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Associations between Positive Parenting Practices and Child Externalizing Behavior in Underserved Latino Immigrant Families

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Abstract

This study examined whether five specific parenting practices (i.e., monitoring, discipline, skill encouragement, problem solving, and positive involvement) were associated with reduced child externalizing behaviors among a sample of Latino immigrant families. It utilized baseline data from 83 Latino couples with children participating in a larger randomized controlled trial of a culturally adapted parenting intervention. Results reveal that monitoring, discipline, skill encouragement, and problem solving each made independent contributions to the prediction of child externalizing behavior, although not all in the expected direction. Further analyses examining mothers and fathers separately suggest that mother-reported monitoring and father-reported discipline practices uniquely contributed to these findings. These results may have important implications for prevention and clinical intervention efforts with Latino immigrant families, including the cultural adaptation and implementation of parenting interventions with this underserved population.

Keywords

Parenting; Parenting Practices; Child Externalizing Behavior; Latino Families; Latino Immigrants

According to the 2010 Census, more than 50 million Latinos live in the United States. Latino immigrants comprise nearly 40% of this population. Latinos are also one of the fastest growing population groups in this country. This population increased by almost 15.2 million from 2000 to 2010, accounting for the majority of population growth during that time (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). Latino children now make up 22% of the population under age 18, and more than half were born to immigrant parents (Fry & Passel, 2009). The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that by 2025, close to one third of children will be Latino. To meet the needs of this burgeoning segment of society, it is critical mental health professionals increase their understanding of Latino families, particularly Latino immigrant families with children.

Latino children face a number of health and mental health disparities and are at high risk for behavioral disorders (Flores et al., 2002). For example, research has shown they report more externalizing and internalizing behaviors than European-American children (McLaughlin, Hilt, & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2007; Varela, Sanchez-Sosa, Biggs, & Luis, 2009). Children of immigrant families face additional challenges that may exacerbate this condition. The change in family status from an ethnic majority to a minority puts strain on the family (Alva & de Los Reyes, 1999). Latino immigrant parents and children may experience acts of discrimination (Varela et al., 2004) and effects from economic distress (Santiago & Wadsworth, 2011). Examining factors that may protect against problematic child outcomes in Latino immigrant families is therefore a salient issue.

Parenting is one family process that is strongly linked to child behavioral outcomes. Although this relationship exists across racial and ethnic groups (Hill, Bush, & Roosa, 2003), there are notable differences unique to Latino families. For instance, hierarchical parenting (i.e., clear parental authority) has been associated with a clinical level of externalizing behavior problems for European-American and bi-ethnic families but not for Hispanic-American families. Instead, inconsistent parenting contributed to more child problem behaviors in these families (Lindahl & Malik, 1999). The cultural value of respect or *respeto* is often honored in Latino families, which could suggest why hierarchical parenting was not found to be problematic. However, subsequent research has found *respeto* to be associated with an authoritarian parenting style which was predictive of greater child internalizing and externalizing symptoms (Calzada, Huang, Anicama, Fernandez, & Brotman, 2012). Overall, the relationship between parenting styles and child outcomes in Latino families remains unclear.

While investigating broad parenting styles (e.g., authoritative vs. authoritarian) can be informative, the implications of such findings are limited. Scholars assert that parental control or authority, as it is measured, is not inherently a negative or positive parenting practice and may not relate to negative child behaviors for Latino immigrant families (Luis, Varela, & Moore, 2007). Further, it is argued that parenting styles are an aggregate of general beliefs and attitudes, whereas parenting practices are goal-directed behaviors that directly impact child outcomes (Darling & Steinberg, 1993; Prevatt, 2003). Examining which specific parenting practices are predictive of child behavior outcomes, therefore, may lead to more actionable findings. This study examined whether certain parenting practices were associated with reduced child externalizing behavior problems among Latino immigrant families.

The Social Interaction Learning Model

This study was informed by the Social Interaction Learning (SIL) model (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 2002; Forgatch & Patterson, 2010). The research-based model describes how everyday interactions occurring between family members shape long-term patterns of behavior for parents and children. In particular, parenting practices have a powerful, direct effect on child outcomes and mediate the impact of contextual factors on child adjustment. When adverse contexts lead to coercive parenting practices, child antisocial behavior may result. However, when positive parenting practices are maintained in the midst of

challenging contexts, children are buffered from adverse environments and healthy adjustment is promoted (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 2002; Forgatch & Patterson, 2010). The SIL model promotes five positive parenting practices: monitoring, discipline, skill encouragement, problem solving, and positive involvement. These parenting practices were examined in this study.

Positive Parenting Practices in Latino Families

Monitoring

Monitoring involves attending to and being aware of the activities of children (Forgatch & Patterson, 2010). Monitoring serves as a protective factor against substance abuse for Latino adolescents (Pokhrel, Unger, Wagner, Rill-Olson, & Sussman, 2008) and is associated with less gang-related activity, fewer lifetime sexual partners, and decreased odds for antisocial behavior (Eamon & Mulder, 2005; Loukas, Suizzo, & Prelow, 2007). Changes in parental monitoring may also play a mediational role in predicting decreased adolescent externalizing behavior among certain Latino subgroups (Gonzales et al., 2012).

Discipline

Noncoercive discipline includes setting appropriate limits and consistently enforcing mild, nonpunitive sanctions for rule violations (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 2002). Noncoercive discipline is particularly important to study with Latinos, as Mexican-American parents, compared to European-American parents, report greater use of hostile control and inconsistent discipline (Hill et al., 2003). Ineffective discipline has been linked to Latino youth disruptive behavior (Eamon & Mulder, 2005; Gonzales et al., 2012; Parke et al., 2004) and conduct disorder (Dumka, Roosa, & Jackson, 1997; Hill et al., 2003). However, there is a lack of literature on noncoercive discipline practices and how these may serve as a protective factor in Latino families.

Skill encouragement

Skill encouragement involves teaching children prosocial behaviors using praise and other forms of contingent positive reinforcement (Forgatch & Patterson, 2010). Limited research in this area suggests after controlling for socio-economic status, Latino parents report praising their children significantly less than Asian American and Caucasian parents (Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994). Yet, there is reason to believe skill encouragement may be associated with favorable outcomes in Latino families, as academic encouragement from parents is a predictor of school success for Latino youth (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004).

Problem solving

Family problem solving takes place as parents and children decide on a relevant goal and work together to implement a solution (Forgatch & Patterson, 2010). Problem-solving practices have been associated with positive outcomes in Latino families. In one study, family decision making predicted higher academic achievement and psychosocial adjustment and lower rates of deviance among Latino teenagers (Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Steinberg, 1996). In more recent work, Mexican-American adolescents reported that open

communication and receiving problem-solving help from parents were indicators of a good parent–adolescent relationship (Crockett, Brown, Russell, & Shen, 2007).

Positive involvement

Positive involvement occurs when parents show children love and attention, such as spending time with them and attending to what they say and do (Forgatch & Patterson, 2010). Positive involvement may contribute to favorable outcomes in Latino families. In a national sample of Latino youth, greater parent–child attachment was associated with reduced odds of exhibiting antisocial behavior (Eamon & Mulder, 2005). Family communication and parental school support have also been associated with decreased odds for delinquent behavior (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 2005). Moreover, higher levels of parent–child communication have been associated with fewer child externalizing problems, especially when parental involvement is personal more so than academic (Davidson & Cardemil, 2009).

Acculturative Stress

Immigrating to a new country can result in stress due to language barriers, economic distress, experiences with discrimination, and family separation (Arbona et al., 2010; Leidy, Guerra, & Toro, 2010). Acculturative stress is the psychosocial strain experienced by immigrants adapting to a new culture and encountering any or all of these challenges (Smart & Smart, 1995). It can negatively impact family dynamics and has been associated with ineffective parenting (Leidy et al., 2010; Martinez, 2006), lower family cohesion (Dillon, De La Rosa, & Ibanñez, 2013; Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, 2008), and parent–child conflict (Smokowski et al., 2008). Acculturative stress has also been linked to youth substance abuse via ineffective parenting (Martinez, 2006). This study will include intra-familial acculturative stress as a covariate to determine if the focal parenting practices are associated with child externalizing behavior net of the parental, familial, and marital acculturative stressors experienced by Latino immigrants.

Child Characteristics

Child age and child gender are commonly associated with externalizing behavior. Studies that examine behavioral trajectories consistently find that parent-reported child externalizing behavior tends to decline during the period from early childhood to adolescence (see Miner & Clarke-Stewart, 2008). Upon entering the school-age years, boys also evidence greater average levels of aggressive and antisocial behavior than girls (Coie & Dodge, 2006). To account for such findings, child age and child gender will also be included in this study as covariates.

Purpose of The Study

The purpose of the current study was to examine whether each of five specific parenting practices were associated with reduced child externalizing behaviors among Latino immigrant families. Our primary aim was to explore if monitoring, discipline, skill encouragement, problem solving, or positive involvement predict child externalizing

behavior in this population. In doing so, we sought to account for the potential influence of acculturative stress, child age, and child gender by including them in the model as covariates. It was hypothesized that each of the five positive parenting practices would be significantly and negatively associated with levels of child externalizing behavior. In addition, we were interested in exploring which parenting practices predict child externalizing behavior separately among Latino immigrant mothers and fathers.

Method

Participants

This study utilized baseline data from a randomized controlled trial (RCT) of a culturally adapted parenting intervention with Latino immigrants. To be eligible for inclusion, participants were required to: (a) be a Latino immigrant parent or primary caregiver; (b) have a target child between the ages of 5 and 12; (c) identify Spanish as a language of preference; and (d) be at least 18 years old. As the RCT was testing a preventive intervention, children were screened for level of behavioral severity and were excluded if they met criteria for Conduct Disorder or Oppositional Defiant Disorder. Families with more than one eligible child were asked to select one target child (i.e., the child they were most concerned about) for the purposes of the RCT.

This study includes data from 83 Latino immigrant families. Study respondents were 83 heterosexual Latino couples with children ($n = 166$ individuals), in which at least one parent was a first generation Latino immigrant. Participants reported a median annual family income between \$21,000 and \$30,000. Families had approximately three children ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 1.06$) living in the household. Although the RCT intended to include only children ages 5–12, participants reported a child age range from 4 to 17 years ($M = 8.83$; $SD = 2.93$). About half of these children were male (51.8%). Average parent age was 36.33 years ($SD = 6.42$), and parents had been living in the United States, an average of 14.59 years ($SD = 6.46$). The vast majority of participants reported their country of origin as Mexico (95.2%); the remainder were born in El Salvador (1.2%), Guatemala (1.2%), or the United States (2.4%).

Procedure

Participants were recruited from the community via flyers and referrals from project partners. Past study participants also provided word-of-mouth referrals. Eligible families completed an in-home assessment process lasting between 2.5 and 3 hours. This included self-report measures (administered in Spanish) and behavioral observations of parent–child interaction. The current study examined a subset of the self-report measures. Assessments were led by community members hired and trained as part of the study. Assessment personnel remained present throughout the appointment to answer questions or read the measures aloud if preferred by the participant. They also monitored to ensure each parent completed the measures independently. All procedures received appropriate Institutional Review Board approval.

Measures

Child externalizing behavior—A Spanish version of the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001) was used to assess parent-reported child behavioral problems. For this study, the 35-item externalizing subscale was utilized. Parents indicated how well each item described their child on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 = *Not True* to 2 = *Very True or Often True*. Scale scores were summed, with higher scores indicating more problem behavior. The CBCL has previously been used with Hispanic/Latino populations and has demonstrated sound psychometric properties (e.g., Martinez & Eddy, 2005; Rubio-Stipec, Bird, Canino, & Gould, 1990). The reliability of the externalizing subscale for the current study was $\alpha = 0.89$ for mothers and $\alpha = 0.88$ for fathers.

Skill encouragement—The skill encouragement measure was adapted from the scale used by Martinez and Eddy (2005). The original 8-item scale was found to have adequate reliability ($\alpha = 0.78$ for mothers; $\alpha = 0.75$ for fathers). For this project, the original scale was evaluated by an expert panel and expanded to 24 items. Parents reported how often they practice various forms of positive reinforcement (e.g., *spend extra time with your child*) and other parenting behaviors (e.g., *help your child to carry out difficult activities*) on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Always*. The items were then averaged to produce a mean skill encouragement score, with higher scores indicating greater levels of skill encouragement. The scale demonstrated strong reliability in this study ($\alpha = 0.89$ for mothers, $\alpha = 0.86$ for fathers).

Discipline—Discipline was measured using 10 items assessing how frequently parents employed noncoercive limit setting strategies in response to child misbehavior (e.g., *talk with your child about his/her misbehavior and the consequences of it; remove privileges from your child*). Each item was measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Always*. The items were averaged to produce a mean discipline score, with higher scores indicating greater levels of noncoercive discipline. This measure was adapted from the 12-item scale used by Martinez and Eddy (2005; $\alpha = 0.67$ for mothers; $\alpha = 0.79$ for fathers). The scale from this study demonstrated similar internal reliability coefficients ($\alpha = 0.62$ for mothers; $\alpha = 0.72$ for fathers).

Monitoring—Parental monitoring was measured on a 12-item scale. Parents reported how often they typically know where their child is, who their child is with, and what their child is doing. Additional items further assessed the parent's familiarity with their child's activities and acquaintances (e.g., *In general, how often does your child spend time with friends you don't know?*). Items were measured on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Always* and averaged to compute a mean monitoring score, with higher scores indicative of greater levels of monitoring. The measure used in this study was adapted from a similar scale employed by Martinez and Eddy (2005; $\alpha = 0.67$ for mothers; $\alpha = 0.72$ for fathers). The reliability of the monitoring scale for the current study was $\alpha = 0.68$ for mothers and $\alpha = 0.68$ for fathers.

Problem solving—This measure was adapted from the scale developed by Domenech Rodríguez, Villatoro Velázquez, and Gutiérrez López (2007), which contained subscales for

both positive problem solving ($\alpha = 0.73$) and negative problem solving ($\alpha = 0.68$). Prior to this study, the measure was evaluated by an expert panel and expanded to 18 items. Parents responded to prompts regarding how often they carry out various problem-solving behaviors (e.g., *talk with my child about the problem; allow all family members to suggest solutions to the problem*) on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Always*. Items indicating negative problem-solving behaviors were reverse-scored before an overall mean score was calculated. Higher scores indicate greater levels of positive problem-solving behaviors. The problem-solving scale demonstrated sound reliability in this study ($\alpha = 0.87$ for mothers; $\alpha = 0.86$ for fathers).

Positive involvement—Positive involvement was measured using a Spanish translation of the Involvement Subscale from the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire (APQ; Shelton, Frick, & Wootton, 1996), which has demonstrated adequate reliability ($\alpha = 0.77$) with Spanish-speaking Latino families (Donovick & Domenech Rodríguez, 2008). This 10-item scale asks parents to indicate how frequently they engage in various relationship-promoting behaviors with their child (e.g., *have a friendly chat with your child; play or do activities that are fun for your child*) on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *Never* to 5 = *Always*. The items were averaged to produce a mean positive involvement score, with higher scores indicating greater levels of positive involvement. Reliability coefficients in the current study were $\alpha = 0.82$ for mothers and $\alpha = 0.84$ for fathers.

Covariates—A comprehensive demographic form was used to collect participant demographic data and included items related to target child gender and target child age.

Acculturative stress was measured by the abbreviated Hispanic Stress Inventory-Immigrant Version (HSI-I; Cavazos-Rehg, Zayas, Walker, & Fisher, 2006). The current study employed the 8-item Intrafamilial stress subscale, which inquires about marital, parental, and family/cultural stress. Parents indicated whether various stressors (e.g., *conflicts among members of my family; children have not respected my authority*) occurred within the past 3 months and how stressful each incident was on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *Not At All Stressful* to 5 = *Extremely Stressful*. Items were averaged to produce a score for each couple, with higher scores indicating greater levels of intrafamilial acculturative stress. The internal reliability coefficients for this study were $\alpha = 0.79$ for mothers and $\alpha = 0.48$ for fathers.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The data collection protocols in place for this project resulted in a minimal amount of missing data on relevant items ($M = 1.0\%$; Range = 0.4–2.4%). Missing data on each measure were handled at the item level through available item analysis for all cases with less than 20% missing data, in accordance with the findings of Parent (2013). The only exception was the CBCL, which specifies its own procedures for addressing missing data (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). Analyses were performed in MPlus Version 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012) using maximum likelihood estimation to account for any missing data remaining on relevant measures.

This study sought to determine whether monitoring, discipline, skill encouragement, problem solving, or positive involvement predicted child externalizing behavior in Latino immigrant families. Using a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) framework, we defined our outcome of interest, child externalizing behavior, as a latent variable indicated by both mother-reported and father-reported child externalizing behavior. This approach allowed us to incorporate the data from both informants in a manner that accounted for the interdependence of parents' scores. This latent variable was used as the dependent variable in all analyses.

The bivariate correlations, means, and standard deviations of the mother-reported and father-reported study variables are reported in Table 1.

To examine associations between the five parenting practices and child externalizing behavior, we were first interested in considering the average level of each parenting practice the child was exposed to across parents. In response, we constructed composite parenting practice variables by taking the mean of each mother-reported and father-reported practice. Descriptive statistics for the composite study variables are reported in Table 2. Of note, couple reports of child externalizing behavior were significantly correlated ($r = 0.52, p < .001$). Mother-reported ($r = -0.29, p < .01$) and father-reported ($r = -0.23, p < .05$) child externalizing behavior were significantly correlated with monitoring. Several of the parenting practice variables were also correlated. These correlations were generally moderate, although they ranged from $r = 0.27 (p < .05)$ between discipline and problem solving to $r = 0.77 (p < .001)$ between skill encouragement and positive involvement.

Parenting Practices and Child Externalizing Behavior

To examine the independent contributions of monitoring, discipline, skill encouragement, problem solving, and positive involvement to reported child externalizing behavior in Latino immigrant families, the five composite parenting practice variables were entered into the model as predictors of the latent variable. Loadings of the latent variable were constrained to account for negative variance that can be found in modeling dyadic data (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). The average acculturative stress reported by each mother–father dyad was included as a covariate along with child age and child gender. All variables were retained in the final model.

The resulting model demonstrated good overall fit ($\chi^2 = 4.726 [p = .786, df = 8]$; CFI = 1.000; RMSEA < .001). Path coefficients indicated that monitoring, discipline, skill encouragement, and problem solving all made independent contributions to the prediction of child externalizing behavior. Both skill encouragement ($\beta = -0.40, p < .05$) and monitoring ($\beta = -0.30, p < .05$) were negatively associated with child externalizing behavior. However, contrary to our expectations, discipline ($\beta = 0.34, p < .01$) and problem solving ($\beta = 0.40, p < .05$) showed significant positive associations, so that higher levels of these parenting practices were predictive of higher levels of child externalizing behavior. Overall, this composite model is estimated to account for half of the variance in reported child externalizing behavior ($R^2 = 0.50$). Results for the composite model are presented in Table 3.

Examination of Mother and Father Parenting Practices

To explore which parenting practices predicted child externalizing behavior for mothers and fathers, we examined separate models for each set of parents. For mothers, we regressed the latent variable for child externalizing behavior onto the five maternal-reported parenting practice variables. Maternal acculturative stress, child age, and child gender were included as covariates. A parallel model was constructed for fathers. Loadings of the latent variable were constrained to account for negative variance and all variables were retained in the final models. Table 4 presents the results for the separate mother and father models.

The maternal model demonstrated adequate fit ($\chi^2 = 11.113$ [$p = .195$, $df = 8$]; CFI = 0.927; RMSEA = 0.070). The results indicated that for mothers, monitoring ($\beta = -0.27$, $p < .05$), skill encouragement ($\beta = -0.40$, $p < .05$), and problem solving ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < .05$) each made independent, significant contributions to the prediction of child externalizing behavior.

Similar to the combined model, both monitoring and skill encouragement were associated with child externalizing behavior in the expected, negative direction, while problem solving evidenced an unanticipated positive relationship. The maternal model accounted for approximately one third of the variance in reported child externalizing behavior ($R^2 = 0.34$).

Goodness of fit tests also indicated adequate fit for the paternal model ($\chi^2 = 11.939$ [$p = .154$, $df = 8$]; CFI = 0.918; RMSEA = 0.079). For fathers, the regression results demonstrated that discipline ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < .01$), skill encouragement ($\beta = -0.35$, $p < .05$), and problem solving ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < .05$) were each significantly associated with child externalizing behavior. Once again, greater levels of skill encouragement were associated with fewer child externalizing behaviors. Noncoercive discipline and problem solving by fathers were each found to predict higher levels of child externalizing behavior. The R^2 for the paternal model was 0.47.

Discussion

To date, the relationship between parenting practices and child outcomes in Latino families remains unclear (Calzada et al., 2012). The present study examined whether each of five parenting practices independently predicted child externalizing behavior in two-parent, Latino immigrant families. This research extends the current literature in two key ways. First, it departs from the common practice of investigating broad parenting styles in favor of exploring the influence of specific parenting practices on child behavioral outcomes. This is important given that recent research has questioned the applicability of traditional parenting style categories among Latino families (Domenech Rodríguez, Donovan, & Crowley, 2009). Furthermore, identifying the role of specific parenting practices can lead to more utilitarian findings by informing parenting intervention efforts with Latino immigrant families (e.g., Martinez & Eddy, 2005; Parra-Cardona et al., 2012). Second, researchers have questioned the practice of relying primarily on data from Latina mothers in parenting research and emphasize the importance of also collecting data from fathers (Domenech Rodríguez, Davis, Rodríguez, & Bates, 2006). In response, this study utilized data from 83 male–female Latino couples.

Study results demonstrate that monitoring, discipline, skill encouragement, and problem solving each uniquely predict child externalizing behavior. Greater parental monitoring and skill encouragement were each predictive of less parent-reported child externalizing behavior. These findings are consistent with literature suggesting parental monitoring serves as a protective factor against negative behaviors among Latino youth (e.g., Eamon & Mulder, 2005; Pokhrel et al., 2008) as well as research suggesting parental encouragement is associated with positive outcomes in this population (Martinez et al., 2004). In addition, these results expand existing knowledge by highlighting the importance of monitoring and skill encouragement among Latino immigrant families. In particular, this study identified the unique contribution of maternal monitoring in predicting reduced child externalizing behavior.

The results of this study also indicate that higher levels of problem solving and discipline are associated with elevated levels of child externalizing behavior. These findings were unexpected, particularly in light of reports suggesting these parenting practices may be predictive of reduced child behavior problems (e.g., Lamborn et al., 1996; Parke et al., 2004). Further analyses examining mothers and fathers separately suggested that father-reported discipline practices uniquely attributed to these findings. Such results could be due to a variety of factors.

With regard to problem solving, it is possible the emphasis placed on parent–child collaboration is misaligned with the traditional Latino value of *respeto*, which attaches importance to obedience and deference to authority (Dixon, Graber, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008). For example, Calzada et al. (2012) found that Mexican-American immigrant children socialized by their mothers to exhibit more assertion, negotiation, and exploration also demonstrated greater problem behavior. Perhaps the parenting practices associated with collaborative family problem solving undermine the socialization of *respeto* in some Latino families, and are therefore associated with higher levels of child externalizing behavior in certain contexts. As an alternative, it is possible that parental use of problem-solving practices was influenced by child behavior. For instance, mothers may grant less autonomy in decision making to children who have more externalizing behavior problems (Reitz, Dekovi, & Meijer, 2006). This assumption, however, was not supported in a study among Hispanic-American youth (Lamborn et al., 1996). More research in this area is needed.

With regard to discipline, previous research has demonstrated that ineffective discipline strategies predict child externalizing behaviors (e.g., Eamon & Mulder, 2005; Gonzales et al., 2012; Parke et al., 2004). The current study, however, found that higher levels of noncoercive discipline practices (i.e., “effective” discipline strategies) were associated with greater externalizing behaviors. Application of the SIL model may shed light on these findings. This framework suggests parenting is divided into two dimensions, positive parenting practices and coercive discipline, and that changes in each dimension independently influence child noncompliance outcomes (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 2002; Martinez & Forgatch, 2001). This study may capture only part of the larger picture given its focus on positive parenting practices where only levels of noncoercive discipline were assessed. It may be that parents reporting higher levels of noncoercive discipline really display greater levels of overall discipline (including more coercive practices), and that

coercive discipline practices may drive the association with greater child externalizing behavior. Conversely, children with more externalizing behavior problems may elicit higher levels of both noncoercive and coercive discipline from their parents. It is also possible that our discipline measure did not adequately assess noncoercive discipline in the context of the Latino culture. Once again, more research is needed in this area, particularly among two-parent Latino immigrant families.

Implications for Practice

In the context of the challenging circumstances faced by many Latino immigrant families, this study suggests certain protective factors that may be operating in this population. In particular, parental monitoring and skill encouragement were found to be associated with lower levels of child problem behavior. While this does not demonstrate causality, it does highlight the importance of acknowledging the parenting practices already being employed in Latino immigrant families that may lead to resilience and the need for continued investigation into how these families are succeeding in promoting positive child outcomes.

Study findings may also have important implications for prevention and clinical intervention efforts with Latino immigrant families. Currently, minority families, and Latino families in particular, often do not have access to culturally relevant parenting programs (Dumas, Arriaga, Begle, & Longoria, 2011). The results of this study may be useful for informing the cultural adaptation and implementation of such interventions with Latino immigrant families. For example, this study suggests that monitoring and skill encouragement may be relevant intervention targets and that families demonstrating lower levels of these behaviors may benefit from exposure to these skills in a parenting intervention. At the same time, to avoid operating from a deficit-based perspective, families already demonstrating success in these areas could be invited to share their “tips for success” with other participants as a way of recognizing their situated knowledge and expertise. It is possible the continued identification of the parenting practices most useful in addressing child behavior problems among Latino immigrant families could lead to the development of brief interventions for use in a preventive context with this population.

These findings also underscore the importance of relying on culturally relevant practices when designing and implementing parenting interventions. Intervention efforts with Latino families that support the value of *familism* (i.e., emphasis on the family unit) may help promote effective parenting practices in this population (Santisteban, Coatsworth, Briones, Kurtines, & Szapocznik, 2012). Moreover, the potential difference between mothers and fathers regarding the role of monitoring and discipline is important to consider when aiming to develop culture- and gender-informed parenting programs. This may suggest the value of engaging both parents in parenting interventions for Latino immigrant families. It may also be meaningful to promote shared parenting, as research with Mexican-American families suggests this is associated with a positive emotional climate (Sotomayor-Peterson, Figueredo, Christensen, & Taylor, 2012).

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Study findings must be considered in light of several limitations. Although certain parenting practices were found to be significantly associated with child problem behavior, this does not establish causality. In this study, we investigated how parenting practices predict child behavior because of our interest in family prevention efforts and the role of parenting interventions. However, parenting practices and child behaviors were measured concurrently, so it cannot be determined which elicited the other. The SIL model, along with other theories of family functioning (e.g., family systems theory), suggests this relationship is bidirectional and that child behaviors also play an important role in influencing parent responses (Forgatch & DeGarmo, 2002; Minuchin, 1985). Future investigations should take advantage of longitudinal data permitting cross-lagged analyses and other forms of causal modeling to investigate this relationship more fully.

While this study provides a valuable perspective by including data from both mothers and fathers from the same family, subsequent studies could be strengthened by incorporating more sophisticated data collection and analysis techniques for examining couple- or family-level data. In this study, we conceptualized our child externalizing behavior outcome as a latent variable indicated by both maternal and paternal reports of child behavior. Future research with larger sample sizes could extend this model by creating latent variables for each of the predictors as well. It would also be important to utilize measures with demonstrated level validity so that individual-level effects could be distinguished from dyadic-level factors (Cook & Kenny, 2006). Alternatively, future research could independently assess child externalizing behavior and employ hierarchical linear modeling to analyze individual-level data (e.g., parenting practices) nested at the family level. Taking advantage of this type of approach, it would also be beneficial for future studies to examine the influence of additional caregivers involved in parenting. Latino cultural values traditionally emphasize interdependence and the important role of family, and research confirms that Latino children have more frequent contact with extended family members (Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio, & Miller, 2002). Accounting for other caregivers could help increase understanding of the parenting practices associated with behavioral outcomes among Latino children.

With regard to measurement, assessing both positive and coercive parenting practices could provide a more comprehensive perspective regarding how parenting practices operate in Latino immigrant families. In particular, assessing for both noncoercive and coercive discipline would be an important step for future research. Efforts to better ensure the cultural validity of the discipline measure are also needed. For example, this measure could be further refined by conducting focus groups with Latino parents and school-age children to get feedback on scale items. In addition, intrafamilial acculturative stress was used as a covariate in this study, which we measured using the Intrafamilial stress subscale of the HSI-I (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2006). However, the discriminant validity of this subscale has not been established, and it is possible some family stressors reported by participants did not stem directly from acculturation experiences. We also found a low internal reliability coefficient on this measure among fathers in our sample. More work is needed to establish valid and reliable ways of assessing intra-familial acculturative stress in Latino immigrant

families. Moreover, all study measures were paper-and-pencil questionnaires leaving their completion susceptible to shared method bias.

While this study was designed to include children ages 5–12, a minority of parents reported on children outside of this age range. Care should be taken when interpreting the findings outside of the context of middle childhood. Finally, the lack of variability in country of origin among study participants precluded examination of specific Latino subgroups. Future research should seek to recruit larger, more diverse samples of Latino immigrant families so that heterogeneity within this population can be more thoroughly examined.

Conclusion

This study found significant associations between positive parenting practices and child externalizing behaviors in a sample of Latino immigrant families. Such work can serve as an important step toward better understanding how to reduce or prevent negative child outcomes. Subsequent investigations should build on these results in an effort to identify specific causal links between modifiable parenting skills and child behaviors in this population. Through continued research, we can better provide culturally relevant and effective parenting interventions to underserved Latino immigrant families.

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Table 1
Bivariate Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations for Mother-Reported and Father-Reported Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. M_Monitoring	—															
2. M_Discipline	.15	—														
3. M_Skill Enc	.43***	.29**	—													
4. M_Prob Solv	.29**	.30**	.68***	—												
5. M_Pos Involv	.46***	.25*	.70***	.55***	—											
6. F_Monitoring	.13	.01	.24*	.19	.08	—										
7. F_Discipline	.04	.18	.19	.12	.25*	.16	—									
8. F_Skill Enc	.18	.03	.43***	.23*	.31**	.42***	.33**	—								
9. F_Prob Solv	.13	-.06	.29**	.26*	.21*	.30**	.31**	.56***	—							
10. F_Pos Involv	.25*	-.01	.46***	.25*	.39***	.43***	.44***	.69***	.61***	—						
11. M_Child Ext Beh	-.31**	.18	-.20	-.02	-.17	-.13	.14	-.10	.05	-.08	—					
12. F_Child Ext Beh	-.08	.02	-.07	.03	-.03	-.25*	.18	-.21*	-.01	-.10	.52***	—				
13. M_Accult Stress	-.35***	-.15	-.42***	-.38***	-.45***	-.25*	-.17	-.33**	-.18	-.26*	.26*	.05	—			
14. F_Accult Stress	-.02	-.02	-.04	.01	-.12	-.21*	-.05	-.37***	-.31**	-.36***	.12	.30**	.37***	—		
15. Child Gender ^a	.05	-.05	-.16	-.05	-.15	.01	-.09	-.08	-.08	-.15	-.22*	-.07	-.01	-.03	—	
16. Child Age	-.28**	-.15	-.20	.02	-.22*	-.08	-.01	-.18	-.03	-.11	-.05	-.18	.22*	.07	-.08	—
<i>M</i>	4.40	3.04	3.44	3.44	3.75	4.24	2.84	3.38	3.41	3.36	12.11	11.14	1.56	1.36	.48	8.83
<i>SD</i>	.40	.48	.48	.55	.60	.45	.55	.46	.59	.68	7.47	7.45	.67	.37	.50	2.92

Note. The “M_” prefix denotes mother-reported variables; The “F_” prefix denotes father-reported variables.

^a Child Gender: 0 = *Male*, 1 = *Female*.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Bivariate Correlations, Variable Means, and Standard Deviations for Composite Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. C_Monitoring	—									
2. C_Discipline	.16	—								
3. C_Skill Enc	.51***	.33**	—							
4. C_Prob Solv	.38***	.27*	.66***	—						
5. C_Pos Involv	.49***	.37***	.77***	.61***	—					
6. M_Child Ext Beh	-.29**	.20	-.18	.02	-.14	—				
7. F_Child Ext Beh	-.23*	.14	-.17	.02	-.08	.52***	—			
8. C_Accult Stress	.38***	-.18	-.43***	-.33**	-.42***	.29**	.17	—		
9. Child Gender ^a	.04	-.10	-.14	-.08	-.18	-.22*	-.06	-.03	—	
10. Child Age	-.23*	-.10	-.23*	-.01	-.19	-.05	-.18	.19	-.08	—
<i>M</i>	4.32	2.94	3.41	3.42	3.56	12.11	11.14	1.46	.48	8.83
<i>SD</i>	.32	.39	.40	.45	.53	7.47	7.45	.44	.50	2.92

Note. The "C" prefix denotes composite variables; The "M," "F" prefix denotes mother-reported variables; The "F" prefix denotes father-reported variables.

^aChild Gender: 0 = *Male*, 1 = *Female*.

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Results for Model Examining Relations between Composite Parenting Practice Variables
and Child Externalizing Behavior

Variable	β	SE
Monitoring	-.30*	.13
Discipline	.34**	.11
Skill encouragement	-.40*	.19
Problem solving	.40*	.15
Positive involvement	-.07	.18
Acculturative stress	.27*	.12
Child age	-.35**	.11
Child gender ^a	-.43	.22
R^2	.50***	

Note. Standardized betas for the continuous variables represent the standard deviation change in child externalizing behavior per standard deviation change in the predictor variable; the standardized beta for the binary variable represents the standard deviation change in child externalizing behavior when the binary variable changes from zero to one.

$\chi^2 = 4.726$ ($p = .786$, $df = 8$); CFI = 1.000; RMSEA < .001.

^a Child Gender: 0 = *Male*, 1 = *Female*.

*
 $p < .05$.

**
 $p < .01$.

 $p < .001$.

Table 4
Results for Separate Mother and Father Models Examining Relations between Parenting Practice Variables and Child Externalizing Behavior

Variable	Mothers		Fathers	
	β	SE	β	SE
Monitoring	-.27*	.13	-.06	.13
Discipline	.18	.13	.36**	.13
Skill encouragement	-.40*	.18	-.35*	.18
Problem solving	.35*	.16	.38*	.16
Positive involvement	-.01	.17	-.36	.19
Acculturative stress	.20	.13	.23	.13
Child age	-.33**	.12	-.31**	.12
Child gender ^a	-.53*	.23	-.44	.23
R ²	.34**		.47***	

Note. Standardized betas for the continuous variables represent the standard deviation change in child externalizing behavior per standard deviation change in the predictor variable; the standardized beta for the binary variable represents the standard deviation change in child externalizing behavior when the binary variable changes from zero to one.

Mother Model: $\chi^2 = 11.113$ ($p = .195$, $df = 8$); CFI = 0.927; RMSEA = 0.070.

Father Model: $\chi^2 = 11.939$ ($p = .154$, $df = 8$); CFI = 0.918; RMSEA = 0.079.

^a Child Gender: 0 = *Male*, 1 = *Female*.

*
 $p < .05$.

**
 $p < .01$.

 $p < .001$.