

Positive Parenting, Family Cohesion, and Child Social Competence Among Immigrant Latino Families

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The relation between positive parenting, family cohesion, and child social competence was examined among Latino families (predominantly from Mexico) who were recent immigrants to the United States. A mixed method study was conducted, including both pre- and post-test self-reported surveys (9-month interval) and qualitative data from focus groups. A total of 282 parents and 282 children (ages 9–12) participated in the survey study. Results at post-test follow-up indicated that family cohesion predicted improvements in child social problem-solving skills and social self-efficacy, and positive parenting predicted improvements in child social self-efficacy. A total of 12 mothers participated in the focus group study that was designed to explore barriers to positive parenting and family cohesion in this population. Results from focus groups revealed four major themes impacting parenting and family cohesion: (a) acculturation differences between parents and children and the resulting power imbalance; (b) difficulty getting involved in their child's education; (c) loss of extended family; and (d) discrimination against immigrants and legal status. The implications for family support programs for immigrant Latino families and their children are discussed.

Keywords: immigrant families, Latinos, child competence, family cohesion, positive parenting

Although social and economic stressors affect children from many different ethnic and cultural groups, in the United States at this time, ethnic minority children are particularly impacted (Guerra & Phillips-Smith, 2005). These stressors also may be experienced more acutely by distinct ethnic subgroups. For example, recent immigrant Latino parents and their children are disproportionately represented in poverty statistics. Approximately 28% of Latinos under the age of 18 live in poverty, which is more than three times the rate of non-Latino White children (Proctor & Dalaker, 2002). Not only do immigrant Latinos and their children experience economic difficulties, but they often are exposed to a battery of harsh and adverse conditions, including unsafe neighborhoods, limited community resources, overemployment (working multiple jobs), language difficulties, discrimination, and crowded living conditions (Hernandez, 2004; Shields & Behrman, 2004).

The extent of these problems is compounded by the fact that Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the

United States. By 2050, Latinos are expected to represent nearly 25% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). Among youth, Latinos are also the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003), and the majority are first or second generation children of immigrants, predominantly from Mexico. Given the sheer numbers of immigrant Latino families in the United States and the adverse conditions that may compromise effective family functioning, it is critical to study family processes that both impede and enhance children's adjustment and well-being, as well as barriers to optimal family functioning.

Most studies of family processes and their impact on children growing up under conditions of economic and social adversity have examined how parenting is compromised leading to negative child outcomes. The central idea is that difficult circumstances create a range of stressors that interfere with positive parenting abilities and, in turn, portend negative consequences for children (McLoyd, 1998). For example, in a primarily European-American sample, Conger et al. (1992) found that family economic distress was associated with lower levels of positive adjustment and higher behavior problems among adolescent males, and these associations were mediated by ineffective parenting. The family stress model, developed by Conger and colleagues (Conger & Elder, 1994; Conger, Rueter, & Conger, 2000), asserts that the effects of economic stress on children are mediated by a series of factors, one of which is ineffective parenting. Numerous studies have found that economic hardship indirectly impacts child adjustment through the impact of economic stress on parenting behavior (Conger et

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al., 1992; Jackson, Brooks-Gunn, Huang, & Glassman, 2000; Parke et al., 2004; White, Roosa, Weaver, & Nair, 2009).

On the other hand, just as economic distress can lead to child maladjustment through its effects on parenting, families who are able to provide supportive parenting may be able to buffer the effects of environmental stressors on their children. Indeed, research on resilience suggests that positive and supportive parenting may serve as a protective factor in high-stress families (Masten et al., 1988). In a relevant study, Pettit, Bates, and Dodge (1997) found that supportive parenting buffered some of the child developmental risks associated with early family adversity among a sample of low socioeconomic status or single-parent European-American and African-American families. Specifically, supportive parenting (including parental warmth, proactive teaching, inductive discipline, and positive involvement) predicted higher levels of child adjustment over 6 years across elementary school, even after controlling for kindergarten adjustment and harsh parenting.

Because of the centrality of the family in Latino culture, family characteristics may be particularly important in promoting resilience for Latino children growing up under conditions of adversity (Deng et al., 2006; Miranda, Estrada, & Firpo-Jimenez, 2000), and provide an optimal context for intervention. Indeed, within Latino culture, *'familismo'* means placing the family before one's own personal needs (Sarkisian, Gerena, & Gerstel, 2006), and has been found to be a protective factor for children and adolescents. Building on the concept of interconnectedness inherent in *familismo*, family cohesion has been associated with better physical, emotional, and educational well-being among children and adolescents and lower levels of aggression and depression (Tolan, Gorman-Smith, Huesmann, & Zelli, 1997). Parenting skills also have been linked to adjustment for Latino children, with harsh parenting predicting higher levels of child emotional and behavioral problems (Parke et al., 2004) and positive parenting predicting lower levels of maladjustment (Dumka, Roosa, & Jackson, 1997).

Still, there have still been relatively few studies focusing on positive parenting and child well-being and social competence among Latinos, and even fewer studies focused on children from recent immigrant families. Child adjustment involves not only the absence of problems, but also the presence of competencies. From a developmental standpoint, competence is defined as mastery of key developmental tasks that signal effective adaptation within a particular life stage in a given cultural context (Havighurst, 1972). Recently, Guerra and Bradshaw (2008) have outlined a set of *core competencies* that characterize key attributes of well-adjusted children and youth. These include (a) positive sense of self; (b) self-control; (c) social problem-solving skills; (d) moral system of belief; and (e) social connectedness. As a whole, research suggests that these social-emotional competencies play an important role in the promotion of positive youth development and the prevention of risk during childhood and adolescence (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & McNeely, 2008).

The Current Study

The current study had two goals. First, we wanted to determine whether positive parenting styles typically studied with more advantaged populations were linked to positive outcomes for preadolescent children in a sample of low-income immigrant Latino families. Second, in addition to examining the relation between positive parenting and child competence, we also considered barriers to positive parenting that may be unique for immigrant families. We utilized a mixed-methods design that included a survey assessment of parenting and child outcomes to test hypothesized relations as well as a focus group investigation of barriers to positive parenting in this population. Because we did not have specific a priori knowledge of these barriers, qualitative methods were most suited to this component of the investigation.

To examine hypothesized relations between parenting and child outcomes, we utilized self-reported survey data collected at two points in time over the course of 9 months. We were particularly interested in two components of family functioning: positive parenting skills and family cohesion. There is a well-documented empirical literature supporting the benefits on children's development of these constructs, although many studies in this area have emphasized relations between negative family functioning and children's problems (Jackson et al., 2000; Parke et al., 2004). In this study, we focused on positive parenting and its relation to children's social-emotional competencies for boys and girls ages 9–12.

In particular, we considered the impact of families on three areas of social competence included in the core competency model (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008): (a) positive sense of self; (b) self-control; and (c) social problem-solving skills. Positive sense of self was operationalized as self-esteem and social self-efficacy. Self-control was limited to emotion regulation (Thompson, 2006). Social problem-solving skills were drawn from social information-processing models of competence (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Guerra & Huesmann, 2004). We hypothesized that both positive parenting skills and family cohesion would predict increases in these child competencies over time.

In addition to determining relations between positive parenting and social competence, we were also interested in understanding further potential barriers to positive parenting among immigrant Latino families and feasible directions for family-based interventions to enhance family strengths and promote positive parenting. These challenges involve both economic and cultural pressures. For instance, upon immigrating to the United States, many Latinos leave their extended family behind and are alone when arriving in the United States. The loss of familial support coupled with the cultural value of *familismo* creates unique dilemmas for immigrant families. Towards this end, we report data from parent focus groups with a different sample from the same socio-economic, geographic, and ethnic/immigrant status.

Survey Study

Method

The data for the present study were collected as part of a comprehensive, multi-year family and community research project designed to support low-income immigrant Latino families and their children. The research was conducted as part of a partnership between a university center and a community-based agency. All data collection was conducted in compliance with the protocol approved by the human subjects review board. The study was conducted in the 92701 zip code of Southern California, an area of approximately 60,000 residents, 92% who are of Latino (Mexican) origin. Some of the families in the study participated in an intervention, although there were no significant differences on relevant demographic characteristics between families in the intervention and nonintervention conditions.

Participants

Data was collected from one parent per family who was designated as the study participant. In most all cases this was the mother, although a small percentage of families were father-only. A total of 282 parents (263 mothers and 19 fathers) were designated participants, each with one focal child (144 females and 138 males), assigned to either the intervention (140 parents) or control (142 parents) condition over 3 years. The average age of the child participants was 9.5 years ($SD = .91$). Almost all parents (99%) were born outside the United States with 96% reporting Mexico as their country of origin. In contrast, 67% of the child participants were born in the United States with only 32% born outside the United States. Parents reported living in the United States an average of 12 years ($SD = 5.91$). Approximately 64% of families lived in households with five to seven members, and 16% lived in households with eight or more residents. The average age of the parent/primary caregiver was 34 years old (range 19–60 years old). Household income was quite low, with 73% of parents reporting a total household income of less than \$15,000 in the prior year. Most parents (83%) were married or living with a partner and 17% were single, divorced, or separated. At the follow up assessment, 192 of the original parents (68%) and their children participated. No significant differences on pre-test measures were revealed between the retained sample and those who were unavailable.

Families were invited to participate in the study through door-to-door outreach conducted by trained community health workers who lived and worked in the same communities. To be included in the study, families had to be Latino immigrants and the parent or primary caregiver for at least one child between the ages of 9 and 12 living with him or her in the home. In the case where a parent had multiple children in the target age range, they were asked to select one of their children between ages 9 and 12 as the “focus child” for the study. Of the families who responded by talking with the community health workers about the pro-

gram and met the criteria for inclusion, 97% agreed to participate in the study. Written consent for participation was obtained from the parents and written assent was obtained from the focus children. The present study reports on pre-test and follow-up survey data from parents and children. To control for intervention effects, condition was used as a covariate in all analyses using survey data.

Measures

The survey included parent-reported measures of parenting skills and family cohesion and child-reported measures of social-emotional competencies.

Positive parenting was assessed using a 7-item scale that included skills such as limit setting and communication (Tolan et al., 1997). Parents rated each question on a 3-point Likert scale. The questions asked parents to think about parenting over the last month and answer questions such as “were you able to communicate calmly and clearly with your child when there were disagreements or problems?” Coefficient alpha with this sample was .79.

Family cohesion was rated by parents using a 9-item scale by Tolan et al. (1997). This scale represents the extent of emotional closeness and dependability, support, and clear communication among family members, with “family” defined broadly as all related individuals living in a single household. On a 4-point Likert scale, parents rated statements about their families such as “Family members feel very close to each other.” Coefficient alpha with this sample was .84.

To control for differing levels of acculturation, an adapted version of the Stephenson Multigroup Acculturation Scale (SMAS; Stephenson, 2000) was given to parents. For the purposes of this study, the dominant society immersion subscale (i.e., “I attend social functions with Anglo American people” or “I speak English at home”) was utilized. Coefficient alpha with this sample was .93.

Child competence was assessed with specific scales measuring positive sense of self, self-control, and social problem-solving skills. Positive sense of self was operationalized as (a) self-esteem; and (b) social self-efficacy, i.e., confidence in one’s ability to interact with other children in social settings. The Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) was used to assess self-esteem. Using a 4-point Likert scale, children answered questions such as “I feel I am just as good as other kids.” Higher scores indicate a more positive self-image. We also included in the measure of self-esteem a 2-item scale to measure conscientiousness developed for this study. Coefficient alpha for this scale was .82.

Social self-efficacy was measured with a 6-item scale adapted from Bandura, Barbaranelli, Vittorio, Caprara, and Pastorelli’s (2001). Using a 4-point scale, children were asked to rate how “good” they were at various social situations such as “making friends with other kids you don’t know” or “getting another kid to stop teasing or bothering you without getting into a fight.” Coefficient alpha with this sample was .81.

Child self-control tapped emotion regulation/anger management and impulse control. Items for emotion regulation/anger management were adapted from and were the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (Spielberger, 1991). Sample questions included "I can stop myself from losing my temper." Items tapping impulse control were adapted from Bosworth and Espelage (1995) and included questions such as "I have a hard time finishing what I start." All six items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale, although the coefficient alpha was somewhat low (.61) for this sample.

Social problem-solving skills were measured with a 7-item scale adapted from Causey and Dubow (1992). Using a 4-point scale, children responded to items such as "When I have an argument or fight with my friends I try to think of different ways to solve it." Coefficient alpha with this sample was .88.

Procedure. Surveys were administered at two points in time 9 months apart. Surveys were administered in the participants' homes by the same community health workers at both time points. Surveys were administered separately to parents and children. All surveys were read to participants individually. The community health workers who administered the surveys did not provide care or the intervention; they were hired only to conduct the survey. Privacy was assured and parent and child interviews were conducted in separate rooms. Both parents and children were given a choice of completing the interview in English or Spanish at each administration. Surveys were translated using standard translation-back translation procedures. All parents filled out the surveys in Spanish, whereas most children completed the survey in English. Modest compensation was provided to parents at each survey administration.

Results

Relations between parenting and child competence. Positive parenting positively correlated with child self-esteem at pre-test ($r = .17, p < .05$); child social problem-solving skills at pre-test ($r = .15, p < .05$) and follow-up ($r = .19, p < .05$); and child social self-efficacy at pre-test ($r = .15, p < .05$) and follow-up ($r = .20, p < .05$). Family cohesion positively correlated with child self-esteem at pre-test ($r = .13, p < .05$) and follow-up ($r = .19, p < .05$); child social problem-solving skills at follow-up ($r = .28, p < .01$), and child social self-efficacy at pre-test ($r = .23, p < .01$) and follow-up ($r = .23, p < .01$).

Guided by the significant correlations above, a series of regression analyses were conducted to examine whether positive parenting and family cohesion (measured at Time [T]1) predicted child competence (at T2 controlling for T1). In all of the regression analyses, group membership (intervention v. control), gender, and parent dominant society immersion were used as control variables. In the first set of regression analyses, we predicted the effect of positive parenting on changes in self-esteem, self-control, social problem-solving skills, and social self-efficacy between T1 and T2. We ran separate regression analyses for each outcome, with T1 child scores entered as an additional control. Significant relations were revealed between positive parent-

ing and child social self-efficacy, $F(5, 140) = 4.75, p < .01$ (See Table 1).

In the next set of regression analyses, we predicted the effect of family cohesion on changes in self-esteem, self-control, social problem-solving skills, and social self-efficacy between pre-test and follow-up. Separate regression analyses were run for each outcome, with Time 1 scores entered as an additional control. Family cohesion predicted child social problem-solving skills at time 2 (controlling for time 1), $F(5, 178) = 9.17, p < .01$ (See Table 2). Family cohesion was also found to significantly predict child social self-efficacy at time 2 (controlling for time 1), $F(5, 181) = 5.52, p < .01$ (See Table 3).

Focus Group Study

Method

Focus groups were limited to parents who did not participate in the survey or intervention components of the research project. A separate sample was recruited using snowball sampling. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were given a small stipend as compensation for time and costs incurred in transportation.

Participants

Two focus groups were conducted with six parents (mothers) in each group. All participants had emigrated from Mexico to the United States in the past 10 years, were between the 29-45 years old, and had children between the ages of 9 and 12. These mothers were from the same community as the sample described above and were involved in the same community-based organization.

Semi-structured interview. Open-ended questions were used to generate discussion about challenges to positive parenting and potential avenues of family support that could be provided through community-based agency programs. Questions addressed specific challenges and barriers to positive parenting, differences in practices and customs between Mexico and the United States, and types of family support, parent training, and interventions that would be most useful and why.

Procedure. Focus groups were conducted by an academic researcher involved in the project and a community agency partner who was bilingual and bi-national (U.S./Mexican). Each group was conducted at the community

Table 1
Regression Analysis for the Relation Between Positive Parenting and Child Social Self Efficacy at Time 2

Variable	B	SE B	β
Group	.58	.61	.08
Child gender	-.17	.61	-.02
Child social self efficacy at Time 1	.29	.09	.28**
Dominant society immersion at Time 1	.18	.09	.16
Positive parenting at Time 1	.21	.10	.17*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Regression Analysis for the Relation Between Family Cohesion and Child Social Problem Solving at Time 2

Variable	B	SE B	β
Group	1.09	.66	.12
Child gender	.44	.65	.05
Child social problem solving at Time 1	.38	.08	.35**
Dominant society immersion at Time 1	.001	.10	.001
Family cohesion at Time 1	.24	.08	.22**

** $p < .01$.

agency during the afternoon with refreshments and child-care provided for participants. All groups were conducted in Spanish. Focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were then reviewed for accuracy with agency staff and a subset of parents who participated in the focus groups.

Qualitative content analyses were used to identify, code, and categorize primary patterns in the focus group data (Patton, 1990). The content of each focus group was coded and key themes that represent challenges to positive parenting were identified. Quotations were also identified from the transcripts that illustrated these themes. In general, focus group participants acknowledged the importance of family cohesion and positive parenting techniques. However, they identified several specific barriers relevant to their current situation in the United States. These barriers or challenges centered on four major themes: (a) acculturation differences between parents and children and the resulting power imbalance; (b) difficulty getting involved in their child's education; (c) loss of extended family; and (d) discrimination against immigrants and legal status.

Results

The acculturation gap and resulting power imbalance.

One of the main challenges to positive parenting involved the reversal of power between parents and children. Among immigrant families, the children attend schools and acculturate at a faster rate than their parents. Children acquire the language and are taught the rules and laws before many of their parents acquire this knowledge. The higher rate of acculturation leads to children overpowering their parents. One parent said:

Here the kids threaten their parents a lot. They say if you slap me I'll call the police, and children since kindergarten are taught to dial 911. That's something that in Mexico, you discipline them different and here, no, here there are lots of kids that since very little they threatened their parents.

As this parent points out, children are taught from a young age to call 911 if their parents discipline them in any fashion involving physical punishment. This gives the child power over his/her parents. One mother said "I think the most difficult challenge I had is to learn the laws of this country, to know how far I can go to discipline my kids, because there is a very thin line here and if you pass that line a little bit it becomes abuse."

School engagement. Parents also expressed difficulty negotiating their role in their child's education. Since the children are learning in English, this prevents the parents from being able to help their children with their homework unless they know English. Many parents also commented on how few teachers knew Spanish. These language barriers often limit the access parents have to communicate with their child's teacher. Parents also commented about the lack of discipline and respect taught in U.S. schools in comparison to the schools in Mexico. Several parents pointed out that in the U.S. schools, they empower children and do not require that they follow the rules. One mother noted:

Because over there at school they have to respect the discipline, and here the school doesn't help, because sometimes you tell them, hurry up that you are going to be late! Oh, it doesn't matter; and over there in Mexico if you are late you will be marked as tardy, but they only allow you two tardies (late slips), and the third one you receive a punishment and is not that you send you home, you were given extra homework or more assignments to complete in another classroom, and that helps a lot, because they respect, and you are supported by the teachers; so it's like a balance if you put everything on your side but school doesn't help, well we don't advance, that's why there are so many disrespectful kids here, in Mexico kids are not disrespectful with adults, even if they don't know you, kids don't tell you bad words like they do here.

This lack of discipline is hard for the parents, as they try to maintain the hierarchical structure in their own family. One mother says "So the school contributes in empowering the kids, to realize that if at school they are not making them respect rules, they make them aware that they can break rules." The parents voiced that not only does the differing acculturation rate between parents and children contribute to the reverse power dynamics, but the lack of respect and discipline seen in the schools contributes to this as well.

Loss of extended family. Another change that impacts families when immigrating to the United States is the loss of extended family. Since many families leave their extended families when they immigrate to the United States, the parents can no longer rely on their extended families for social support or help in raising their children. One mother notes:

Here I don't have any family on my side, over there you have your parents, your sisters and brothers, like over there you raise your kids with more family surrounding them, that can correct them (scold, advise them) like telling them listen son, what you did is wrong because this or that, you can count

Table 3
Regression Analysis for the Relation Between Family Cohesion and Child Social Self Efficacy at Time 2

Variable	B	SE B	β
Group	.44	.55	.06
Child gender	-.10	.54	-.01
Child social self-efficacy at Time 1	.28	.08	.27**
Dominant society immersion at Time 1	.15	.08	.13
Family cohesion at Time 1	.16	.06	.18*

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

more on your family. I don't have that kind of support here. Here instead of supporting you they criticize you, like for instance, oh, you're pampering them a lot; that you are not doing it right, so sometimes you ask yourself, am I really screwing it up? But we always want the best for our kids, and in Mexico I had that support, that even if my husband wasn't there with us, I had my mom and dad with me and sometimes I was hard with them and my mother took me to the softer side, and like that, there was a balance, my sisters also, I got so much support from them.

This mother describes how lack of social support from her extended family makes positive parenting more difficult. She does not have her family around to back her up and help her become a better parent. In addition, she describes the role the extended family plays in helping a child learn and grow, which she does not have here in the United States.

Legal status and discrimination. Various challenges arise for unauthorized immigrant families due to their legal status. These challenges encompass issues such as discrimination, lack of resources, and fear of deportation. The current study faced challenges with recruitment because the families are so fearful of deportation they will not open their doors. Many parents said they are afraid to walk on the streets for fear of immigration raids. One mother said, "because as immigrants it's a huge fear, you live with such uncertainty, that if you go out to the street maybe you are not coming back, who are my kids going to stay with?" This constant fear of deportation is both paralyzing and isolating. Children do not play outside and many families do not have many friends.

In addition to social isolation, the fear of deportation has also impacts parenting. Not only does it impact the power dynamics, but it also impacts parents' ability to motivate and encourage their children to pursue their goals and education. For instance, one child told his mom that he would not be able to go to college.

I don't have papers mom, and I tell him that's not a problem. I try to make them look for the big things, goals for the future. And I tell him, and you know what, even if I'm really old, I will keep on working so you finish your university studies, but he tells me, well my friend at school told me that here in this country people without papers is worthless, so we also as a mom have to handle those things there's a word that sounds horrible my son told me, they said to me that I was a "mojarra" [derivation of *mojado*, meaning wetback] so there are kids that are like that, that try to put kids that are not born here down.

Discussion

The current study had two goals. First, we examined the relations between positive parenting, family cohesion, and child social competence within recent immigrant Latino families in the United States. However, simply documenting that positive parenting leads to enhanced adjustment, even under difficult and stressful conditions, does not provide information on how best to promote such positive parenting. Although there are a number of evidence-based programs for enhancing parenting skills and family functioning, it may be that the unique circumstances for immigrant Latino

families are not addressed in these interventions and/or may limit their impact. For this reason, a second goal of this study was identify barriers to effective parenting for immigrant Latino families in the United States.

Findings from the survey data suggest that even under adverse conditions, parents who were able to communicate openly and effectively with their children and maintain close family connections had children who showed improvements in social competence, particularly in the area of social problem-solving skills and social self-efficacy. Specifically, both positive parenting and family cohesion predicted gains in social self-efficacy, whereas only family cohesion predicted gains in social problem-solving skills (although positive parenting correlated significantly with child social problem-solving skills).

Both positive parenting and family cohesion can provide a supportive context for child development where social interaction skills can be learned via modeling and reinforcement. For example, when parents carefully set limits and explain the reasons for their actions, children also learn to think carefully, evaluate solutions, and anticipate consequences, many of the skills relevant for effective social problem solving. They can also learn how to get along with others (i.e., social self-efficacy) by practicing social interaction skills within a supportive and cohesive family system.

Not only are these child social competence outcomes important in their own right for children's adjustment, they are also linked to lower levels of problem behaviors such as aggression and violence during childhood and adolescence (Guerra & Leidy, 2008). Further, because children also shape their own environments, children who are good at solving problems and have confidence in their social abilities can also contribute to positive family functioning. For children of immigrant parents, these skills can help them learn to navigate more effectively the demands of both their culture of origin and cultural norms in the United States, and contribute to the development of bicultural identity. Although we only considered children's competencies in peer relationships, an important next step would be to examine the transactional relations between family cohesion and parenting skills and children's social problem-solving and social self-efficacy within the family context.

These findings suggest that interventions with immigrant Latino families should strive to promote positive parenting skills and increase family cohesion in hopes of increasing children's adjustment and prevent problem behaviors. Although the current study did not examine the effects of an intervention, the finding that positive parenting and family cohesion can lead to better child adjustment over time indicates the value of implementing such an intervention. Clearly, an emphasis on these family characteristics is not unique for Latino families. Indeed, many parenting programs emphasize positive parenting skills and effective family functioning as a means to increase children's social and emotional competencies (for a review, see Lundahl, Risser, & Lovejoy, 2006).

However, an important question is whether research on evidence-based family prevention and intervention pro-

grams can be extended to and is relevant for immigrant Latino families. A small number of family-based prevention programs have been adapted for Latino families; however, in most cases adaptation involves changes in surface structure characteristics such as translation into Spanish and inclusion of Latino family rituals. The effectiveness of these programs on child outcomes has been mixed. For example, in a recent review of family-based aggression prevention programs for Latinos, Leidy, Guerra, and Toro (2010) note that few programs have been tailored specifically to Latino families, and even fewer have yielded positive results on promotion of social competence or prevention of problem behaviors such as aggression.

As our focus group findings suggest, immigrant Latino families in the United States at this time face unique challenges that are not necessarily relevant for Latino families in general. An important concern surrounds the impact of the acculturation gap on parenting and child development. As noted, children typically learn to speak English more rapidly than their parents, develop an understanding of and ability to negotiate U.S. rules and institutions, and adapt to new cultural norms in the United States more readily. In contrast, due to a variety of factors (including lengthy work schedules, isolation from U.S. institutions, and immigration status), their parents often do not learn English or become versed in the laws and expectations of mainstream U.S. society. This differential acculturation is a source of stress for immigrant families and may interfere with their efforts to foster positive family interactions. For example, in a related study, Martinez (2006), found that increases in discrepancies in acculturation levels between immigrant Latino parents and children were associated with increased family stress and ineffective parenting practices.

Thus, efforts to enhance positive parenting and effective family functioning must consider how best to help parents navigate acculturation gaps. Some of this burden rests with parents learning how to manage the power imbalance that often results from children's more rapid acculturation combined with the day-to-day realities of economic and social marginalization. Efforts to improve English language skills and learn rules and regulations governing parenting, school responsibilities, and social institutions should be part of parenting interventions, just as learning appropriate responses to children's power assertions is important. Parents must also learn how to adjust their discipline practices to be consistent with the emphasis within Latino culture on respect and deference to authority but at the same time emphasizing positive parenting strategies that both enhance compliance and promote healthy child development within developmental contexts in the United States.

On the other hand, children also shape their school and home environments. Family-focused interventions must also engage children in learning how to navigate the cultural values of their parents, their Latino heritage, and the demands of U.S. youth culture simultaneously. Interventions should teach children ways of communicating with their parents that are still respectful in spite of their higher rates of acculturation. Research should be conducted to examine ways to help children cope with the acculturation gap be-

tween themselves and their parents while still fostering a positive family environment.

Another key theme from the focus group findings was the importance of social support and the loss of extended family support when parents come to the United States. This loss of familial support coupled with the cultural value of *familismo* creates unique challenges for immigrant families. For example, the extended family is often an important source of child monitoring and supervision, as families are reluctant to leave their children in the care of any one but family members. However, for parents who have to work long hours, finding adequate supervision becomes problematic. Further, beyond pitching in to help care for children, extended family can provide feedback, advice, and guidance as parents navigate the demands of childrearing. To address this loss of support, preventive interventions that build social support networks for immigrant families should be most effective.

Finally, it is important to note that systems must also be more responsive to the needs of immigrant Latino families, and that family strengthening is a multi-level endeavor. Consider support provided by public schools. At present in the United States many immigrant Latino children attend schools that are ill equipped to address the special needs of immigrant Latino families (Leyendecker & Lamb, 1999). Parents' lack of fluency in English combined with few bilingual staff effectively excludes them from engagement in their child's schooling (e.g., parent conferences, parent-teacher association meetings, helping children with their schoolwork). On the other hand, schools with large numbers of immigrant Latino youth must find a middle ground regarding how to accommodate core Latino cultural values, such as respect for authority, within their mandate. Just as parents must learn how to negotiate school requirements, schools must be responsive to the unique needs of their students' families.

The current study had several limitations. We used relatively brief measures of family functioning that may not have captured adequately family dynamics and related stressors for immigrant families. Further, although the focus groups provided insights into the unique stressors for immigrant families, we did not link these stressors directly with family characteristics, i.e., we did not collect survey or more in-depth data on family dynamics for focus group participants. Additionally, we had relatively few participants in the focus groups, and did not address fathers' perceptions of barriers to positive parenting. Finally, our measures of child competence also were relatively brief, self-report measures, and we did not conduct focus groups with children to understand more fully how they navigate these multiple cultural demands.

Still, the importance of the family within Latino culture, a focus that is sustained or even amplified as a result of the immigrant experience, provides a general orientation directed towards enhancing children's well-being and promoting their healthy development. Immigrant parents often strive to give their children a better life than they had—a sentiment that was reflected by many of the focus group participants. Our findings suggest that promoting positive

family interactions and effective parenting is relevant for child social competence and well-being and is of great importance for immigrant Latino families. Understanding the unique barriers and challenges faced by these families also is necessary to develop culturally sensitive and responsive family-based prevention and intervention programs targeted specifically to immigrant Latino families and their children.

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**Call for Papers for a Special Section of the
Journal of Family Psychology:
U.S. Military Operations: Effects on Military Members'
Partners and Children**

Editors: Michelle Kelley and Ernest Jouriles

The *Journal of Family Psychology* invites manuscripts for a special section on military families. The deployment of U.S. military personnel to global hot spots, whether as combatants or as peacekeepers, has prompted increased attention to the psychological well-being of those deployed and their families. A driving force behind this attention has been the high rates of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) documented among military personnel exposed to combat. Yet, the influence of military deployment and combat exposure is much more far-reaching and complex. Presently, there is a dearth of theory and research on how the deployment and reintegration of military personnel influence family, couple, and child functioning. The intent of this special section is to provide a conceptual framework for understanding how U.S. military operations might influence family interactions and family members' mental health and to showcase new developments in the study of military families.

The deadline for receipt of papers for this special section is **October 31, 2010**. Review papers, theoretical papers, and empirical papers will be considered. Please follow the journal's Instructions to Authors for information about how to prepare an article, which can be found on the journal's web page (www.apa.org/pubs/journals/fam). Manuscripts must be submitted electronically through the Manuscript Submission Web Portal of the *Journal of Family Psychology* (www.apa.org/pubs/journals/fam). Please be sure to specify in the cover letter that the submission is intended for the special section on military families. All papers will be initially screened by the editors, and papers that fit well with the theme of this special section will be sent out for blind peer review.