Published in final edited form as:

J Marriage Fam. 2012 April 1; 74(2): 312–327. doi:10.1111/j.1741-3737.2012.00958.x.

Familism, Interparental Conflict, and Parenting in Mexican-Origin Families: A Cultural-Contextual Framework

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Abstract

The present investigation examined the relations between the cultural belief of familism and various aspects of family functioning and child adjustment, including interparental conflict, parenting, and children's attachment to school, in a sample of 549 two-parent Mexican-origin families. The results indicated that parents' familistic values were negatively associated with interparental conflict for both mothers and fathers. Parents' familistic values were also indirectly associated with parenting through the marital relationship. Interparental conflict was negatively associated with nurturant-involved parenting for both parents, but particularly for fathers. Interparental conflict had an indirect negative effect on children's attachment to school via mothers' and fathers' nurturant-involved parenting. Both paternal and maternal nurturant-involved parenting behaviors were positively associated with children's attachment to school across two time points. Child gender differences are also discussed.

Keywords

culture; development; Hispanic Americans; interparental conflict; middle childhood; parental involvement

Researchers have recently begun to emphasize the importance of examining cultural beliefs and traditions as protective factors that promote positive outcomes for individuals and families (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Caucé & Domenech Rodríguez, 2002). Latino families constitute the largest ethnic minority group in the United States, and more than two thirds of Latinos are of Mexican heritage (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). Thus, research examining family processes in Mexican-origin families is particularly needed. Examining both the social and the cultural context of the family environment holds great promise for improving understanding of family interaction processes and child development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An important cultural belief often hypothesized to be associated with positive adjustment in Mexican-origin families is *familism*, or a strong identification of individuals with their family (Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Marín, & Perez-Stable, 1987). Familism encompasses family closeness, getting along with family members, contributing to the well-being of the family, and having a more collectivist orientation than an orientation toward personal success (Caucé & Domenech Rodríguez, 2002). Familism may have an overarching impact on family well-being by promoting positive familial relationships,

guiding parental behaviors that promote behavior consistent with this cultural value, emphasizing family cohesion, and motivating Mexican-origin youth to adhere to the family's prosocial beliefs (Cardoso & Thompson; Germán, Gonzales, & Dumka, 2009; Roosa, Morgan-Lopez, Cree, & Specter, 2002).

The present study makes two important contributions to this area of research. First, we examined how familism is associated with family processes expected to affect the development of Mexican-origin youth (see Figure 1); specifically, we examined whether parents' familistic beliefs are linked to interparental conflict, parenting behaviors, and, in turn, children's school attachment during late childhood. Examining the family interactions that are associated with attachment to school in Mexican-origin youth are especially important because these youth experience a high risk of dropping out of high school (see <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>, 2007 – 2008 statistics).

Second, we attempted to clarify the association between interparental conflict and child adjustment in Mexican-origin families (see Figure 1). The detrimental influence of interparental conflict on family relationships and, in particular, child adjustment is evident (e.g., Conger, 2001; Gonzales, Pitts, Hill, & Roosa, 2000; Parke et al., 2004; Sturge-Apple, Davies, Winter, Cummings, & Schermerhorn, 2008). Interparental conflict appears to influence children both directly and indirectly, via parenting behaviors (Conger, 2001). But examination of the developmental implications of interparental conflict in minority groups remains scarce (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000). In addition, studies that have addressed children's psychological adaptation to interparental conflict have focused on children's internalizing and externalizing problems, and findings from existing research on the effects of interparental conflict in Mexican-origin families are mixed. Some studies have found that interparental conflict directly predicts negative child adjustment (Parke et al., 2004), whereas other studies have shown the influence is indirect, via parenting pathways (Gonzales et al., 2000). But these studies were cross-sectional, used single reporters for the construct variables, and had relatively small sample sizes. In the present research we aimed to clarify these mixed findings using a larger sample size, multiple reporters, and assessing change in child adjustment across time. We also extend prior research by examining the influence of interparental conflict on Mexican-origin children's attachment to school.

Theoretical Framework

Familism and Family Functioning

As shown in Figure 1, we expected that familistic values would positively contribute to functioning in Mexican-origin families. Familistic beliefs typically encompass a broad range of cultural characteristics, such as loyalty, respect, solidarity, and interdependence, that exist within the immediate family and extended kin networks (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). Sabogal and colleagues (1987) identified three connected areas of familistic beliefs. The first is *familial obligations*, or the belief that individuals have a responsibility to provide economic and emotional support to other family members. Second is *perceived support and emotional closeness*: the perception that family members can be depended on, should be united, and have close relationships. Last is *family as referent*, the belief that an individual's behaviors should meet with familial expectations. We used this last measure in the present report because these dimensions of familism have successfully been incorporated into an overall measure of familism in other studies (Dumka, Gonzales, Bonds, & Millsap, 2009; Germán et al., 2009; Knight et al., 2010).

Caregivers who place a high priority on familism may be less likely to engage in conflict with one another, be more involved parents, and encourage higher levels of commitment to school and prosocial behavior in their children (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). Research has

shown that individuals who endorse familistic values report higher levels of family cohesion and cooperation (Behnke et al., 2008; Coltrane, Parke, & Adams, 2004; Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2008). Familism may promote healthy family interactions because of the social support and sense of belonging provided by family (Gonzales, Knight, Birman, & Sirolli, 2004), and it may help family members stay connected by increasing family cohesion during times of adversity (Behnke et al., 2008; Smokowski et al., 2008). These findings are consistent with the hypothesis that familism promotes positive family interactions.

Cultural values may also be related to parenting behaviors. Although the majority of research with Mexican-origin families has focused on differential levels of acculturation and enculturation between parents and children, some researchers have hypothesized that familistic values may also guide parents' childrearing behaviors (Germán et al., 2009; Roosa et al., 2002). Studies have found that Latino parents' familistic values predict higher levels of involvement and monitoring of children and adolescents (Coltrane et al., 2004; Romero & Ruiz, 2007). Parents' familism has also been linked to children's academic performance in middle school (Dumka et al., 2009) and high school (Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). Dumka et al. (2009) suggested that parents who emphasize family obligations might also emphasize the importance of school success as a way for children to eventually contribute to the family. Nevertheless, overall little data exists in regard to how familism is associated with parenting practices. We extended this prior research by predicting that familism would be related to nurturant-involved parenting, both in terms of parental involvement as well as in expressions of warmth and support in interactions with the child.

In summary, research suggests that parents who endorse familistic values may be more engaged and committed to their family, have more supportive relationships, and thus better help their children navigate developmental tasks (Germán et al., 2009). Consistent with this prior research, our conceptual model (see Figure 1) first predicted that mothers' and fathers' familistic values would be positively related to each other (path a in Figure 1). Second, we predicted that parents' familistic values would be positively related to nurturant-involved parenting (paths b and c). We also predicted that familistic values would be negatively associated with interparental conflict (paths d and e).

Interparental Conflict and Child Adjustment

Interparental conflict is negatively related to child adjustment by means of a variety of mechanisms, including parental modeling of poor interpersonal skills, disruption of effective parenting, or induction of emotional distress (Emery, 1982; Rhoades, 2008). Interparental conflict has also been linked to emotional and academic difficulties in the school context (Sturge-Apple et al., 2008) and to aggression, as well as poor social functioning (Gerard, Krishnakumar, & Buehler, 2006; Kitzmann, Gaylord, Holt, & Kenny, 2003), but primarily in families in the racial/ethnic majority culture. Studies also have shown that high levels of interparental conflict negatively affect parenting (Buehler & Gerard, 2002; Gerard et al., 2006; Pleck & Hofferth, 2008; Schacht, Cummings, & Davies, 2009; Sturge-Apple, Davies, Boker, & Cummings, 2004; Sturge-Apple et al., 2008). For example, interparental conflict has been associated with parents' harsh discipline of their children (Gerard et al., 2006). Some research has also shown that fathers' parenting is particularly undermined by interparental conflict (Coiro & Emery, 1998; Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2007; Schacht et al., 2009; Sturge-Apple et al., 2004).

Relatively few studies have assessed the association between interparental conflict and child adjustment in Mexican-origin families (McLoyd et al., 2000). A few studies have found that interparental conflict is associated with lower quality parenting in Mexican-origin families (Formoso, Gonzales, Barrera, & Dumka, 2007; Gonzales et al., 2000). Formoso et al. (2007) found that interparental conflict was negatively related to quality fathering for single-earner

families in Mexican-origin families. Gonzales et al. (2000) found that interparental conflict negatively predicted parental acceptance and positively predicted inconsistent discipline. Consistent with an indirect effects hypothesis, Gonzales et al. found that the influence of interparental conflict on child adjustment was mediated completely by parenting practices. Other studies of Mexican-origin families have found that interparental conflict is directly associated with poor child adjustment (Parke et al., 2004). Parke et al. (2004) found that interparental conflict directly influenced child adjustment in both Mexican-origin and European-origin families, but the association was stronger for Mexican-origin youth, suggesting that they may be more vulnerable to interparental conflict.

Thus, the research is mixed as to whether the relation from interparental conflict to child adjustment is the result of direct (e.g., Parke et al., 2004) or indirect (e.g., Gonzales et al., 2000) mechanisms in Mexican-origin families. In addition to their discrepant findings, both of these prior studies used cross-sectional research designs and thus did not address the issue of change in child behavior or provide assurance that putative causal variables preceded child outcomes in time. Moreover, these two studies also had method variance biases from the use of a single informant for key constructs. In Parke et al.'s (2004) study, mothers reported both interparental conflict and child adjustment, whereas in Gonzales et al.'s (2000) study children reported both interparental conflict and child adjustment. The present study will provide additional information with regard to these mixed findings and will extend research by using multiple reporters to examine these processes as well as assess their impact on child adjustment over time.

We predicted that interparental conflict would be negatively associated with nurturant-involved parenting for both mothers and fathers (see Figure 1, paths f and g). In addition, consistent with the idea that children of Mexican origin will be especially vulnerable to problems in the family, our model predicted that interparental conflict may be negatively linked to child adjustment by means of both direct (path h) as well as indirect pathways (via parenting).

Nurturant-Involved Parenting and Attachment to School

The final step in our model involves the association between parenting and youth's attachment to school. Attachment to school, or a student's experiences of belonging to and closeness with others at school, may be an especially important outcome variable because it has been shown to buffer youth from psychosocial maladjustment (Loukas, Roalson, & Herrera, 2010). However, the transition to adolescence can be a particularly vulnerable time for youth as they increasingly experience challenges to their social and academic competence and demonstrate an increased risk for internalizing and externalizing behaviors (Scaramella, Conger, & Simons, 1999). Youth of Mexican origin may be especially susceptible to these risks because they are subject to discrimination, racism, and academic marginalization, which can negatively affect adjustment and academic competence and can lead to school alienation and early dropout from school (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010). Thus, research that has examined family processes that are positively associated with school attachment may be particularly important for Mexican-origin youth.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that parental involvement, warmth, support, and low hostility (i.e., nurturant-involved parenting) positively influence youth adjustment by promoting academic and social competence (e.g., Conger & Conger, 2002; DeBaryshe et al., 1993; Melby & Conger, 1996; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992). Latino families place a great deal of emphasis on succeeding in school, and parental involvement is associated with children's greater academic motivation, higher grade-point averages, and higher educational aspirations (Cardoso & Thompson, 2010; Dumka et al., 2009). In turn, children's belief in the value of education or a commitment to education is related to

perceptions of attachment to school and better school performance and behavior (Jenkins, 1995, 1997).

Furthermore, a major limitation of most developmental research is that researchers often neglect to examine fathers' beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes, especially in racial/ethnic minority families (Campos, 2008; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). We addressed this limitation by examining both mothers' and fathers' parenting behaviors. Although research has demonstrated an association between mothers and fathers' parenting (i.e., Pleck & Hofferth, 2008), studies have also shown that fathers make unique contributions to children's development (Marsiglio et al., 2000; McBride, Dyer, Liu, Brown, & Hong, 2009; Parke, 2000; Pleck, 2007). For example, father involvement is positively related to children's academic achievement (e.g., Flouri & Buchanan, 2004). Few studies have examined relations between the parenting behaviors of Mexican-origin fathers and the adjustment of their children (for exceptions, see Coltrane et al., 2004; Formoso et al., 2007; and Parke et al., 2004). Thus, a final important contribution of the present study is that we examined the associations between both mothers' and fathers' parenting and child adjustment. Accordingly, the last paths in our model (see Figure 1) predicted that fathers and mothers' nurturant-involved parenting would be positively related (path i in Figure 1) and that parenting would be positively linked to children's attachment to school (paths j and k).

Several demographic variables are associated with parental involvement. Parents' ages have been shown to differentiate parenting styles and involvement (Hofferth, 2003). Low educational attainment and family income are related to lower levels of parental involvement (Coltrane et al., 2004; Dyk, 2004). Poorer child outcomes have also been reported in children living in households in which their parents cohabit (Dunifon & Kowaleski-Jones, 2002). In consideration of these factors, we controlled for parents' age, parents' education, household income, and whether the parents were married or cohabiting (data not shown in Figure 1 for simplicity). Last, we tested for potential differences by parental and child gender, because studies have shown that men tend to be more involved with their sons than with their daughters (Harris & Morgan, 1991; Pleck, 2007).

Method

Participants

Data for this study were taken from the California Families Project (see <http://cfp.ucdavis.edu/>), an ongoing longitudinal study of Mexican-origin families in a metropolitan area of northern California. The study examines community, school, family, and individual characteristics that promote children's academic and social competence and reduce emotional and behavioral problems during the transition from late childhood to early adolescence. Participants at Wave 1 (W1) included 674 single- and two-parent families with a fifth-grade child ($M_{\text{age}} = 10.85$, 49.8% male) who were drawn at random from school rosters of students during the 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 school years. Two-parent ($N = 549$, 82%) and single-parent ($N = 125$, 18%) families participated. Families were recruited by telephone or, for cases in which there was no listed phone number, by a recruiter who went to the home. Eligible families were of Mexican origin as determined by their ancestry and their self-identification as being of Mexican heritage. The child had to be living with his or her biological mother, and the father in two-parent families had to be the child's biological father. Of the eligible families, 72.6% agreed to participate in the study.

Interviews were conducted with the focal children, their mothers, and their fathers (if present). Approximately 80% ($N = 438$) of fathers in two-parent families participated during W1. Wave 2 (W2) interviews were conducted with mothers and children approximately 1 year after W1 interviews during the sixth grade. W2 interviews involved one visit to the

home and were focused on the target child. Fathers were not interviewed at W2. Of the original families, 84% ($N = 568$) of mothers and children also participated in W2 interviews. Families were paid for their participation. For W1 interviews children received \$50, and each parent received \$75. For W2 assessments, mothers received \$20 and children \$30.

Procedure

Trained research staff interviewed participants in their homes, using laptop computers. Interviews were conducted in Spanish or English according to the preference of each participant. The Spanish versions of all measures were translated from English and then back-translated by native (bilingual) Spanish speakers who were members of the project research staff. Interviewers were all bilingual, and most were of Mexican heritage. During W1, each of two visits lasted approximately 2 to 3 hr, during which each participant was interviewed separately by one of two interviewers. Every effort was made to ensure that the interviews were completed independently so that other family members could not hear the responses of the other participants. W2 interviews followed the same procedures as the full assessments previously described. Children reported on selected measures from the W1 assessment. Mothers provided demographic information and reported whether any changes had taken place in the household.

The Present Study

We focused our analyses on 549 two-parent families (49% male children). This strategy is consistent with the theoretical questions of interest, which included assessment of interparental conflict and parenting by both mothers and fathers (see Figure 1). Of the two-parent families, 11% ($n = 61$) were cohabiting, and 89% ($n = 488$) were married. Of these families, 79% ($n = 433$) of fathers directly participated. Analyses revealed no significant mean differences in measures between families with fathers who participated versus those who did not. Estimated annual household income averaged between \$35,000 and \$40,000 ($SD = \$20,000$). About 91% of fathers, 88% of mothers, and 30% of children were born in Mexico. Average years lived in the United States was 19.58 ($SD = 9.70$) for fathers and 16.09 years ($SD = 10.57$) for mothers. Approximately 85% ($n = 466$) of mothers and children in two-parent families participated in W2 interviews a year later. Given the attrition rate, we performed an attrition analysis using both demographic data and study variables and found no significant mean differences.

Measures

We discuss measures from left to right across the conceptual model (see Figure 1). Latent variables with multiple indicators were used for all of the constructs shown in the model.

Familism—This latent variable was measured at W1, using the 16-item Familism subscale of the Mexican American Acculturation/Enculturation Scale (Knight et al., 2010). This subscale measures family support and emotional closeness, obligation to family, and family as a referent. Each parent was asked whether they agreed with items, basing their responses on a 4-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 = *not at all* to 4 = *very much*. Sample items included “It is always important to be united as a family.” High scores indicated higher levels of familistic values (mother’s $\alpha = .80$, father’s $\alpha = .80$). Although the Familism scale is composed of three separate subscales, a factor analysis of these items showed that a one-factor solution was most appropriate. Thus, this measure was parceled into three indicators of familism for each parent. Considerable recent research (Kishton & Widaman, 1994; Little, Cunningham, Shahar, & Widaman, 2002) supports parceling of items to develop multiple indicators of latent constructs to avoid contaminating influences of measurement error when estimating relations among latent variables.

Interparental conflict—Our latent variable for interparental conflict was measured at W1 using the Behavioral Affect Rating Scale (BARS; Conger & Conger, 2002; Conger et al., 2002), a 22-item scale that measures warmth and hostility within a close relationship. The BARS was developed for research with rural families in Iowa and has proven to be reliable and valid at measuring high warmth and low hostility within relationships in families across a variety of ethnic groups. In the current study, the mothers reported on the fathers' behavior toward them, and the fathers reported on the mothers' behaviors toward them. Response categories were modified for the present study from the original 7-point Likert-type scale to a 4-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*almost never or never*) to 4 (*almost always or always*). Sample items included "During the past 3 months, when you and [spouse] have spent time talking or doing things together, how often did s/he get angry at you?" Higher scores indicated relatively higher levels of hostility and lower levels of warmth (mother report of father hostility, $\alpha = .88$, warmth $\alpha = .94$; father report of mother hostility, $\alpha = .81$, warmth $\alpha = .91$). Items were randomly assigned to three indicators to create the latent construct for interparental conflict as recommended by Kishton and Widaman (1994). The same item assignments to parcels were used for mothers and fathers.

Father and mother nurturant-involved parenting—This latent variable, measured during W1, consisted of three dimensions of nurturant-involved parenting: (a) parental warmth, (b) monitoring, and (c) inductive reasoning. Parental warmth was measured with the 9-item warmth subscale from the BARS (Conger & Conger, 2002). Parental warmth was reported by the child about each parent, by fathers about the mother's warmth to child, and by mothers about the father's warmth to child. Response categories were modified for the present study from the original 7-point Likert-type scale to a 4-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*almost never or never*) to 4 (*almost always or always*). Sample items included "How often did [mother/father] have a good laugh with [child/you] about something that was funny?" Higher scores indicated higher levels of parental warmth ($\alpha s = .82$ for mother's warmth and $.87$ for father's warmth).

The parental monitoring instrument we used is a 14-item scale adapted from a measure developed by Stephen A. Small (personal communication, 2005). Responses ranged from 1 (*almost never or never*) to 4 (*almost always or always*). Four versions of this scale were used: (a) parent self-report, (b) parent-on-spouse report, and (c) child report on each parent. Sample items included "Over the past 3 months, [you/your mom/dad] knew how [your child/you] was doing in [their/your] schoolwork." Higher scores indicated higher monitoring (child report on mother, $\alpha = .89$; child report on father, $\alpha = .94$; mother self-report, $\alpha = .78$; mother report on fathers, $\alpha = .92$; father self-report, $\alpha = .81$; father report on mothers, $\alpha = .91$).

Inductive Reasoning is a six-item subscale from the Iowa Parenting Scales (Conger & Conger, 2002). Inductive reasoning was reported by the child about each parent, by mothers on fathers' behavior, and by fathers on mothers' behavior. Responses ranged from 1 (*almost never or never*) to 4 (*almost always or always*). Sample items include "How often does [father/mother] discipline [child/you] by reasoning, explaining, or talking to him/her/you?" Higher scores indicated higher levels of inductive reasoning (child on father, $\alpha = .85$; child on mother, $\alpha = .81$; mother on father, $\alpha = .84$; father on mother, $\alpha = .82$).

For structural equation model analyses, we combined these three scales to form an index reflecting nurturant-involved parenting. Items were then randomly assigned to three indicators to construct a latent construct (Kishton & Widaman, 1994; Little et al., 2002), and items assigned to each parcel were the same for mothers and fathers.

Child's attachment to school—Child's attachment to school was measured at W1 and W2 using the Attachment to School Scale. This scale assesses children's beliefs on the importance of doing well in school, stronger attachment to school, and the notion that school is important. The Attachment to School Scale consists of 11 items compiled specifically for the project by Rand D. Conger from diverse sources. School attachment was reported by the child and measured on a 4-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all true*) to 4 (*very true*). Items include "You look forward to going to school," "You like to do well in school," and "You care about your teachers." Higher scores reflect higher school attachment ($\alpha_s = .76$ at W1 and $.77$ at W2). Items from the scale were randomly divided into three parcels to construct a latent variable representing school attachment.

Control variables—We controlled for the following demographic variables: mothers' and fathers' age in years, mothers' and fathers' education (measured in years), family income, and whether parents were cohabiting (0 = *cohabiting*, 1 = *married*).

Analysis Strategy

We used structural equation modeling to evaluate predictions from the conceptual model (see Figure 1) using the Mplus software program, Version 6 (Muthén & Muthén, 2007). To address the issue of missing data, we used full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation to evaluate predictions from the conceptual model. To accommodate missing data, FIML involves the fitting of covariance structure models directly to the raw data from each participant rather than to covariances among manifest variables. This avoids deleting persons with missing data (i.e., such as in listwise deletion). FIML estimation has been found to be efficient and unbiased when data are missing completely or are missing at random and appears to be less biased than other approaches (Arbuckle, 1996).

First, we fitted a confirmatory factor model with all latent and control variables freely correlated. Given the significant correlations between child gender and other variables in the model, we separated our sample by child gender and tested for group differences. Starting with a baseline model, we evaluated increasingly restrictive hypotheses by constraining certain key parameters to equality across groups. The difference between two chi-square values for nested models is distributed as chi-square values with degrees of freedom equal to the difference in model degrees of freedom. Parsimonious explanations were preferred. If no significant difference in chi-square values was found between models, the more constrained model was considered superior. To identify the model, we fixed factor variances to unity (1.0) in the boys' sample and, after cross-group invariance constraints on factor loadings, we estimated factor variances in the girls' sample. We also invoked appropriate between-group factorial invariance constraints to ensure that the same latent variables were identified across mothers and fathers by constraining loadings to be identical (Meredith, 1993; Widaman & Reise, 1997). For example, the loadings of familism parcels were constrained to be invariant across the maternal and paternal familism factors. We could then meaningfully compare the path coefficients involving mother and father variables. In our final structural models, we identified factors by fixing one factor loading to the estimated loading from the confirmatory factor analysis and estimated factor variances in both groups. This led to latent variables with unit variance in the sample of boys sample and latent variables in comparable metric in the sample of girls, ensuring that all latent variables in the model would have approximately standardized coefficients and that estimated path coefficients would be in a comparable metric (for details, see Widaman & Reise, 1997).

Our final step involved specifying a restricted structural model consistent with the conceptual model (see Figure 1) with seven latent variables and five control variables. To examine both the immediate effect of interparental conflict and parenting on child

adjustment, as well as effects across time, the model includes two time points measuring children's school attachment (W1 and one year later, at W2). To evaluate the fit of a structural model to data, we used the standard chi-square index of statistical fit that is routinely provided under maximum likelihood estimation of parameters. Significant chi-square statistics are not uncommon when large sample sizes are analyzed, however, so we also used several indices of practical fit, including the root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA; Browne & Cudeck, 1993), the Tucker – Lewis Index (TLI; Tucker & Lewis, 1973), and the comparative fit index (CFI, Bentler, 1990), which are less sensitive to sample size. The RMSEA is an absolute index of fit, with values under .05 indicating a close fit to the data. Associated with the RMSEA is a confidence interval for the RMSEA; if the confidence interval includes .05, the hypothesis of close fit of the model to the data cannot be rejected. For both the TLI and CFI, fit index values should be greater than .95 to consider the fit of a model to data to be acceptable. We analyzed the control variables in relation to all latent variables and retained them in the analysis if significant.

Results

Correlations Among Latent Variables

Correlations among latent variables (see Table 1) were largely as expected and provided tentative support for our hypotheses. For example, interparental conflict was negatively correlated with mothers ($r = -.35, p < .01$) and fathers' ($r = -.59, p < .01$) nurturant-involved parenting. Child gender (for boys) was negatively correlated with mother involvement ($r = -.19, p < .01$) as well as school attachment ($r = -.14, p < .01$). Correlations among the indicators for each latent construct are available from Zoe E. Taylor.

Invariance Constraints

We then tested a series of two-group models with restricted patterns of parameter estimates as shown in Figure 1. Our first configural invariance model demonstrated acceptable fit, $\chi^2(330, N = 549) = 409.26, p < .05$, RMSEA = .030, CFI = .987, TLI = .984. We then placed increasingly restrictive factorial invariance constraints on the model. We met criteria for strong invariance, which requires invariant factor loadings and measurement intercepts across groups, $\chi^2(358, N = 549) = 438.17, p < .05$, RMSEA = .029, CFI = .987, TLI = .985. Our next step was to place equality constraints systematically on the model to determine whether father and mother pathways differed significantly from each other. Imposing invariance constraints on the mother and father factor loadings did not significantly change the fit of the model, $\Delta\chi^2(6, N = 549) = 9.96, ns$. We then individually tested mother and fathers pathways for invariance by constraining them to be equal and assessing the change in chi-square and degrees of freedom. If the change in chi-square and degrees of freedom was nonsignificant, we left the equality constraints in the model. In two cases, imposing equality constraints resulted in a significant change of fit. Constraining the paths from interparental conflict to father and mother parenting resulted in a significant difference in fit, $\Delta\chi^2(1, N = 549) = 43.66, p < .01$. Also, constraining the paths from father and mother nurturant-involved parenting to W1 school attachment resulted in a significant difference of fit, $\Delta\chi^2(1, N = 549) = 8.91, p < .01$. These paths were therefore left unconstrained in our final statistical model (see Figure 2).

Last, we ran a two-group model to test for differences by child gender. We constrained each path between latent variables separately to determine which specific paths differed by child gender. If the change in chi-square associated with an invariance constraint was nonsignificant, we left the equality constraint in the model. Three pathways showed significant differences between boys and girls, as demonstrated by a significant worsening of fit when these paths were constrained: between (a) mothers and fathers' familism, (b)

father involvement on school attachment at W1, and (c) school attachment at W1 on school attachment at W2. These results are shown separately by gender in the model (see Figure 2). Factor loadings of manifest indicators on latent variables in this structural model were statistically significant ($p < .01$), and relatively large, with loadings ranging from .67 to .94 in standardized metric (see Figure 2).

Restricted Structural Model

Familism—Contrary to our hypothesis that mothers' and fathers' familism would be correlated (path a in Figure 1), this was not found (girls: $r = .03$, $SE = .09$, $p = .72$; boys: $r = .18$, $SE = .11$, $p = .12$). Consistent with our predictions, however, parents' familistic values were negatively associated with interparental conflict for both fathers and mothers ($\beta = -.16$, $SE = .04$, $p < .01$). Note that identical effects of parental familism on interparental conflict are shown because invariance constraints were placed on these weights, and statistical tests indicated that these constraints were reasonable and did not negatively affect model fit to the data. Contrary to our predictions, familism was not related to nurturant-involved parenting for either parent, but the indirect effect of familism on nurturant-involved parenting via marital conflict was significant using the Sobel test ($+0.11$ [$SE = .03$], $z = 3.62$, $p < .01$, for fathers; $+0.06$ [$SE = .02$], $z = 3.38$, $p < .01$, for mothers).

Interparental conflict—Interparental conflict was negatively associated with fathers' ($\beta = -.68$, $SE = .08$, $p < .01$) and mothers' nurturant-involved parenting ($\beta = -.38$, $SE = .06$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, interparental conflict appeared to be more strongly negatively associated with parenting for fathers than for mothers, as demonstrated by the significant change in fit when we constrained these pathways to be equal. Interparental conflict did not directly predict school attachment at either time point. Interparental conflict had a significant indirect association with W1 school attachment through mothers' parenting ($-.13$ [$SE = .03$], statistically significant using the Sobel test, $z = -4.22$, $p < .01$). Interparental conflict also indirectly predicted W2 school attachment via mothers' parenting ($-.04$ [$SE = .01$], statistically significant using the Sobel test, $z = -2.95$, $p < .01$). Interparental conflict was not associated with school attachment through fathers' nurturant-involved parenting at W1 for girls, but it was significant for boys ($-.16$ [$SE = .06$], statistically significant using the Sobel test, $z = -2.83$, $p < .01$). The results also showed a significant indirect association from interparental conflict to fathers' nurturant-involved parenting at W2 ($-.07$ [$SE = .02$], statistically significant using the Sobel test, $z = -3.10$, $p < .01$).

Nurturant-involved parenting and child school attachment—Gender differences were evident in the relation between fathers' parenting and child school attachment at W1. For boys, father involvement significantly predicted school attachment ($\beta = .24$, $SE = .08$, $p < .01$), but this relationship was nonsignificant for girls ($\beta = .01$, $SE = .07$, $p = .92$). In contrast, mother involvement was associated with children's school attachment at W1 for both girls and boys ($\beta = .34$, $SE = .06$, $p < .01$). Both mothers' and fathers' nurturant-involved parenting predicted school attachment at W2, after controlling for W1 school attachment ($\beta = .10$, $SE = .03$, $p < .01$). Child gender differences also were evident between school attachment at W1 and W2. School attachment at W1 strongly predicted school attachment at W2 for boys ($\beta = .48$, $SE = .08$, $p < .01$) but was not statistically significant for girls ($\beta = .17$, $SE = .09$, $p = .07$).

Supplementary Analyses

To assess whether there were differences between families in which fathers participated in the study and those who did not participate, we performed analyses on a restricted sample that excluded families in which fathers did not participate. The results of the restricted sample were essentially the same as those shown in Figure 2 that include the full sample.

Some values increased slightly, and others decreased slightly. Overall, the results supported the same conclusions. In separate analyses we also evaluated whether there were differences between two-parent families in which the mother and father were cohabiting versus married. We performed analyses on a restricted sample that excluded cohabiting families. Once again, the results did not differ from those for the full sample, so all families were kept in the analysis.

Discussion

This study extends prior research with Mexican-origin families by examining the cultural belief of familism and its associations with family functioning and child adjustment, including interparental conflict, parenting behaviors, and children's attachment to school in Mexican-origin families during late childhood. The results demonstrated that familistic values were negatively associated with interparental conflict for both mothers and fathers. These findings suggest that familistic beliefs may be linked with lower levels of interparental conflict in Mexican-origin families, which could potentially help buffer families from the negative affects of adversity and conflict. Moreover, this relationship was significant for both mothers and fathers. In addition, parents' familistic values were significantly indirectly related to nurturant-involved parenting. These findings are consistent with prior research showing that parental familism has positive associations with parental involvement (Coltrane et al., 2004; Romero & Ruiz, 2007). It is important to note that we extended this prior research to nurturant-involved parenting, which reflects both involved and warm parenting behaviors. Thus, overall we found moderate support for our predictions that familism would contribute to positive family dynamics.

Our prediction that interparental conflict would be negatively associated with nurturant-involved parenting also was supported. Although interparental conflict was significantly related to lower levels of nurturant-involved parenting for both parents, we found evidence that interparental conflict more strongly negatively predicted fathers' parenting than mothers' parenting, as demonstrated by a significant difference in model fit when constraining mother and father pathways to be equal. These findings are consistent with prior research (Coiro & Emery, 1998; Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2007; Sturge-Apple et al., 2004); given that our results were cross-sectional, however, these findings should be replicated across time. It is important to note that we used rigorous statistical tests to address whether mothers and fathers substantively differed in terms of various aspects of family functioning and their associations with child adjustment. For example, studies often examine paternal influences on child adjustment without controlling for maternal influences (e.g., Schacht et al., 2009). Our findings suggest that mothers more often maintain nurturant-involved parenting in spite of interparental conflict, whereas fathers' parenting is more often disrupted or undermined by conflict. Fathers may not as easily differentiate their roles of father and husband as clearly as mothers do, so fathers may apply a pattern of being actively involved or disengaged to both their partner and child alike (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). Also, fathers may need the support of mothers to clearly determine their parenting role, because men are typically less socialized to be caregivers than are women (Coiro & Emery, 1998).

Although some research has suggested that racial/ethnic minority families may not be as vulnerable to the negative effects of interparental conflict because of other factors, such as extended kin or cultural values (for a review, see McLoyd et al., 2000), other studies have clearly shown that the spillover of interparental conflict does affect the adjustment of Mexican-origin children (Gonzales et al., 2000; Parke et al., 2004). We found that interparental conflict is associated with children's attachment to school indirectly through a negative association with nurturant-involved parenting, consistent with Gonzales et al.

(2000), instead of a direct effect, as Parke et al (2004) found. It is important to point out that the present investigation used multiple reporters and therefore may reflect less biased results than prior studies. Gonzales et al. used child reports to measure both conflict and child outcomes, whereas Parke et al. used only mother reports. In addition, we found that the indirect effects were significant across time, in contrast to studies that have used cross-sectional study designs (Gonzales et al., 2000; Parke et al., 2004).

Last, we examined the association between nurturant-involved parenting and children's school attachment. Our results demonstrated that nurturant-involved parenting predicted school attachment at two time points. Nurturant-involved parenting was positively related to relative change in children's school attachment over time. Our findings support a growing literature demonstrating that fathers make unique and independent contributions to their children's development (e.g., Coltrane et al., 2004; Marsiglio et al., 2000; Parke, 2000). These findings are especially important for Mexican-origin families, whose youth drop out of school at an alarming rate. In a national survey, 42% of Latino youth aged 16 through 25 and not enrolled in school cited "not liking school" as a reason why they have not returned to their education (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). When asked why Latino youth do not do as well as others in school, 57% of youth over age 16 responded that a major reason was that parents of Latino youth do not play an active role in their children's education (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). Thus, parenting and other family processes that encourage youth to feel connected to school may have far-reaching consequences for their children's development.

We also found that child gender moderated some of these findings. Father involved-nurturant parenting was significantly associated with school attachment during W1 for boys, but not for girls. However, fathering equally predicted school attachment across time for both boys and girls. This could suggest that fathers are more immediately involved with their sons than their daughters, consistent with research demonstrating that fathers are more involved with their sons during later childhood than their daughters (Hosley & Montemayor, 1997). Also of note is our finding that children's school attachment across time was more stable for boys than for girls. Given that the focus of our study was not gender differences in school attachment, these findings should be examined in more depth in future research.

This study has several limitations that should be noted. First, children's familistic values may be linked to many of the family processes we studied. Future research should address whether parent and child familism are linked and explore how children's familistic beliefs relate to child adjustment. Second, we assessed the first three constructs in our model cross-sectionally, and thus we cannot assume temporal order or causality. Examining whether familism is associated with changes in both conflict and parenting across time would provide a stronger test of these associations. Also important is that familism may serve as a protective mechanism against other negative environmental influences experienced by Mexican-origin families. Further examination of the ways in which familism counteracts stressors and promotes positive functioning in Mexican-origin families is needed. Future research should also more closely examine potential negative effects of familism to more fully understand this important cultural concept. In addition, we addressed interparental conflict only in two-parent families. The associations between familism and interparental conflict should also be examined in families with noncustodial parents. Last, given that our sample is not nationally representative, it is unclear whether our findings generalize to the overall population of Mexican-origin families.

Despite these limitations, our study explored the important issue of how cultural values are associated with family functioning, and it improves our understanding of family processes in Mexican-origin families as they relate to interparental conflict, parenting, and child

adjustment. In terms of practical implications, our data suggest that familistic values may be a resource for families in terms of reducing conflicts and in indirectly promoting nurturant-involved parenting for both mothers and fathers. Our results also demonstrate that interparental conflict has an indirect relationship with the adjustment of Mexican-origin youth and suggests that interventions centered on improving parental relationships in Mexican-origin families may have important implications for their children's development. Also important are prevention programs, which should focus on increasing effective parenting behaviors and should target both mothers and fathers in Mexican-origin two-parent families. Last, this research demonstrates the importance of family processes in promoting attachment to school and suggests that interventions designed to keep Mexican-origin youth engaged in school should reflect a broader ecological context by targeting processes at home as well as at school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In conclusion, this study highlights some contributions of cultural values to family functioning. Future research examining how cultural values and traditions influence family contexts could make additional important contributions to understanding the pathways that lead to positive adjustment and resilience in Mexican-origin families.

Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (Grant 2 R01DA017902-06).

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Figure 1. Conceptual model

Figure 2. Results from statistical model

Note: $\chi^2(567, N = 549) = 647.10, p < .05$; comparative fit index = 0.99; Tucker – Lewis Index = 0.99; root-mean-square error of approximation = .023. Only significant paths are shown. The factor loadings are all significant ($p < .01$). Controls were included for parents' age, parents' education, household income, and cohabiting versus married families. FF = father's familism indicator; FP = father's nurturant-involved parenting indicator; W1 = Wave 1; C = interparental conflict indicator; (g) = girls; (b) = boys; S = child's school attachment indicator; MF = mother's familism indicator; MP = mother's nurturant-involved parenting indicator.

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed). ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

Table 1

Correlations Among Latent Variables ($N = 549$)

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Fathers' familism														
2. Mothers' familism	.08													
3. Interparental conflict	-.09	-.20**												
4. Fa. involved parenting	.07	.17**	-.59**											
5. Mo. involved parenting	.15*	.02	-.35**	.47**										
6. W1 school attachment	-.00	.07	-.17**	.27**	.42**									
7. W2 school attachment	-.00	.13*	-.23**	.33**	.30**	.48**								
8. Mothers' age	.07	.03	.10*	-.04	-.01	.04	-.06							
9. Fathers' age	.14**	.09	.10*	-.04	-.01	-.02	-.02	.71**						
10. Mothers' education	-.08	-.16**	-.04	.17**	.24**	.08	.08	-.03	-.05					
11. Fathers' education	-.23**	-.09	-.01	.17**	.16**	.10	.03	-.01	-.06	.42**				
12. Household income	-.12*	-.12*	.03	.08	.04	.10*	.04	.08	.08	.32**	.26**			
13. Child gender (boys)	-.00	-.02	.04	-.05	-.19**	-.14**	-.14**	-.04	.00	-.04	.06	.01		
14. Cohabiting	-.01	.05	-.05	-.01	-.08	.07	.01	-.05	-.07	-.08	-.10*	-.11*	.02	
<i>M</i>	3.53	3.53	1.51	3.21	3.38	3.65	3.68	36.80	39.41	9.16	9.34	7.86	0.50	0.88
<i>SD</i>	0.32	0.31	0.36	0.43	0.32	0.34	0.35	5.74	6.11	3.72	3.70	4.24	0.50	0.33

Note: For child gender, 0 = girls, 1 = boys. W1 = Wave 1; W2 = Wave 2. Fa = father; Mo = mother.

*

$p < .05$ (two-tailed).

**

$p < .01$ (two-tailed).