

Raising Sons and Daughters in African American Families: A Within Family Exploration of

Parental Differential Treatment

Aryn M. Dotterer and Shawn D. Whiteman

Project Funded by NICHD Grant R01-HD32336, Ann C. Crouter & Susan M. McHale, Co-Principal Investigators

PURDUE
UNIVERSITY

BACKGROUND

- The phrase, “African American mothers love their sons, but raise their daughters” suggests that mothers give their daughters more responsibilities and monitor their whereabouts more compared to sons (Madera, 2010).
- Others argue that African American families tend to hold more egalitarian attitudes (Taylor, 1991), thus boys and girls may be reared in similar ways.
- Research examining this phenomenon has primarily relied on between-family designs ignoring within-family differences between sons and daughters..
- This study explored whether sons and daughters in the same family experienced differential treatment or were parented in similar ways.

METHOD

Participants

- Participants were mothers, fathers, and two offspring from 184 African American/Black, working/middle class families.
- Average age of older sibling =14 (47% female); younger sibling = 10 (54% female).

Procedures

- Families were interviewed over the phone in a series of seven nightly calls (5 weekdays, 2 weekends).

Measures

- Parental Knowledge.** Parental knowledge reflected the extent to which parent and adolescent reports of youths’ daily activities and experiences matched. Higher scores reflect greater knowledge.
- Parental Time.** Youth’s report of time spent in activities with their mother or father were aggregated across the 7 telephone interviews to create indices of total alone time with mothers and fathers. Higher scores indicate more time (in minutes) spent together across the 7 days

RESULTS

- Data were analyzed with a series of mixed-model ANOVAs. Gender composition of the sibling dyad served as the between subjects factor and birth order served as the within-subjects factor.
- Time with Mothers
 - Birth order X gender constellation, $F(3, 184) = 11.49, p < .01$
 - Mothers spent more time with their younger children, especially in older brother-younger sister dyads
 - However, in older sister-younger brother dyads, mothers spent approximately twice as much time with their daughters compared to their sons
 - See Figure 1
- Time with Fathers
 - Birth order X gender constellation, $F(3, 181) = 6.06, p < .001$
 - Fathers generally spent more time with their younger children
 - However, in mixed-sex dyads fathers spent more time with their sons than with their daughters
 - See Figure 2
- Mothers’ Knowledge
 - Birth order X gender constellation, $F(3, 173) = 2.86, p < .05$
 - Mothers generally had greater knowledge of younger siblings activities, especially in older brother-younger sister dyads.
 - However, in older sister-younger brother dyads, mothers had greater knowledge of their older daughters’ activities.
 - See Figure 3
- Fathers’ Knowledge
 - Birth order, $F(1, 148) = 7.11, p < .01$
 - Fathers had greater knowledge of their younger child’s activities.
 - See Figure 4

Discussion

- Results indicate that when parents have the opportunity to gender-type their socialization (i.e., in mixed-sex dyads), they do.
- Support for the notion that African American mothers “raise their daughters” was particularly evident in older brother-younger sister dyads.

- Future research should examine how parental differential treatment is linked to adolescent adjustment.
- This study made an important contribution by examining both *mothers’* and *fathers’* differential treatment in African American families.

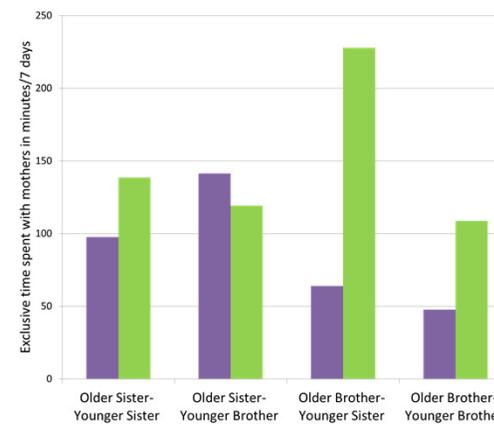


Figure 1. Time with Mothers as a Function of Birth Order and Gender Constellation

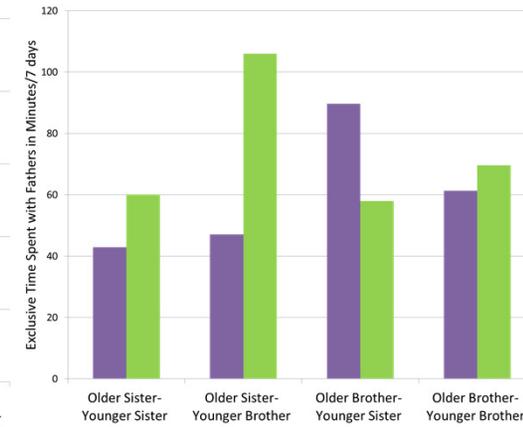


Figure 2. Time with Fathers as a Function of Birth Order and Gender Constellation

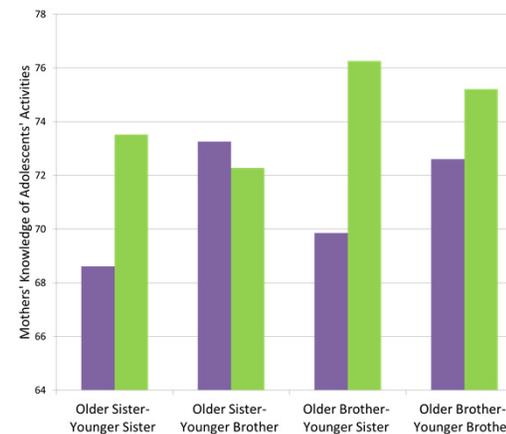


Figure 3. Mothers' Knowledge as a Function of Birth Order and Gender Constellation

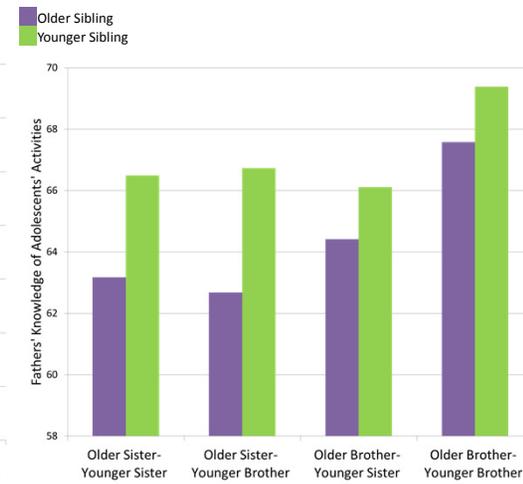


Figure 4. Fathers' Knowledge as a Function of Birth Order and Gender Constellation