(108) = 3.16, p = .002$ , letting the child suffer the consequences of his or her misbehavior (e.g., if he/she does not use the jacket, she might get cold; if he/she does not do his/her homework, he/she could get bad grades, etc.),  $t(108) = 3.33, p = .001$ , and getting upset and losing control when disciplining,  $t(103.24) = 4.18, p < .001$ . Given mothers higher involvement in presumably desirable and undesirable practices, it is likely that mothers are simply more involved in the day-to-day discipline of the child.

Table 3  
*Specific Discipline Practices: Parents Endorsing "Almost Always" or "Always"*

	Mothers		Fathers	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1. Talk with child about misbehavior and consequences	52	94.6	34	80.0
2. Shout or scold	14	25.5	7	12.7
3. Ask child to correct or fix problem	51	92.7	43	78.2
4. Let child suffer the natural consequences of misbehavior	13	23.6	5	9.1
5. Give a warning for punishment	39	70.9	27	49.1
6. Give pinches, pull ears or spank	2	3.6	1	1.8
7. Follow through on punishment warnings	40	72.7	38	69.1
8. Order your child to "stop" or give a command (e.g., Do not run)	40	72.8	34	61.8
9. Remove privileges	28	50.9	19	34.5
10. Give your child a time out for more than 15 minutes?	13	23.6	9	16.4
11. Withhold points from an incentive chart	5	9.1	4	7.3
12. Do nothing	3	5.4	1	1.8
13. Give child a fine	4	7.3	4	7.3
14. Try to discipline child but regret doing so because it's not going to work	1	1.8	1	1.8
15. Give child a time out for less than 15 minutes	13	23.6	11	20
16. Give child extra chores	6	10.9	5	9.1
17. Get upset and loses control	6	10.9	0	0
18. Ignore the behavior on purpose	0	0	0	0

#### Child behavior

Overall reported child behavior was in the normal range for internalizing, externalizing, and total problem behaviors for both mothers and fathers (see Table 1). In addition to these data, parents reported that over a quarter of children in the sample ( $n = 15, 26.8\%$ ) had received psychological services in the past. There was

a high degree of correlation between mother and father internalizing ( $r = .63, p < .001$ ), externalizing ( $r = .69, p < .001$ ), and total ( $r = .71, p < .001$ ) behavior scales. Although a visual inspection of means reveals that mothers tended to score higher than fathers, there were no significant mean differences between them. When examined by clinical categories of nonclinical (T score

less than 65), borderline (t score between 65 and 74), and clinical (t score at or above 75), a slightly different pattern emerges. Still the vast majority of mothers ( $n = 40$ ) and fathers ( $n = 47$ ) categorize their children in the nonclinical range. However eight mothers rated their children as borderline or clinical whose fathers rated them as nonclinical. The reverse was true only for two fathers.

Data from mothers and fathers were combined to examine the correlation between parenting practices and externalizing child outcomes. The correlations were all in the expected direction. Parental monitoring was strongly negatively correlated with externalizing scores,  $r(108) = -.362, p < .001$ , as was problem solving,  $r(108) = -.251, p = .009$ . The relationship between externalizing behavior problems and skills building approached significance,  $r(108) = -.174, p = .072$ . The relationship between positive involvement and externalizing problems was in the expected direction but nonsignificant,  $r(108) = -.126, p = .194$ .

The CBCL captures observations from parents which are most likely to occur in the home or when the child is with the parents in the community. One item asked parents to report on the child's behavior at school. As might be expected for normative development, nearly half of parents in the sample ( $n = 25, 44.6\%$ ) reported that their child had misbehaved in school in the past month.

### Testing the SIL Theory

A series of multiple regression analyses were conducted to check for mediation following the tenets of SIL that parenting practices mediate the relationship between context and child outcomes. We focused specifically on externalizing problem behaviors, as that is the child outcome that the PMTO intervention targets most directly. We conducted analyses separately for mothers and fathers. In order to meet assumptions for mediation (Baron & Kenny, 1986) there must be significant correlations between predictors (context variables) and outcomes (child externalizing behavior), and each of those with the mediators (parenting practices). Three mediation models were tested for mothers that met these criteria.

**Mothers.** The first model examined the relationship between marital satisfaction and child externalizing behaviors through problem solving. The first step was significant,  $R^2 = .125, p = .016$ . When problem solving was entered in the model there was a significant increase in predictive power,  $R^2$  change =  $.148, p = .005$ . In the second step, problem solving was significant ( $p = .005$ ) while the predictive power of marital satisfaction was reduced to nonsignificance ( $p = .086$ ). Maternal problem solving fully mediated the relationship between marital satisfaction and child externalizing behaviors.

The second model examined the relationship between parenting stress and child externalizing behaviors through problem solving. The first step in the regression model with maternal stress as the predictor was significant,  $R^2 = .489, p < .001$ . When problem solving was entered, the second model returned an  $R^2$  change that was quite small in magnitude (.034) and statistically nonsignificant. Problem solving did not mediate the relationship between maternal stress and child externalizing behavior.

The third model examined the relationship between parenting stress and child externalizing behavior with supervision as the mediator. When maternal supervision was entered, the second model returned an  $R^2$  change that approximated significance ( $R^2$  change =  $.030, p = .081$ ). When the unique contribution of the predictor and mediator were examined, the contribution of stress remained highly significant ( $p < .001$ ) yet the contribution of supervision to the model remained statistically significant ( $p = .026$ ). Supervision did not mediate the relationship between maternal stress and child externalizing behavior.

**Fathers.** Only two mediation models could be tested given the significance between variable of interest for fathers. The first model examined the relationship between parenting stress and child externalizing behaviors through supervision. The first step in the regression model with paternal stress as the predictor was significant,  $R^2 = .216, p = .001$ . When supervision was entered, the second model returned an  $R^2$  change that was small in magnitude (.010) and statistically nonsignificant ( $p = .424$ ). The same results were found for the model examining the relationship between marital satisfaction and child externalizing behaviors through supervision. The first step was significant,  $R^2 = .098, p = .032$ . When supervision was entered, the second model returned an  $R^2$  change that was small in magnitude (.065) and statistically nonsignificant ( $p = .072$ ).

### Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to examine parenting practices in the context of two-parent families with children between 6 and 11 years of age living in Puerto Rico. The current sample can be considered "normative" (or a "prevention sample") insofar as reports of child behavioral disturbances were relatively low. For the sample, parenting indexes of context (depression, stress) were relatively low and what are considered "effective" parenting practices were relatively high. These findings are in line with what we would expect for a prevention sample, that is, a sample where there are no major concerns regarding child outcomes. It would be pertinent to expand this work to include at-risk and

clinical samples. The greater variability in child behavior would presumably be also linked to more variability in parenting practices as well as contextual stressors.

In general, we found that the parenting self-report measures have potential for use in Puerto Rico. It is notable that self-report parenting measures showed good reliability and they correlated in the expected direction with externalizing behavior problems such that higher endorsement of effective problem solving, monitoring, and skills building was associated with lower externalizing behavior problems. There is certainly room for improvement. Qualitative research would be especially valuable in capturing local definitions for each of these constructs (e.g., monitoring) along with the breadth and depth of behavioral indicators solidly placed within the cultural context. With the dearth of research on Puerto Rican families, the present study provides a much-needed glimpse into parenting practices and their relationship to parental stressors and child outcomes. However, scales developed in a U.S. context (albeit for use with Latino families) may not fully capture the parenting practices of Puerto Rican families.

The finding regarding low levels of depression and parental stress are surprising. Puerto Rico's poverty indicators far exceed those of the poorest states in the U.S. mainland. Data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013) showed that 65.3% of children in San Juan and 89.6% of children in Ponce lived in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 30% or more. Financial stressors alone should have been detected in the data. However, while the poverty statistics seem staggering, the rest of the map unveils fully 100% of children in 52 of 78 townships in Puerto Rico lived in neighborhoods with poverty rates of 30% or more. By contrast, our sample was living in areas with relatively more neighborhood affluence. Indeed, San Juan was among the ten *least* poor areas in the country. Parents' reports on subjective economic status may very well reflect a response to a comparative status (i.e., relative to other parents, I have sufficient resources) rather than absolute status (i.e., I have few resources). Future research may seek expand to parents in poorer neighborhoods. There may also be an opportunity to examine the comparative-absolute hypotheses. Parents with more ties to the U.S. mainland may exercise different comparisons (e.g., to U.S. rather than PR economic markers) resulting in differential predictors for parenting behaviors, depression, and/or parental stress.

Overall, a picture emerges of parents with high levels of positive involvement, skills building, monitoring, and problem solving skills. These parents have low levels of parental stress and depression suggesting they enjoy their parenting role and other dimensions of their lives. Future research may focus on the possible

protections that the parent role may bring to Puerto Rican families. In this particular sample, two parent families may be fulfilling expectations from their families of origin and society for (a) a heterosexual partner, (b) a formal commitment through marriage, and (c) procreation.

The stressors of parenting for parents in our sample may be balanced by the rewards and satisfaction of social approval. Indeed we heard from many parents, mothers in particular, who wanted to participate in our research but did not qualify because they were single mothers. We listened to them and reassured them that we valued them as people and as mothers. We acknowledged their existence and their powerful role in society. The PI is herself a divorced mother of two and expressed her empathy to mothers on their sense of marginalization and the tremendous challenges that single mothers face. We unequivocally acknowledged that research was needed with single mothers on the island. We also explained that united parenting front and marital satisfaction were important variables in our research and that these required parents in a couple. We clarified that same-sex parents would have been welcome to participate as we celebrated diverse families broadly. Research is sorely needed on parenting for single caretakers to better understand how the findings from the present research may or may not generalize to a broader population of parents, and also to help inform intervention efforts for single parents.

In two-parent families, our data showed few but important differences across mothers and fathers. The data suggested that mothers spent more time monitoring and positively involved with their children. They also had higher rates of engagement across disciplinary activities. One possible interpretation is that mothers spent more time parenting. Relatively low levels of depression and parenting stress and relatively high levels of marital satisfaction and united parenting front may have indicated that parents were satisfied with their division of labor. Cultural explanations are often offered, for example, for the division of labor of men and women. However, it is also possible that measures did not fully capture the constructs were intended to observe. For example, depression is known to manifest differently in men than women and it is possible our measure did not fully capture the indicators that would validly detect depression. Fathers' direct contributions to parenting may have also been missed by our measures. Future research may be useful to bring clarity to mothers' and fathers' parenting practices.

As one of the primary goals for this research was to learn information that could inform implementation of evidence-based interventions with families in Puerto Rico, it is interesting to note that we experi-

enced participating parents as extremely interested in parenting workshops. Indeed, some parents expressed more interest in the workshops than the payment for participation. Parents repeatedly reported wanting to “be better parents” and said that they did not feel as though they had an innate knowledge regarding the most effective parenting practices. Parents reported needing support to develop effective practices to raise their children. These reports create an interesting contrast to Lucca-Irizarry and Pacheco’s (1989) work where no mothers reported learning about parenting from manuals or books. Perhaps Lucca-Irizarry and Pacheco’s findings are tied to available resources rather than the attitudes of mothers toward parenting workshops or manuals. Future research may tackle this question directly by asking parents about the acceptability of different forms of support for parenting such as workshops, therapy groups, videotaped materials, or various written materials. Our experience suggests that parents are seeking resources and they perceive that none are available. A systematic consideration of these questions could well inform the work of psychologists as well as public policy leaders. Overall the present study provides some valuable information for family researchers in Puerto Rico to continue to build a solid knowledge base about Puerto Rican families can help inform research, practice, and policy.

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