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What is This?

Research Methodology

Attending to the Role of Race/Ethnicity in Family Violence Research

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Since the 1970s, researchers and public health and/or social policy communities have devoted increasing attention to family violence. Although officially reported crime figures for family violence appear to be declining, rates continue to be high in broadly defined racial and/or ethnic minority groups. More careful assessments of the potential role of race/ethnicity in family violence, and similarities and differences occurring across and within groups categorized based on race/ethnicity, are essential if adequate interventions are to be developed and utilized. This article provides suggestions on conducting better studies on family violence in the United States, particularly with respect to issues of race/ethnicity. The authors begin by considering conceptions and definitions of *race/ethnicity* and providing a broad definition of *family violence*. They then suggest issues for consideration at each stage of the research process, from reviewing previous research, to making methodological decisions, selecting samples, choosing measures, and analyzing and interpreting findings.

Keywords: *ethnicity; family violence; race*

Much progress has been made in ameliorating the problem of family violence in the United States. However, it is still a national public health problem resulting in thousands of deaths, injuries, mental health disorders, and days lost from work and school every year. Moreover, little progress has been made in protecting marginalized groups (Richie, 2005; U.S. Department

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of Justice, 2005)—a growing segment of the population. Major demographic changes in the United States are making it increasingly multicultural (West, 2005). Minority groups socially defined by "race" and "ethnicity" will soon become more than 50% of the population. This fact reinforces the need to conduct more research on family violence within minority populations in this country; their voices, and not just those of predominantly White and middle-class professionals, need to be heard (Yick & Berthold, 2005). For individuals in disadvantaged and oppressed groups, the structure of society, multiple forms of prejudice and discrimination, and institutionalized violence may exacerbate abusive family relationships (Richie, 2005). Moreover, the causes, correlates, and outcomes of family violence in White, European-American, middle-class, heterosexual communities may differ from those who are immigrants, people of color, the extreme poor, and men and women in same-sex relationships. Consequently, the most effective intervention and/or prevention programs may need to be targeted to particular groups with particular experiences and social statuses. In this article, we address conceptual and methodological issues in research on family violence within the United States, focusing particularly on groups traditionally identified by "race" and 'ethnicity." After defining key terms, we present considerations related to race/ethnicity for each stage of the research process and report—reviewing and evaluating available literature, conceptualizing *race/ethnicity*, making sampling and other methodological decisions, analyzing and reporting data, and interpreting findings.

Definitions of Terms

Terms such as *family violence, abuse, mistreatment*, and *aggression* have been defined and understood in diverse ways and often used interchangeably (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2005). For the purposes of this article, we use the term *family violence*, broadly defined to include physical, psychological, economic, and sexual abuse and neglect in intimate relationships, including parent–child, adult and/or aging parent, marital and cohabiting, and gay-lesbian-bisexual-transexual relationships. Most of our research examples focus on child abuse and domestic violence, primarily because of limitations of space.

Race and *ethnicity* are even harder to define. In 1997, recognizing the increasing diversity of the U.S. population, the federal Office of Management and the Budget (1997) announced revised standards for federal data on race and ethnicity. Currently, the categories for "race" are American Indian/Alaska

Native, Asian, Black/African American, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, White, and "Some Other Race." The two "ethnicity" categories are Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. Defining *race* and *ethnicity* this way may seem relatively straightforward; however, this "straightforward" definition ignores considerable controversy over how the terms should be defined, and whether they are useful at all. Although some social scientists continue to view *race* as an inherited set of characteristics (e.g., Rushton & Jensen, 2005), the more prevalent view within the scientific and academic community is that *race* and *ethnicity* are social constructs rather than biologically based categories. This position can be found in statements from psychology (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003), anthropology (American Anthropological Association, 1998), sociology (American Sociological Association, 2003), pediatrics (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2000), and the U.S. Surgeon General (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2001). Criticisms of the assumption that *race* is a biological determinant of intelligence, health, mental health, and behavioral problems are substantial: "Race has no consensual theoretical or scientific meaning in psychology" (Helms, Jernigan, & Mascher, 2005, p. 27); "[Once] trumpeted as scientific 'fact,' the notion that 'race' is a valid, biologically meaningful a priori category has long been—and continues to be—refuted by work in population genetics, anthropology, and sociology" (Krieger, 2003, p. 195).

Although some researchers (e.g., Institute of Medicine, as cited in Oppenheimer, 2001) have argued that the term *ethnicity*, closely aligned to *culture*, is preferable to *race*, others (e.g., Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht, & Lindsley, 2006) argued that *ethnicity* is imprecise, used in inconsistent and changing ways, and similarly tainted. "A historical examination of 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group' finds that these concepts . . . derive in part from race and immigration and are not neutral terms; instead, they carry their own burden of political, social, and ideological meaning" (Oppenheimer, 2001, p. 1049). In this article, when presenting our views, we adopt the increasingly common descriptor (e.g., AAP, 2000) *race/ethnicity*. In this formulation, *race* can be considered "the category to which others assign individuals on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color or hair type, and the generalizations and stereotypes made as a result," and *ethnicity* as "the group mores and practices of one's culture of origin" (APA, 2003, p. 380). Both terms, although useful for communicating about arbitrarily defined groups, lack scientific reliability and validity (Kaplan & Bennett, 2003). We view them as proxies for a wide range of factors (e.g., poverty, discrimination) contributing to specific outcomes (e.g., family violence). Efforts to "unpack" ethnicity

from various "ecocultural" factors—including economic marginality, domestic and family workload, salience of religion, and social support—have proven useful to understanding and managing type 2 diabetes mellitus (Walsh, Katz, & Sechrest (2002) and are equally important to understanding and responding to family violence.

Because race and ethnicity are associated with a long history of racism, discrimination, and violence, some medical and behavioral scientists (e.g., Fullilove, 1998) have argued that the terms should be abandoned altogether. However, there is clear evidence (e.g., Gushue, 2004) that a "race-blind" approach is antithetical to the goals of multicultural competence—that is, to

> awareness and knowledge of how age, gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status are crucial dimensions to an informed professional understanding of human behavior and . . . skills necessary to work effectively and ethically with culturally diverse individuals, groups, and communities. (Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell, & Greene, 2000, p. 653)

We concur with the view (e.g., Krieger, 2003) that social oppression has real effects, that not using the terms will not end the problems, and that if we are to understand fully the negative effects of corrosive social forces on individuals identified as members of marginalized social groups, we cannot do so by ignoring their assigned membership in those groups. Thus, it is important to consider race/ethnicity when testing theories on predictors and consequences of family violence, examining barriers to adequate services, studying the effectiveness of prevention and intervention programs, examining notions of violence and abuse, and considering solutions to these family problems (Fontes, 1998). This view is consistent with the APA (2003) recommendation that "culturally sensitive psychological researchers . . . recognize the importance of conducting culture-centered and ethical psychological research among persons from ethnic, linguistic, and racial minority backgrounds" (p. 388). Moreover, it is also important, whenever possible, to consider the context in which the particular racial/ethnic groups are functioning when assessed. Beiser (2003) suggested that the reason blood pressure increases with age in African Americans and the Zulus of South Africa but not among the Serer in Senegal is that the African Americans and Zulus are victims of greater racism, marginalization, and restricted opportunity than the Serer. This perspective has statistical and other methodological implications: Specifically, we would suggest that "controlling" for race in statistical analyses (e.g., Miller & Bukva, 2001) limits the sharing of valuable information.

Evaluating the Relevant Literature

Issues of Oppression and Cultural Sensitivity

Traditionally, cross-cultural research has been "framed according to the dominant culture's views of families, normalcy, violence, trauma, disclosure, and privacy" (Fontes, 1998, p. 55). The dominant group often fails to recognize the adaptive qualities of other cultures, overestimates the role of culture in family violence, and assumes that White middle-class Western culture is superior to other cultures (Dasgupta, 2005; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). An overemphasis on the role of cultural values in perpetuating family violence in different racial/ethnic groups (dubbed the "cultural deviant perspective"; Hampton, Carrillo, & Kim, 2005) can lead to entrenchment of existing stereotypes (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). These stereotypes imply that higher rates of family violence in racial/ethnic minority communities, in comparison to White communities, are due to a deficiency or pathology in the values and lifestyles of those minority groups. Researchers evaluating the relevant literature should do so with cultural sensitivity—elucidating racial/ethnic similarities in family violence and, when highlighting differences, avoiding the perpetuation of stereotypes against the various minority groups (West, 2005).

We recommend taking a "cultural variant perspective" when evaluating (and conducting) such research. This perspective assumes that "families of color are culturally unique, yet functional and legitimate . . . [and] recognizes the impact of differences in environments, which result in differences both in family structure and in ways of functioning" (Hampton et al., 2005, p. 137). In regard to racial/ethnic differences in family violence found in previous studies, researchers should consider how racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression can exacerbate the situation; family violence is likely only one of the forms of abuse that members of marginalized groups experience (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Social structural influences (e.g., poverty, limited educational opportunities), historical influences (e.g., history of forced slavery and migration), and systematic oppression must all be considered when studying the rates at which different groups experience family violence and their willingness to seek help for it (West, 2005).

Attending to Other Relevant Variables

Also relevant to evaluations of past studies is the extent to which the investigators addressed possible confounding of socioeconomic status (SES) and other demographic variables with race/ethnicity (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005).

Recognition that differences in family violence rates between White families and racial/ethnic minorities might be due to higher rates of poverty in racial/ethnic minorities has been called the "cultural equivalent perspective" (Hampton et al., 2005). Typically, racial/ethnic minority group members differ from majority group members not just in cultural heritage and experiences of oppression but also in social class. Because SES is often a statistical predictor of family violence, disentangling its effects from those of race/ethnicity is extremely important yet difficult. In many cases, racial/ethnic differences in rates of family violence have diminished or become nonsignificant when researchers controlled for social class variables such as *low income* or *poverty* (e.g., Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Poverty per se is probably not a direct cause of family violence but is a proxy for the conditions of impoverished communities that seem to contribute directly—"persistent and concentrated poverty; racial, economic, and social isolation; chronic unemployment; social disorganization and family disruption" (Hampton et al., 2005, p. 128).

"Controlling" for SES has not always completely reduced the association between race/ethnicity and family violence—in part, perhaps, because the socioeconomic position of Black and White families within the same SES is typically quite disparate (Belle & Doucet, 2003), and because racial/ethnic minorities also tend to be less educated than Whites (West, 2005). Often there has also been inadequate attention to the role of acculturation in family violence (West, 2005), Studies have shown that acculturation (the process by which immigrants accommodate to the majority culture's way of life; Ho, 1992) results in a breakdown of natural support systems—the more immigrants adjust to the American way of life, the more their support systems disintegrate (Sanchez, 1992). Other evidence indicates that acculturation, at least in Hispanic cultures, may exacerbate rates of family violence (e.g., Kantor, Jasinski, & Aldarondo, 1994) but also lead to more help seeking (e.g., Mayo, 1997).

Ethnic Lumping and Overgeneralization

In much of the previous research, little attention has been paid to similarities and differences among the various groups within the broad race/ethnic categories (Fontes, 1998). For purposes of racial/ethnic comparisons, diverse ethnic groups have often been collapsed into heterogeneous categories—for example, "Blacks"—though ignoring the diversity within that larger group. Also, when research is conducted on a more circumscribed ethnic group (e.g., Cuban Americans), the findings are sometimes overgeneralized to all members of the larger group (e.g., Latinos) (Bograd, 2005). The process whereby individuals

with diverse cultural backgrounds are sorted into broad race/ethnic categories, as is done by the U.S. Census Bureau and many researchers, is "ethnic lumping" (Fontes, 1993a); each category is an umbrella encompassing related, but not identical, racial/ethnic groups, with differing cultural heritages, different immigration histories, and different degrees of acceptance by the majority U.S. racial/ethnic group. Moreover, experiences and values within these groups have been influenced not just by cultural heritages but also by historical facts—did individuals or their ancestors come to this country to escape religious or ethnic persecution, in chains as slaves, or to seek economic opportunity? What are their lives like now? full of opportunity, stress, discrimination, or success? Such questions need to be considered when researchers build on earlier studies.

Issues of within-group diversity have rarely been addressed in studies of family violence in different races/ethnicities and are a fertile area for future research. For example, previous studies of family violence in Native American Indian communities seldom acknowledged that there are 651 federally recognized American Indian/Alaska Native culturally heterogeneous and geographically dispersed tribes that maintain their own languages, family structures, social and religious functions, and health practices (Norton & Manson, 1996) and vary in degree of isolation and poverty (Hamby, 2000). When Yuan, Koss, Polacca, and Goldman (2006) studied physical and sexual assault in adults from six Native tribes, they found significant differences among tribes in rates of both types of assault—with different tribes having rates that were similar to, higher than, and lower than national estimates. Also, some predictors of assault (e.g., childhood victimization) were similar to those found in the general population, whereas others were specific to the groups (e.g., level of tribal affiliation).

Among Latino/Hispanic populations, most family violence research has been done on Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans (Garcia & Marotta, 1997) who vary in cultural ideals, immigration histories, acceptance in the majority U.S. culture, and SES (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2001). The sociodemographic variables on which these groups differ are related to the incidence of family violence and willingness to seek help for it (e.g., Krishnan, Hilbert, & VanLeeuwen, 2001; Torres et al., 2000). Among the large proportion of today's African American families, many are the descendants of slaves; however, there are also large numbers of descendants of Black freemen 20th-century immigrants. Within the overarching Census category "Asian/Pacific Islander," Asian respondents identified more than 24 specific group affiliations (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2001). However, reports of family violence in specific Asian American communities are generally limited to refugee and/or immigrant samples, and few studies

provide comparative data from more than one group. Moreover, breaking down the Asian American group into subgroups still ignores within group differences in acculturation, SES, sociopolitical beliefs and history, and immigration status. For example, in a Chinese American subgroup, there could be people from China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, each of which has a distinct sociopolitical history (Yick & Berthold, 2005).

Another limitation that can be seen in some of the available research is a tendency to treat White Americans as though they do not constitute a race/ethnic group like other racial/ethnic groups and to neglect their diversity (e.g., Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; West, 2005). White Americans come from many different countries with diverse cultural and religious values, and from all social classes within the United States (Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005). Among White Americans (and other racial/ethnic groups), some of the relatively neglected potential factors in family violence are religious background (e.g., Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, fundamentalist, reformed, etc.), country of origin, level of acculturation, number of generations in this country, geography, and social class. Furthermore, another gap in the available literature, and an important direction for family violence research, is attention to mixed race groups and other more recent immigrant groups (e.g., Middle Easterners, Arabs) (West, 2005).

Sampling Issues

Nationally Representative Samples

When reporting information on prevalence rates of family violence in different racial/ethnic communities, researchers need to recognize that estimates vary enormously depending on how the data were collected (Hines & Malley-Morrison, 2005). Many of the most widely cited estimates come from national population-based self-report surveys, such as the National Family Violence Surveys (NFVS) and the National Violence Against Women Survey (NVAW). There are also national population-based surveys that rely on data from mandated reporters, such as the National Incidence Studies (NIS) of child maltreatment and the National Elder Abuse Incident Study (NEAIS). Dozens of articles have been published using data from these surveys. If findings from these surveys are reported, it is important to consider their limitations (including ethnic lumping) with regard to racial/ethnic group differences.

One noteworthy limitation is that different investigators have grouped respondents differently when identifying racial/ethnic groups. For example, in

some NFVS analyses of child maltreatment (e.g., Straus & Donnelly, 2001), participants' race was coded as either White or "minority"; clearly this strategy can mask many potential differences among racial/ethnic groups. Several other studies using NFVS data (e.g., Wolfner & Gelles, 1993) have separated racial/ethnic minority groups (i.e., Hispanics, Blacks, and Native Americans) to allow greater specificity in comparisons. In contrast to the analyses of NFVS data in which Hispanics were included in the "minority" sample, the original analyses of NIS-3 data combined Whites with Hispanic Whites and compared them to non-Whites (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996), thereby making comparisons between the two surveys difficult. It is not surprising to note that there are differences in results: NFVS data indicate ethnic differences in parental levels of physical discipline (Straus & Stewart, 1999), whereas NIS-3 data show no ethnic differences in child abuse (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996). Despite the different levels of "ethnic lumping" characterizing these national studies, the data sets generally include many demographic items, thus facilitating efforts at unpacking race/ethnicity from those other variables.

The NFVR and the NVAW samples, although representative of the U.S. population, have additional limitations: (a) They were telephone surveys, and because the poorest of the poor may not have a telephone, they could not be included in the survey (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). These uninterviewed people might have high rates of family violence because they often live in remote, isolated, poverty-stricken areas; (b) The surveys were given only to English and, in the case of the NVAW, Spanish speakers, and many Native Americans and immigrants speak only their tribal or native language; and (c) Researchers did not collect data on tribal affiliation, country of origin, or residence, and there could be significant variations in family violence among Native tribes, Hispanics from different countries, Asians from different countries, and African Americans with different national origins.

Another concern is the potential difference between people who agree to complete such surveys and those who do not. To avoid stereotyping of their group, leaders in many racial/ethnic minority communities have imposed a "gag order" to suppress information on family violence. Members of these communities may resist participating in research on, and seeking help for, issues of family violence (West, 2005). In addition, if potential research participants are from a country where political persecution was common, it may be impossible to recruit them because they may fear researchers, particularly if the research is government sponsored. Even when they are recruited, they may not reveal personal information if their culture emphasizes keeping these issues within the family (Yick & Berthold, 2005).

The self-report nature of the large national surveys (and other surveys) is also a limitation for several reasons. For example, self-report studies may use measures and methods that have been primarily validated among Whites, and their validity in other racial/ethnic groups is not always known (Hampton et al., 2005). Also, the researchers may have used definitions of terms that do not necessarily exist in other cultures and/or do not translate (Fontes, 1998). Furthermore, some cultures are not familiar with true/false formats or Likert-type scales, making any data from surveys using these response options questionable at best (Fontes, 1998). For example, when response options include a middle category, many Asians will choose it because Confucian ideals teach that they should never favor extremes (Yick & Berthold, 2005).

National Studies of Officially Reported Data

Among the most well-known reports on identified cases of family violence are (a) the National Incidence Study (NIS) of child abuse and neglect; (b) the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS); (c) the Department of Justice Reports on intimate partner violence, using estimates from the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) and the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR); and (d) the NEAIS. Although very useful, these data are subject to biases, such as underreporting cases from more advantaged levels of society and overreporting cases from impoverished and minority communities.

Child maltreatment. When reporting racial/ethnic differences in rates of child maltreatment in national studies of official reports, researchers should acknowledge the biases associated with mandated reporting of suspected cases; that is, a major problem in estimating the rate of child maltreatment within different racial/ethnic communities is the extent to which there are differential reporting tendencies based on the race/ethnicity of the suspected family. For example, the NIS indicates that significantly more of the known Black than White victims of sexual abuse were reported to Child Protective Services (CPS) (68% vs. 39%, respectively), and significantly more White than Black victims of educational maltreatment were reported (10.9% vs. 2.7%, respectively). The NIS data also indicate that low-income White children were more likely to have been reported to CPS than more economically privileged White children; however, nonpoor Black victims were just as likely to be known to CPS as poor Black children (Ards, Chung, & Meyers, 1998).

Intimate partner abuse. Studies show that data sets of officially reported intimate partner abuse may underrepresent minorities because of language

barriers (e.g., Warrier, 2000), experiences of institutional racism and discrimination (e.g., Yoshihama, 2000), lack of information about available services (e.g., Song, 1996), views that intimate partner abuse is a private matter (e.g., Bui & Morash, 1999), unwillingness of victims to disclose to medical personnel (e.g., Rodriguez, Bauer, Flores-Ortiz, & Szkupinski-Quiroga, 1998), fear of "losing face" (e.g., Rasche, 1988), and fear of deportation (e.g., Lee, 2000). Maltreatment of abusers by the criminal justice system also keeps many members of ethnic/racial minorities from filing criminal reports (e.g., Kanuha, 1994). Moreover, because racial/ethnic minorities tend to be stereotyped as violent, sexual, and drunken, female victims may fear that reporting their male partners to the police will reinforce stereotypes and betray their racial/ethnic group (e.g., Kanuha, 1994).

Help-seeking samples. Another popular method of studying family violence is to recruit people seeking help from social service agencies for different types of family violence. These samples also have limitations, mostly because help-seeking samples tend to underrepresent ethnic minority communities in the United States (e.g., Chester, Mahalish, & Davis, 1999), even when such programs are available to them. One major barrier to using services is a culturally based reluctance in some racial/ethnic groups to seek help for problems of family violence. A value that crosses racial/ethnic lines is the idea that some things are meant to happen regardless of any human intervention. For some Asian cultures, suffering is seen as a path to maturity and a stronger, better character (e.g., Masaki & Wong, 1997). Some Latinos believe that suffering on earth is God's will to be followed in the next life by spiritual reward (e.g., Campbell, Masaki, & Torres, 1997). Abused racial/ethnic minority individuals subscribing to these beliefs may not seek help believing that suffering now means spiritual rewards later. Also, cultural values emphasizing family integrity and the responsibility of women to keep the family together often keep Hispanic (e.g., Torres, 1987) and Asian American (e.g., Ho, 1990) women from seeking help or staying in treatment (e.g., Vasquez, 1998).

In social service settings, racism has been implicated as a barrier to help seeking for intimate partner abuse (Walker, 1995). In addition, there are inequities in service delivery based on ethnicity (e.g., Campbell & Gary, 1998). Among many racial/ethnic minorities, battered women may resist using shelter services because of a strong belief that intimate partner abuse should be dealt with by the family (e.g., Abraham, 2005). Members of some racial/ethnic communities who seek outside help may be ostracized by their own and/or their spouse's families and may suffer retribution from their spouse's family. Fear of isolation, fear of relocation, fear of immigration

authorities, fear of poverty, shame, cultural insensitivity, child custody issues, and language barriers often keep victims in an abusive situation (Dasgupta, 2005). Reluctance to disclose family violence in Latino families may stem from several cultural values, including *familism* (inclusiveness and closeness of the family), *marianismo* (the belief in the sexual purity of unmarried girls), and *respeto* (feelings of respect for those who are older) (Fontes, 1993b). Rather than violate *familism*, a Latino child may avoid disclosing sexual abuse by a family member, or an overstressed caregiver of an elderly parent may be reluctant to seek outside help, possibly leading to the abuse of that elder. Asian Americans, often labeled the "model minority," may feel the need to provide a façade that masks problems of family violence (e.g., Dasgupta, 2005) and turn to their specific community, family, or friends for support, probably in part because of the cultural sensitivity these sources can provide (Abraham, 2005). Moreover, there are few programs focusing on specific ethnic or racial groups (Bograd, 2005). Thus, when reviewing studies using help-seeking samples, it is important to ask, "Who is excluded and why?" (Bograd, 2005, p. 33).

Conceptual and Methodological Decisions

Discussing Race/Ethnicity

Regardless of how *race/ethnicity* is defined and discussed in official reports and published studies, all researchers need to decide what terms they will use in their own work. Kaplan and Bennett (2003) made several useful suggestions concerning the treatment of *race/ethnicity* in biomedical publications, and we have adapted their list here for family violence researchers:

1. Avoid implying that terms such as *Black* or *White* have stable or uniform definitions.
2. When including race/ethnicity as a variable in a study, specify the purpose and avoid any implication that it is a causal variable or a basic, natural, and objective way of grouping people.
3. Be precise in reporting how race/ethnic categories are defined and how individuals are assigned to them.

For example, instead of writing "Snow et al. found a higher prevalence of diabetes among African American adults than among white adults," it would be more informative to write "In a sample of adults ages 18 to 64 years, Snow et al. found a higher prevalence of diabetes among individuals identified as

African American in their medical records than among individuals identified as white." (p. 2712)

4. Distinguish between race/ethnicity as a risk factor (having a causal relationship to an outcome) and risk marker (a variable correlated with causal factors but not playing a causal role).

5. Do not use race/ethnicity as a proxy for genetic variation; statements about genetics should not be made unless supported by solid, reliable, and valid genetic information, and currently, DNA evidence indicates greater genetic variation within socially defined racial groups than between them.

6. When interpreting racial/ethnic differences, consider all the relevant factors that may account for the findings, including social class, racism and discrimination, religion, and acculturation.

We would like to add two suggestions to this list. First, obtain extensive demographic information from participants to help with the "unpacking" of variables. In her cross-cultural research, Malley-Morrison (2004) asked participants to indicate their ethnicity, the culture with which they identified, the country of their birth, the country of each of their parents' birth, their socioeconomic status, their childhood and current religions, education and employment levels, and other variables. Second, be sure to discuss the (inevitable) limitations to the study in the Discussion section of the paper.

When focusing particularly on the role of *race/ethnicity* in family violence, investigators can take a cultural, cross-cultural, or integrated approach to their research. Cross-cultural researchers have typically focused on race/ethnicity and national origin as independent or intervening variables influencing human cognition and behavior, have explored the generalizability of findings from middle-class White Western samples to individuals from different backgrounds, have considered the extent to which cultural and racial/ethnic factors mask or moderate core elements of human thought and behavior, and are concerned with such issues as psychometric equivalence of measures across cultures (Adamopoulos & Lonner, 2001). A recent example of a cross-cultural family violence study is Amodeo, Griffin, Fassler, Clay, and Ellis's (2006) analysis of the nature, severity, and aftermath of child sexual abuse (CSA). Using race/ethnicity as a predictor variable, they found that Black women were significantly more likely to have been sexually abused than White women. However, after two demographic variables— living with two biological parents from birth through age 16 years and childhood SES—were added to the model, the race difference in likelihood of having been sexually abused was no longer significant. Amodeo et al. concluded, "Without samples that control for these [family structural] variables, racial differences in CSA prevalence could be exaggerated" (p. 246). Thus,

cross-cultural researchers need to attend further to demographic characteristics associated with race/ethnicity and various forms of family violence to help unmask the extent to which race/ethnicity is a risk marker and proxy for other variables.

Cultural researchers tend to differ from cross-cultural researchers in emphasizing the inseparability of culture and individual behavior, arguing that mind and culture define and constitute each other within specific contexts, generally avoiding direct cultural comparisons, and often preferring qualitative and ethnographic, rather than quantitative, methodologies (Adamopoulos & Lonner, 2001). One example of the cultural approach can be found in Malley-Morrison (2004), an examination of qualitative definitions of *family violence* and abuse from individuals from 24 different countries. In this book, the emphasis is on identifying the factors (e.g., status of women) within each country that appear to be associated with particular views on the kinds of behaviors considered abusive. Another recent example, by Bhuyan, Mell, Senturia, Sullivan, and Shiu-Thornton (2005), is an intensive qualitative study of views on domestic violence in a focus group of 39 Cambodian immigrant women. Their concerns were used to develop specific services for Cambodian immigrant women in the community studied. Although Adamopoulos and Lonner (2001) highlighted a preference for qualitative studies by researchers in the cultural tradition, cultural researchers also use quantitative techniques. Two examples of quantitative within-group cultural studies are articles on the effects of child abuse on Latinos (Hinson, Koverola, & Morahan, 2002) and predictors of child neglect in Native Americans (Nelson, Cross, Landsman, & Tyler, 1996).

Finally, Adamopoulos and Lonner (2001) argued for the potential benefits of an integrative perspective that views culture as a human construction that is an antecedent and a consequence of human behavior, and that can serve to enable and restrain human behavior—for example, to make it more or less likely that individuals will report maltreatment. An example of an integrative approach can be found in a recent *Educational Gerontology*, edited by Malley-Morrison (2006). This volume presented findings from qualitative studies on perspectives on elder abuse in five cultures, plus an integrative cross-cultural comparison of themes (Patterson & Malley-Morrison, 2006). Ultimately, an integrative approach, combining the potential statistical power of cross-cultural approaches with the insights of representatives of different cultures as expressed in their own "voices," will lead to a clearer picture of the potential role of race/ethnicity in family violence.

Developing Cross-Cultural Studies
in Family Violence

Secondary Analyses

Conducting a cross-cultural study on the role of *race/ethnicity* in family violence with a nationally representative, ethnically diverse sample is almost impossible without external funding. Although several federal and private funding agencies issue fairly frequent calls for research proposals in the area of family violence, researchers cannot count on funding for their projects. Fortunately, the federal government has already expended substantial funds studying family violence—particularly child abuse, intimate partner abuse, and elder abuse—and periodically calls for proposals to study available data sets. For example, the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) is a federally funded longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of children who have come into contact with the CPS system. In 2006, the DHHS issued a call for proposals to analyze the NSCAW data set to address such issues as characteristics of children at highest risk for poor outcomes. Nearly one half of the sample consists of children from racial/ethnic minorities, thus providing substantial opportunity for cross-cultural studies of the role of *race/ethnicity* in outcomes for children in the child welfare system.

The National Data Archive on Child Abuse and Neglect (NDACAN) has several other child abuse data sets available to researchers for secondary analysis that could include cross-cultural comparisons—for example, the NCANDS: Child File, 2004; Longitudinal Pathways to Resilience in Maltreated Children; Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), 2003, Public Use Data Files; and Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect (LONGSCAN), Assessments 0-6. Similarly, the National Archive of Criminal Justice Data makes available data sets from many studies dealing with issues of domestic violence, and some have sufficient data to allow analyses by race/ethnicity. For example, the Violence and Threats of Violence against Women and Men in the United States, 1994-1996 (aka, the NVAW Survey) data set, which provides data on victims and perpetrators of intimate violence from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, can be obtained for secondary analyses. The NVAW Survey and other available data sets have limitations to their generalizability—for example, the populations sampled may be "caught cases" that differ in important ways from other members of their racial/ethnic groups (for weaknesses of the NVAW Survey, see the discussion above). The same is true of samples in many other available

materials, including local social service systems records and hospital emergency room records.

Many large available data sets have oversampled members of minority groups (in relation to their proportions in the population at large) to facilitate cross-cultural comparisons. For example, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (AddHealth) oversampled for Puerto Rican, Cuban, Chinese, and African American youth residing in well-educated households. Unfortunately, even studies with "nationally representative" samples and oversampling of racial/ethnic minorities often include too few representatives of hard-to-reach groups such as *non-English speakers, recent immigrants,* and the *most impoverished segments of society*, thereby continuing to limit our knowledge concerning family violence in these groups. Indeed, even when a conscientious effort is made to increase the generalizability of findings beyond the White European-American majority group, the oversampled ethnic minority groups may still be characterized by ethnic lumping. (The AddHealth decision to recruit Puerto Rican and Cuban Hispanic/Latinos shows awareness of this danger and an effort to address it.) Moreover, vulnerable members of some of these groups may be subjected to forms of abuse (e.g., threats of deportation, hiding of immigration papers) not typically mentioned on standard abuse surveys.[1] Despite the limitations of available data sets, some have specifically targeted particular racial/ethnic minority groups and can be used for within-group cultural studies. For example, data from the Mexican American Prevalence and Services Survey (Vega et al., 1998), which had a stratified random sample of men and women of Mexican origin from Fresno County, California, have been used for within-group cultural studies of family violence and its correlates in Mexican Americans (e.g., Firestone, Harris, & Vega, 2003).

All studies have limitations of some sort, and "ethnic lumping" may represent a limitation in resources more than an insensitivity to intragroup differences. Because ethnic minority groups in the United States may share many experiences of oppression, discrimination, and socioeconomic difficulty, they may also, to the extent that those factors influence family violence, share similar outcomes in regard to family violence. Thus, much of the previous research indicating differences among racial/ethnic groups provides a launching pad for future studies aimed at disentangling factors predictive of family violence and better assessing issues of generalizability. Researchers intending to build on the earlier studies should consider whether available resources will allow them to undertake more differentiated analyses of the role of culture/ethnicity in family violence. Where within-group comparisons are limited by the nature or size of the available samples,

researchers should acknowledge this limitation and still make every effort to "unpack" *race/ethnicity* from other demographic variables for which it is a proxy.

Original Samples Studies

Cross-cultural studies can also be facilitated by collaborations among researchers with access to different populations. For example, Murray Straus, codirector of the Family Research Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire, has established a research consortium for conducting cultural and cross-cultural studies of dating violence internationally. A similar model could be followed for cultural and cross-cultural studies of different racial/ethnic groups within the United States. It is also a good idea to include researchers or consultants who have intimate knowledge of the racial/ethnic group(s) a researcher is aiming to study. The Web pages Dr. Straus has established for the consortium provide invaluable information for undertaking collaborative research (http://pubpages.unh.edu/~mas2/ID.htm).

For pragmatic reasons, many researchers will carry out their studies with nonrepresentative convenience samples; such studies, interpreted appropriately, can be a valuable source of data. Often, researchers have access to social service agencies, hospital emergency rooms, or agencies within the criminal justice system. Such contacts can provide an opportunity to recruit survivors of various forms of family violence or individuals at high risk for family violence. Nevertheless, researchers need to consider carefully and describe well the population to which the findings can be generalized and carefully acknowledge and outline the limitations.

Data Analysis

It is clearly useful to include a sufficiently large representation of races/ethnicities in a sample to permit reliable statistical analysis, both of the potential contribution of race/ethnicity as predictor or moderator to the outcomes of interest and of potential confounding variables in any relationships found. Where possible, it can be useful to "oversample" racial/ethnic group members—that is, recruit them into the sample in larger proportions than their representation in the relevant population (e.g., national, community, service user). Recruiting members of subgroups within the larger ethnic minority groups in sufficient numbers to allow within-group analyses and to avoid ethnic lumping may be a daunting task but worth undertaking; focusing on

homogeneous racial/ethnic subgroups within a particular local community may be more practical and can also provide useful information concerning experiences of family violence. If the representation of racial/ethnic group members is too small to permit reliable generalization, it may be better to exclude those individuals from the statistical analyses.

Asking participants to self-identify their race/ethnicity and their own and their parents' national origins can provide a great deal more valuable information than simply asking participants to check off whether they are, for example, African American, Asian American, Hispanic, or Native American. If the sample size for different groups is adequate, more specific information (e.g., Ghanian) can reduce ethnic lumping and permit comparisons within the broad racial/ethnic groups. When Agbayani-Siewert (2004) examined perspectives on dating violence in Chinese, Filipino, Hispanic, and non-Hispanic White students, she found that Filipino students were more similar to the White students than to the Chinese students. Agbayani-Siewert provided an extensive analysis of cultural differences between Filipinos and Chinese to account for differences in views across these two "Asian American" groups. She acknowledges the limitations of a college student sample (e.g., they are probably more liberal than nonstudents from similar cultural backgrounds); however, the availability of a large college population gave her the statistical power to make cross-cultural comparisons within the Asian American group that might not otherwise have been possible. When the sample is sufficiently large enough to allow comparisons of scores across different subgroups within a larger ethnic group (e.g., Asian American) and no differences are found, then it is more appropriate to combine the separate groups into an overall ethnic minority group (e.g., Asian American) for further analyses (Hall, DeGarmo, Eap, Teten, & Sue, 2006).

When cross-cultural researchers conceptualize *racial/ethnic group* membership as an independent variable on which various forms of family violence are contingent, they often use simple student *t* tests or ANOVA when the criterion variable of interest is continuous, and chi-square when the criterion variable is dichotomous (categorical). Such an analytic approach is adequate as long as the investigators do not overinterpret their findings to suggest that racial/ethnic group membership per se causes the outcomes of interest—for example, differences between Black and Latino males in the nature of sexual abuse experiences (Moisan, Sanders-Phillips, & Moisan, 1997). When more than two racial/ethnic groups are being compared on an outcome, ANOVA designs are more appropriate than *t* test or chi-square analyses. In an analysis of the contribution of *race/ethnicity* as an independent variable to perspectives on dating aggression, Agbayani-Siewert (2004)

found a significant main effect for race/ethnicity on all her sociocognitive outcome variables; post hoc analyses revealed that the group of Chinese students scored significantly higher on justification of abusive behavior than all other groups.

More complex statistical approaches such as ANCOVA, regression analyses, or odds-ratio analyses are useful when *racial/ethnic group* is conceptualized as an independent variable and one wants to control for demographic variables that may be confounded with it or may mediate its relationship with predicted outcomes or criterion variables. For example, in a cross-cultural study of parent–child observations in low-income families, Bernstein, Harris, Long, Iida, and Hans (2005) conducted one-way ANCOVAs with *racial/ethnic group* as the predictor and demographic and background variables as covariates. These analyses revealed that on every behavioral interaction subscale (e.g., child positive involvement, child noncompliance, parent sensitivity), there were significant racial/ethnic group differences, even after controlling for the covariates. In other studies, main effects due to race/ethnicity are often greatly attenuated or disappear altogether following analyses controlling for particular demographic or other variables (e.g., Amodeo et al., 2006).

To fully understand the nature of racial/ethnic group differences in variables related to family violence, it is important to consider the role of psychological and demographic correlates of race/ethnicity. For example, in a laboratory experiment designed to predict sexually coercive behavior in Asian American and European American young men, Hall et al. (2006) initially found significant main effects for racial/ethnic group on acceptance of violence and history of family violence; however, after controlling for "culturally relevant" variables (e.g., perceived minority status, concern with loss of face), the racial/ethnic group differences were no longer significant. Including culturally relevant variables in studies of multi-ethnic samples puts additional requirements on sample size; however, such studies can greatly enhance our understanding of the role of race/ethnicity in family violence.

Increasingly, *race/ethnicity* is conceptualized as a moderator more than as an independent variable. Probably the most frequently cited source for assessing moderator effects of variables, such as race/ethnicity, is Baron and Kenny (1986). In their seminal article, Baron and Kenny defined a *moderator variable* "as a qualitative (e.g., sex, race, class) or quantitative (e.g., level of reward) variable that affects the direction and/or strength of the relation between an independent or predictor variable and a dependent or criterion variable" (p. 1174). They also described moderators as subgroups varying in the extent to which the predictor variable contributes to the outcome variable (p. 1181).

To the extent that the relationships between predictors (e.g., family violence) and outcomes (e.g., self-perceptions) are seen as varying within different racial/ethnic groups, regression analyses with *race/ethnicity* as a moderator variable are appropriate. For example, in a study of high-risk adolescents, Lau et al. (2006) examined *race/ethnicity* as a moderator of the relationship between youth reports of parental behaviors and their identification as having been abused. Although there were no racial/ethnic differences in adolescents' self-labeling as *abused*, there was a significant interaction between race/ethnicity and physical parental discipline in predicting self-labeled *physical abuse*. Specifically, the association between physical discipline and self-labeled physical abuse was more strongly related in non-Hispanic Whites than in Asian Pacific Islanders. Van Wyk, Benson, Fox, and DeMaris (2003) offered an excellent discussion of statistical approaches to disentangling race/ethnicity from other contextual variables, and their article is well worth reading in advance of data analytic planning.

A statistical test that can be useful when the sizes of different racial/ethnic groups in the total sample are relatively small, but the number of relevant variables (including other demographic variables) is large, is cluster analysis. Cluster analysis is somewhat similar to factor analysis, but instead of identifying factors based on degree of correlation among many different items, it identifies clusters of individuals who are similar to each other and different from individuals in other clusters on various variables. Two major ways of using cluster analysis to learn more about the contribution of race/ethnicity to family violence are (a) perform cluster analyses first on a set of relevant variables not including race/ethnicity, and then determine whether cluster membership varies significantly by race/ethnicity (e.g., Girvin, 2004) and (b) include *race/ethnicity* as one of the variables entered into the cluster analysis to determine whether members of a particular race/ethnicity tend to be grouped together in a single cluster (e.g., Cullen, Smith, Funk, & Haaf, 2000).

A final method of analysis that is quite complex but offers an elegant approach to the potential role of race/ethnicity in family violence is multilevel modeling. For adequate power in multilevel modeling, a large sample and several different racial/ethnic groups are important; however, the method is quite robust and can provide reliable results even if some of the racial/ethnic groups are relatively small. Multilevel modeling allows one to simultaneously consider individual-level and group-level influences on a variable of interest without violating assumptions of independence (as would occur in an individual-level analysis using *race/ethnicity* as an independent variable) or losing valuable variability (as would occur in analyses aggregating scores by races/ethnicities). By running a series of nested linear models that take into

account hierarchical structure, multilevel modeling allows one to examine how group influences interact with individual characteristics.

With multilevel modeling, one can investigate race/ethnic group as a predictor of family violence and as a moderator of the association between family violence and a given outcome variable. Hines (in press) used multilevel modeling to determine whether the status of women and level of gender hostility influenced the level of sexual aggression men and women sustained in intimate relationships at 38 sites around the world. In a somewhat different multilevel analysis of data from 60 sites around the world, Hines (provisionally accepted) investigated whether the level of hostility toward men in a society and the general level of violence in a society influenced the association between intimate violence victimization of men and post-traumatic stress symptoms. Moderator and mediator analyses are also possible in multilevel modeling (cf., Hines & Straus, in press). For an excellent discussion on methods in multilevel modeling, see Raudenbush and Bryk (2002).

In our discussion of methodological issues, we emphasized the cross-cultural approach because it predominates in psychological and sociological (but not necessarily ethnographic) studies of multi-ethnic samples in family violence research; however, we also value cultural studies. Individuals and families from different racial/ethnic groups may conceptualize their experiences in unique ways and respond emotionally and behaviorally to those experiences in unique ways. To understand their conceptualizations and responses, rich qualitative studies such as those of Ahmad, Riaz, Barata, and Stewart (2004), Bhuyan et al. (2005), and Malley-Morrison (2004) are invaluable.

In conclusion, there are a number of strategies available for increasing the knowledge base on the role of *race/ethnicity* in family violence. These include designing cross-cultural, cultural, and integrative studies; identifying relevant available data sets that have oversampled racial/ethnic minority groups or that specifically target racial/ethnic minority groups; modifying available surveys to include items that may be very specific to particular at-risk minorities; and mastering advanced multivariate statistics pertinent to the research questions (or finding a statistical consultant with the necessary expertise).

Discussions of Findings

In discussing implications of findings, it is wise to consider the extent to which ethnic lumping has been avoided and to tease out factors that may account for any racial/ethnic differences or similarities that emerged. A good section on limitations, particularly limitations to generalizability, is

very important. Consider this caveat from McDaniel and Slack (2005), who explained, "We do not have adequate variation in our dependent variable to address the disproportionate incidence of CPS investigations by race and ethnic status (see Myers, 2003), but our study provides insight into the investigation risk factors for a sample of predominantly African American families in Illinois" (p. 180). A particularly useful tactic could be to discuss findings with members of the racial/ethnic communities that were studied.

Also, when making connections between their own findings and others in the literature, researchers should review carefully the methodological differences among the studies—for example, what were the differences in sampling methods, measures, statistical analyses, and so on? It is also important to consider studies in which no racial/ethnic group differences were found. Many investigations in which researchers explored the possibility of racial/ethnic group differences in rates, causes, or consequences of family violence found none. Any discussion of null findings needs to consider methodological and statistical reasons for the lack of associations. Null findings could reflect a lack of differences between two racial/ethnic groups (e.g., Whites vs. non-Whites) but do not necessarily mean that there are no racial/ethnic group differences (e.g., there could be considerable variability within either or both of the racial/ethnic groups). It is also important to consider the possibility of a Type II error. Null findings could reflect low statistical power because of small sample sizes and/or attenuated associations because of skewed variables; consequently, null findings should not be unconditionally assumed to be a valid representation of reality—there could be many statistical and methodological reasons for a lack of racial/ethnic group differences. A great contribution to the field would be meta-analytic studies that explore racial/ethnic group differences and reasons for these differences. In other words, any meta-analytic study should tease apart the role of *race/ethnicity* from other variables with which it is correlated (e.g., SES, attitudes, beliefs, etc.).

Finally, when interpreting data, it is important to attend to all of the factors and experiences that may be contributing to any associations found between race/ethnicity and family violence. At the same time, cultural sensitivity (presumed to be a component of cultural competence) should not be used as an excuse for extreme cultural relativity; that is, it may be customary within a society to kill women who have been raped or children born with disabilities, and these actions may be viewed as moral and appropriate within that particular society; however, the acts can still be judged as violent, abusive, and unacceptable. Our position on this issue is consistent with the one expressed by the United Nations in their Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women

(1993); these documents decry traditional patterns of violence and discrimination against children and women in their homes and communities around the globe and direct all member states, regardless of any history of justifying these practices, to eliminate them.

Summary and Limitations

Addressing issues of race/ethnicity should be an important component of the family violence researcher's agenda at all stages of the research process, including the basic decision of how to speak of *race/ethnicity*. Critical reviews of previous studies reporting data on racial/ethnic differences should address issues of oppression, cultural sensitivity, ethnic lumping and overgeneralization, and inattention to potential sociodemographic confounds; failure to consider these issues is a limitation in most research on racial/ethnic differences in family violence. It is also important to attend to sampling issues: Self-report surveys of nationally representative samples, reports of "caught cases," and samples receiving social services provide very different kinds of information about the role of *race/ethnicity* in various forms of family violence because of the different ways each study classifies racial/ethnic groups and the biases that may affect whether certain races/ethnicities are under- or overrepresented. The process of designing studies on racial/ethnic issues in family violence should include a consideration of how the samples recruited can affect the ways in which the data can be interpreted. All types of sampling methodologies are useful; however, issues of ethnic lumping, representativeness, and generalizability need to be considered. Collaborations with other researchers in different racial/ethnic groups can strengthen a study.

For data analysis, methods used to explore racial/ethnic group differences include *t* tests, chi-squares, and ANOVAs. It is also important to control for possible confounding variables, and mediator and moderator analyses are valuable tools for achieving this goal. Multilevel modeling is a relatively new method that allows for very powerful analyses of factors involved in racial/ethnic group differences in rates of family violence and in associations between family violence and various predictors and outcomes. In addition, the field would greatly benefit from meta-analytic research of existing studies of racial/ethnic group differences in issues of family violence. Finally, interpretations of data should attend to issues of generalizability, and results should be compared with previous findings. To avoid making a Type II error, it is important to consider possible statistical and methodological reasons for any null findings. Consideration should be given to the weaknesses and strengths of the study, what it offers the field, and what questions remain.

Recognition of the possible role of *race/ethnicity* in the relationships being examined is important, as is a consideration of the factors for which race/ethnicity is a proxy. It is important not to attribute all racial/ethnic differences to "culture" and to remember that "cultural sensitivity" does not excuse violence—the abuse and maltreatment of family members for any reason violates understandings of human rights and should not be excused because of cultural differences.

There are many important topics related to *race/ethnicity* and family violence that have been neglected in this review because of space constraints. We do not deal as fully as we would have wished with issues of immigration and acculturation. Our examples are drawn primarily from the literature on men's abuse of women partners and child abuse; however, other forms of family violence—including elder abuse, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transsexual abuse, and women's abuse of male partner—are equally important. There are also many fine studies on topics such as disproportionate reporting of family violence based on race/ethnicity that are worthy of further attention. Despite these limitations, we hope that we have provided researchers in the field of family violence with some useful recommendations for addressing issues of *race/ethnicity* in their work. Attending to the role of *race/ethnicity* in family violence research means (a) including multiple and/or discrete measures of race/ethnicity and multiple measures of sociodemographic variables that vary by race/ethnicity, (b) achieving as much within-group as between-group diversity in the sample as possible, (c) striving to unpack *race/ethnicity* from other sociodemographic variables through statistical analyses, (d) conducting within-group and between-group analyses when sample size and composition permit, and (e) carefully considering to whom one's findings can be generalized and the limitations to generalization.

Note

1. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for these reminders.

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