

Couples' Cultural Values, Shared Parenting, and Family Emotional Climate Within Mexican American Families

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This study tested a model of shared parenting as its centerpiece that incorporates cultural values as predictors and family emotional climate as the outcome variable of interest. We aimed to assess the predictive power of the Mexican cultural values of familismo and simpatia over couples' shared parenting practices. We anticipated that higher levels of shared parenting would predict family emotional climate. The participants were 61 Mexican American, low income couples, with at least one child between 3 and 4 years of age, recruited from a home-based Head Start program. The predictive model demonstrated excellent goodness of fit, supporting the hypothesis that a positive emotional climate within the family is fostered when Mexican American couples practice a sufficient level of shared parenting. Empirical evidence was previously scarce on this proposition. The findings also provide evidence for the role of cultural values, highlighting the importance of family solidarity and avoidance of confrontation as a pathway to shared parenting within Mexican American couples.

Keywords: Mexican Cultural Values; Shared Parenting; Family Emotion Expressiveness

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Research has shown that in two-parent families, partners' agreement on childrearing practices and on their ability to coordinate parenting responsibilities impact family functioning. Overall, studies on shared parenting (which includes the construct of *coparenting*) remain consistent in their findings. There is evidence of its association with children's developmental outcomes (Brown, Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, &

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Neff, 2010), the quality of parenting during infancy (Elliston, McHale, Talbot, Parmley, & Kuersten-Hogan, 2008), during adolescence (Solmeyer, McHale, Killoren, & Updegraff, 2011), and even during the young adult life of children (Gasper, Stolberg, Macie, & Williams, 2008; Valls-Vidal, Pérez-Testor, Guardia-Olmos, & Iafrate, 2010). There is also evidence that shared parenting impacts the quality of the marital relationship (Ippolito-Morrill, Hines, Mahmood, & Cordova, 2010; Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch, & McHale, 2004), as well as whole family outcomes such as family emotional climate (Lindhal & Malik, 1999).

Shared Parenting

Across studies, shared parenting has been defined as the extent to which husbands and wives, in their roles as mothers and fathers, behave, perceive, think, or feel that they agree, support, coordinate, and work together in childrearing tasks with each other (Gable, Crnic, & Belsky, 1994; McHale, 1995). In this study, we define and measure shared parenting as couples' self-reports of agreement on childrearing (Snyder, 1981) and coparenting practices (Ahrons & Wallisch, 1987).

In early studies, tested predictors of shared parenting include parents' characteristics, such as the extraversion-introversion personality dimension (Belsky & Hsieh, 1998); self-esteem (Lindsey, Caldera & Colwell, 2005); perceptions of division of labor (Van Egeran, 2004); parental beliefs; and family earner status (Buckley, & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2006).

Recent findings report that shared parenting predicts higher infant-father attachment security (Brown et al., 2010). Even with young adult children, the impact of parents' shared parenting during childhood is present in their assessment of the familial relationship and young adult adjustment. For example, Gasper et al. (2008) found that parental hostility and cooperation mediated the relationship of marital status to young adults' mental health. Shared parenting remains associated with the quality of parenting during infancy. In their study, parents' withdrawal from coparenting negotiation was associated with the father's disengagement and with decreased levels of warmth play, as well as with fathers feeling that their partners did not appreciate their parenting efforts (Elliston et al., 2008).

However, because shared parenting has been less explored with Mexican American couples, there is a need for research that assesses the predictive power of this construct with respect to the family outcomes of Mexican Americans. Early work showed that Mexican American parents shared parenting tasks. A qualitative study found that shared parenting, as a hypothetical construct, had the same meaning for Latino as for Anglo-American parents (Caldera, Fitzpatrick, & Wampler, 2002). Furthermore, the evidence that illustrates that Latino men were as involved in childrearing as their Anglo-American counterparts served to support our interest in testing a model of shared parenting for Mexican American couples, under the presumption that involved fathers actually exhibit some type of shared parenting arrangement (Coltrane, Parke, & Adams, 2004).

Recent studies have started to provide a deeper understanding of Mexicans' shared parenting. Solmeyer et al. (2011) found that parents exhibit several patterns of interparental differential treatment with their adolescent children (i.e. both treated their two offspring equally; one parent treated equally while the other favored one offspring; both favored the same offspring) and that these patterns were associated with

value of familismo for these families. Similarly, Cabrera, Shannon, and La Taillade (2009) found that Mexicans' marital relation was the strongest predictor of coparenting, which, in turn, predicted mother-infant interaction and father engagement in a group of low and high acculturated couples.

Family Climate

Family level variables are defined as exchanges or relationships among all family members (parents, siblings, and other family members) (Lindhal & Malik, 1999); whereas shared parenting focuses on the relationship between spouses specifically in their roles as parents (Gable et al., 1994). The quality of relationships among family members creates a family-level emotional climate or environment that identifies the intimate context within each family (Moos & Moos, 1981). Although it is a broad concept, we narrow the scope such that family emotional climate is operationalized in this study as "a persistent pattern or style of exhibiting nonverbal and verbal expression that often, but not always, appear to be emotion-related" (Halberstadt, Parke, Cassidy, Stifter, & Fox, 1995, p. 93).

Halberstadt et al. distinguished between positive expressiveness, characterized by openness and sensitivity to family members (e.g., being appreciative, emphatic, loving, and concerned), and negative expressiveness, marked by anger and contempt. As with shared parenting, previous research has found evidence suggesting that family emotional climate is, by itself, a predictor of child behavior (Garner, 1995; Lindhal & Malik, 1999; Schoppe, Mangelsdorf, & Frosch, 2001). Still other studies have found cooperative coparenting to be associated with a family characterized by a warm and cohesive emotional climate (Kitzmann, 2000; Kolak & Volling, 2007).

Some findings in the literature support the role of family climate within studies involving Latino families. Miranda, Estada, and Firpo-Jimenez (2000) found that Latino families lower in acculturation were higher in family cohesiveness and that Hispanic families reported higher levels of family relationship satisfaction than their European-American counterparts. Loukas and Roalson (2006) found that adolescents' effortful control was associated with family environment, especially for Latino youth. Nevertheless, there is still a gap in the literature exploring the links between shared parenting and family emotional climate in Latinos. Therefore, one of the principal aims of this study is to contribute to our understanding of such links within Mexican American families.

Mexican Cultural Values

It is well known that Mexican Americans differ from Anglo Americans in some aspects of family life. Mexican American families usually are more extended groups than the nuclear family that characterizes most Anglo-American families. Family organization may differ under this family structure, as might parental roles, as parental roles in Western societies may be influenced differently by the interplay of a different set of cultural values. The stronger orientation toward interdependence within Latino groups, as opposed to individual independence within other social groups, (Harkness & Super, 2002) highlights the importance of cultural values such as *familismo* and *simpatia* for Mexican Americans. *Familismo* is related to the high importance Mexican Americans attribute to family solidarity and togetherness and also refers to respect for people based on a hierarchical order. *Simpatia* refers to

prone to interpersonal harmony, where avoidance of confrontation is a key factor (Diaz-Guerrero, 1994, 6th ed.).

The term *Simpatia* (with no exact translation to English) is commonly used among native speakers in daily life, and it maintains its historically attributed meanings. Since Diaz-Guerrero's pioneering work, the study of personality had dismissed the role that socio-cultural environment played in explaining why people behave the way they do (Alarcon, 2010). He found that an important premise for Mexicans was that of *obediencia afiliativa* (i.e., obedience driven by love such as that of children with their parents, or between spouses, etc.), which also was a culture-sensitive understanding of a typical Mexican's non-confrontational style (Diaz-Guerrero, 1994, 6th ed.)

In one of Diaz-Guerrero's cross-cultural studies with large samples of school-age children and adolescents (Holtzman, Diaz-Guerrero, & Swartz, Lara Tapia, La Rosa et al., 1975, as cited in Diaz-Guerrero, 1994, 6th ed.), Mexicans were found to differ from European Americans in their style of confrontation or conflict-avoidance. European Americans were actively oriented to change the external source of distress, where Mexicans were more prone to change themselves internally to accept the distressing situation and adjust to it. The value of *Simpatia* summarizes some of this non-confrontational style. Someone who is *Simpatico* is willing to lose an argument, time, and other things during interpersonal conflict to retain the internal satisfaction, affection-laden, smooth interpersonal contact, especially with significant others.

Familismo has a similar significance for native speakers. Although Spanish language has no strict and exact translation for the term, its attributed meanings are known, shared, and used commonly in daily life in Latin America. A Spanish native speaker describes someone as being high in *familismo* as someone who expresses ideas such as family is first for that person or that he is always there to support his family, as well as frequent and explicit expressions of deep respect for their parents. Therefore, the essence of this term is consistent in the common way that Mexicans refer to it themselves.

There have been several studies of the influence of this set of cultural values on diverse parental and familial practices with Latino and Mexican American families. For example, Arcia and Johnson (1998) found that the strong emphasis that Mexican American parents put on children's obedience toward parental demands constitutes the desired goal of socialization. Harwood's studies found that Puerto Rican mothers exhibited a more physical way of controlling their infants' behavior during feeding episodes, as compared with Anglo American mothers (Harwood, Miller, Carlson, & Leyendecker, 2002), and that they held different perceptions of attachment behavior in their children (Harwood, 1992). The evidence is also present with adolescent behavior, as in the case of Hill, Bush, and Roosa (2003). Although Hill et al. found that the vast majority of relations between parenting and children's mental health outcomes were similar across ethnic groups, some differences (for instance, the negative relation between maternal acceptance and conduct problems) were stronger for Spanish speaking Mexican Americans than for English speaking Mexican Americans. They suggested that low acculturation and more endorsement of *familismo* might produce feelings of family acceptance in children, which in turn might elicit stronger feelings of commitment to the family and a desire not to disappoint parents through misbehavior. Romero and Ruiz (2007) found that the amount of time that Mexican adolescents spent with their families in positive activities (i.e., hobbies, sport, fun time, etc.) increased parental monitoring, which led to less adolescent coping with risky

behaviors. They measured *familismo* as the inclusion of 2 subscales: family proximity and family closeness.

Finally, father involvement researchers have suggested that Mexican American fathers' commitment to caregiving results from their strong endorsement of *familismo* (Adams, Coltrane, & Parke, 2007). Thus, it is reasonable to expect that these values are important influences to understand how Mexican American parents agree and cooperate, or fail to do so, in parenting tasks, and how this process influences family emotional climate in a sample of low-income Mexican American parents.

A note about acculturation

Research has shown that when minority groups are the target population of a study, generational status and acculturation have a strong impact in producing within-group variability. Acculturation is defined as the process through which immigrants and their offspring acquire the values, behavioral norms, and attitudes of the host society (Marin, 1993). Acculturation has been mentioned as an important factor when studying minority groups given the evidence showing that acculturation impacts, among others, parenting outcomes (Cabrera et al., 2009; Hill et al., 2003). Consequently, we controlled statistically for couples' level of acculturation to minimize the confounding component of being exposed to mainstream beliefs and practices, couples' cultural endorsement, shared parenting, and family climate. We controlled acculturation by means of regression residualization procedures. In essence, we statistically adjusted for the effect of another variable by taking out any variance associated with it, so to remove the confounding effect of the other predictor (Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

Therefore, we tested a model where we hypothesized that Mexican American couples' endorsement of the cultural values of *familismo* and *simpatia* predicted shared parenting, which, in turn, predicted family emotional climate. This study uses the *dyad* (couple) as the unit of analysis in value endorsement and shared parental arrangements, as well as the emotional climate within the family. This best represents the contribution of both parents to the family climate, instead of by the individual characteristics of each parent. It is the relational characteristics, beyond the individual traits, which are of the greater interest (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006; Reiss, Collins, & Berscheid, 2000; Russell & Russell, 1994).

METHOD

Participants

Participants for the study were part of a larger longitudinal study of children's emotion socialization. The sample consisted of 61 couples of Mexican origin who were the biological parents of the target children, who were enrolled in the home-based Head Start program at the time of data collection. The investigators collaborated with Head Start family educators who informed eligible families about the study and recruited them to participate. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all aspects of the project were approved by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Arizona. During the first home visit, written consent was obtained from the parents. Parents received a modest payment for their participation and a small gift for their child at each home visit. The mean age of mothers was 29.6 years

($SD = 6.1$), and the mean age of fathers was 32.8 years ($SD = 7.1$). The mean age of the target child was 3.7 years ($SD = 4.4$ mo.) and 54% were female. About 66% of the families reported having one or two children, 24% reported having three children (included the target child). The majority of the participants in the study indicated that they were first generation immigrants, with over 90% of mothers and fathers born in México. Other demographic characteristics such as marital status, employment status, and educational level of the sample are reported in Table 1.

Procedure

The present study is based on a secondary analysis of data collected as part of the Parenting and Children's Emotion (PACE) project. The PACE project is a longitudinal study of parental socialization of emotion competence in children from low-income families. The larger longitudinal study involved six waves of data collection over a 3-year period. Hispanic and non-Hispanic White, two-parent families with a 3- to 4-year-old child enrolled in the home-based Head Start program were eligible to participate in the study. Mothers, fathers, and children completed in-home, individual face-to-face, structured and semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted by graduate and undergraduate student research assistants from the Family Studies and Human Development division at the University of Arizona. Interviewers received a detailed training manual and participated in group training sessions conducted by the project investigators.

This study used data from a portion of the structured interview conducted with mothers and fathers during the first wave of data collection of the larger study. For the current study, the sample was further restricted to families in which both parents were of Mexican origin and were biological parents of the target child.

The interviews were conducted in either Spanish or English, whichever was the preferred language of the family members. All survey measures were translated and

TABLE 1
Summary of Demographic Variables (N = 61 couples)

Variable	Mothers		Fathers	
	N	%	N	%
Marital status				
Married	45	72.6	45	74.2
Cohabiting	16	25.8	16	25.8
Employment status				
Employed full time	11	17.7	54	87.1
Employed part time	4	6.5	2	3.2
Homemaker	44	71.0	2	3.2
Other	2	4.8	4	3.2
Educational level				
No degree	31	52.5	39	61.0
High school degree	15	25.4	11	18.6
GED	2	3.4	2	3.4
Some college	3	5.1	9	15.3
BA/BS degree	1	1.7	—	—
Vocational training	7	11.9	1	1.6

back translated by bilingual speakers to ensure equivalence between the English and Spanish versions of the survey. Additionally, to ensure meaningfulness of the interviews, several questionnaires were pilot-tested. About 91% of the mothers and 89% of the fathers in the current study completed their interview in Spanish.

Measures

As shown in Table 2, α -values for measures used in the present study ranged from 0.71 to 0.90, indicating good to excellent reliability. There is also evidence of construct validity as shown by the large, positive, and significant factor loadings of each indicator on the corresponding latent variable of the model (Loehlin, 2004; see Figure 1). Means and standard deviations on all continuous measures are also detailed in Table 2.

Acculturation

Acculturation was measured using a 12-item, 5-point scale (Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, & Marin, 1987). Parents were asked to answer questions revolving around language usage, media usage and preferences, as well as ethnic social relations. An item example is *In general, what language(s) do you read or speak?* The scale ranges from “Only Spanish/All Hispanics” (0) to “Only English/All Non-Hispanics” (4), with higher scores representing higher level of acculturation. Scale alphas were 0.90 and 0.88 for mothers and fathers respectively. As stated previously, we controlled for acculturation by residualizing procedures (Cohen & Cohen, 1983); thus, all variance shared between acculturation and the rest of the predictor variables was removed previous to performing the multivariate analysis.

Familismo

To measure this variable we used a modified version of the Family Relational Values Q-sort of Wozniak, Sung, Crump, Edgar-Smith, and Litzinger (1996), which is a 12-item scale that assesses parents' values around family solidarity, respect for parents, among others. Item examples are *Family members should be there in times of need*, and *Children should never express anger towards their parents*. Respondents indicated their extent of agreement or disagreement with the statement on a 4-point scale that ranged from “Strongly Disagree” (0) to “Strongly Agree” (3); with higher

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables ($N = 61$ couples)

Variables	Mothers				Fathers			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α
Acculturation	0.88	.76	0–4	0.90	1.07	0.66	0–4	0.88
Familism/Respeto	2.05	.32	0–3	0.82	2.12	0.32	0–3	0.77
Simpatia	2.73	.52	0–4	0.81	2.67	0.49	0–4	0.78
Agreement in Childrearing	3.09	.72	0–4	0.74	3.31	0.59	0–4	0.72
Coparenting	3.29	0.72	0–4	0.90	3.25	0.64	0–4	0.84
Family Climate	3.17	0.41	0–4	0.71	3.02	0.46	0–4	0.75

scores reflective of higher levels of endorsement of those values. Scale alphas were 0.82 and 0.77 for mothers and fathers respectively.

Simpatia

Parents' values of *simpatia* were assessed using a modified version of the *Simpatia* Scale developed by Griffith, Joe, Chatham, and Simpson (1998), a 10-item scale. An item example is *To be able to openly share your feelings*. Respondents are asked to indicate how important each item is to them on a 5-point scale that ranges from "Not important" (0) to "Extremely Important" (4), with higher scores reflecting higher importance. Scale alphas were 0.81 and 0.78 for mothers and fathers respectively.

Parental Agreement about Childrearing

Parents' level of agreement/disagreement was assessed using a 10-item version of the Parental Agreement about Childrearing questionnaire (Snyder, 1981) that is part of the larger Marital Satisfaction Inventory, Revised. Respondents are asked about the extent to which they and their partners agree about issues related to parenting. An item example is *My partner and I don't argue about our child*. Parents indicate how true or untrue each listed item is to them on a 5-point scale that ranges from "Not at all true for us" (0) to "Very true for us" (4), with higher scores reflective of higher parental agreement about childrearing. Alphas were 0.74 and 0.72 for mothers and fathers respectively.

Coparenting

Parents' coparenting was assessed with a 10-item scale (Ahrns & Wallisch, 1987) with questions revolving around how often parents share their child's experiences and parenting responsibilities. An item example is *Making day-to-day decisions regarding your child's life*. Parents were asked to rate on a 5-point scale ranging from "Never" (0) to "Always" (4) the frequency with which they discuss what rules are set for their child, their children's medical problems or concerns, etc. Alphas were 0.90 and 0.84 for mothers and fathers respectively.

Family Climate

Family climate was measured using a 12-item scale (Halberstadt et al., 1995) that assessed the frequency of the family's emotional expressiveness in the home as reported by the parent. Twelve affective scenarios were presented, in relation to which parents rated the frequency of their family expressiveness. Items cover a range of positive and negative emotions in a variety of settings typical of many families. An item example is *Praising someone for good work*. Parents rate items on a 5-point scale that ranges from "Never" (0) to "Always" (4) with higher scores reflective of higher levels of positive emotion expressiveness (reverse coded for negative items). Alphas were 0.71 and 0.75 for mothers and fathers respectively.

Statistical Analyses

All univariate analyses were performed using SPSS version 15.0, and multivariate models were estimated using SAS version SAS 9.1 (SAS Institute, 2005). To keep the dyad as the unit of analysis, we used the means of the fathers' and mothers' scores for each of the measures described above as raw data. Prior to estimating the mean

values for the 61 dyads, we conducted Pearson's correlation analysis and paired *t*-test analysis to see if mothers' and fathers' data were comparable. Correlation coefficients did not reach statistical significance except for level of acculturation ($r = .64; p < .01$). This suggests that there is no rank order or linear association between mothers' and fathers' scores on the study variables. Previous studies have found the same partial association between couples' scores. Lindsey and Mize (2001) found in their study that mothers and fathers were similar in self-reports of childrearing beliefs on control, but these same mothers and fathers were uncorrelated in their observed patterns of parent-child responsiveness. Russell and Russell (1994) suggested that couples' similarity is the most common form of interdependency in dyadic data; it is not a trait that extends across all parenting domains, not even within the same couple.

Nevertheless, paired *t*-test analysis revealed that mean differences between partners' scores were not significant in any of the six variables. This means that the overall level of *familismo* and *simpatia* endorsement, as well as shared parenting, agreement in childrearing, and family climate were the same for both members of the dyad. Because partners did not exhibit high discrepancies regarding their levels of each reported value and practice, we created the dyad mean scores reflecting the total contribution of each dyad to each of the variables measured.

We used Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test our theoretically-specified model (see Figure 1). SEM is a suitable strategy as it allows the hypothesized causal network between outcomes to be fully specified, estimated, and tested (Bentler, 1995). It requires strong theoretical support in modeling the variables (Loehlin, 2004), and it also provides increased stability to our predictors through the latent variables. SEM was performed by SAS PROC CALIS to provide a multivariate causal analysis of the measurement and structural relations between these constructs. SEM results were evaluated using a chi-square statistic, the Bentler–Bonett Normed Fit Index (NFI), the Bentler–Bonnett Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and the Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA). Index values of the NFI and CFI > 0.90 are considered satisfactory levels of practical goodness of fit, whereas RMSEA values of 0.05 or less are considered indications of good fit. Values between 0.08 and 0.10 are considered indications of a mediocre fit, and values greater than 0.10 are considered indications of a poor fit. The CFI was selected because it is adjusted for model parsimony and performs well with moderate to small sample sizes ($N < 250$), especially with Maximum Likelihood estimation. Alternative fit indices, such as the Bentler–Bonnett Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI), provide poor estimates of model fit with smaller samples (Hu & Bentler, 1995).

A sample size of $N = 61$ is considered a small sample for the purposes of SEM. However, the absolute size of the sample must also be considered in terms of the relative complexity or parsimony of the model. The recommended ratio is at least five cases for every structural parameter freely estimated in confirmatory models (Bentler, 1995). A sample size of $N = 61$ could therefore in principle support the estimation of $k = 12.2$ model parameters according to this ratio. The restricted model tested with the present data contained exactly $k = 12$ free model parameters to be estimated, and was therefore within the specified limits.

Prior to these SEM analyses, all the variables used within the model were residualized on acculturation by means of regression models to statistically control for any individual differences within our sample on this potential confound.

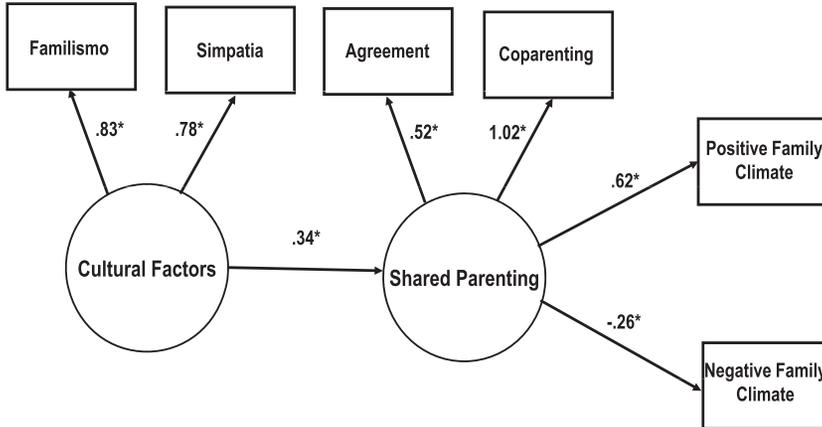


FIGURE 1. The model of shared parenting with Mexican American couples

RESULTS

Figure 1 displays a measurement model where a latent variable called Cultural Factors is indicated by the *Familismo* and *Simpatia* means for each couple, and a latent variable called Shared Parenting is indicated by the *Agreement* and *Coparenting* means for each couple. To test the hypothesis that couples' endorsement on cultural values would predict their Shared Parenting, we specified a structural pathway leading from Cultural Factors to Shared Parenting. We kept Family Climate as two separate outcome variables, also measured by the mean scores for each couple, rather than aggregate them as indicators of a single latent construct. This was done because of our interest in testing the relative strength of the predictor variables in explaining positive and negative family climate separately. Thus, to test the hypothesis that Shared Parenting would predict Family Emotional Climate, we specified two separate structural pathways, one to predict positive climate outcome and a second to predict negative climate.

Overall model fit was highly acceptable, with a small and non-significant χ^2 and excellent practical fit indexes ($\chi^2_{(9, n=61)} = 8.217, p = .5124, NFI = 0.920, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.000$). The measurement model showed strong loadings for the indicators of both latent factors. The Cultural Factor latent variable loadings were 0.83 and 0.78; and the Shared Parenting latent variable loadings were 0.52 and 1.02. These loadings indicate that in both cases, the hypothesized indicators were highly related to their latent variable and evidenced convergent construct validity (Loehlin, 2004).

This model supports the hypothesis that higher levels of the Cultural Factor Values predict higher Shared Parenting, as seen by a positive and significant structural coefficient of 0.34. A positive and significant structural coefficient of 0.62 provides support for the hypothesis that Shared Parenting predicts Positive Family Climate, and the negative and significant structural coefficient of -0.26 , although somewhat lower, indicates support for the hypothesis that the more Shared Parenting, the less Negative Family Climate. The squared multiple correlations for the endogenous variables were $R^2 = 0.12$ for Shared Parenting, $R^2 = 0.38$ for Positive Family Climate, and $R^2 = 0.07$ for Negative Family Climate.

DISCUSSION

We developed a model with the Shared Parenting construct as a center piece to be tested with an understudied population, Mexican American couples. We hypothesized that Shared Parenting would be a useful construct to explain Mexican American couples' agreement and coparenting tasks. The data strongly supported our modeled latent variable Shared Parenting, suggesting that the construct is adequate to at least partially explain Mexican American parents' arrangement of parenting efforts, as it was found in early studies with Anglo-American couples (Gable et al., 1994; McHale, 1995; Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2004; Van Egeran, 2004). This finding is also consistent with the Caldera et al. (2002) qualitative study that indicated that shared parenting was important for Mexican couples. It is also consistent with more recent studies showing that Mexican parents are involved in shared parenting (Cabrera et al., 2009). Similarly, studies showing Latino and Mexican American fathers being involved in taking care of and nurturing their children (Coltrane et al., 2004) provide convergent support for our finding; although, these studies did not use exactly the same construct as we did. The trend of increasing father involvement in Latino and Mexican American fathers is highly consistent with the observation that Mexican American couples agree on and share parenting tasks.

We hypothesized that Shared Parenting would be associated with positive emotional climate within the family, as the literature has previously documented with White Anglo-American families (Kitzmann, 2000; Kolak & Volling, 2007). Our data supported this idea in a consistent way; couples who agree on and share parenting tasks provide a more positive and a less negative emotional climate to the family.

The predictive role of Mexican cultural values in Shared Parenting was also evidenced by our data. Here, the previous literature supporting our finding is scarce. For instance, there have been studies showing the influence of collectivist values on parenting practices (Arcia & Johnson, 1998; Harwood, 1992; Harwood et al., 2002); however, studies of Mexican cultural values as predictors of shared parenting are scarce. Only recently have some studies used ethnicity as a proxy for cultural values (Cabrera et al., 2009), and others have started to include and actually measure values, such as in the case of Solmeyer et al. (2011), who associated coparental practices with parents' *familismo* endorsement.

Nevertheless, these findings suggest that endorsement of solidarity with your family and avoidance of confrontation promotes sharing the hard task of parenting young children in Mexican American families. Coltrane et al. (2004) suggested that Mexican American men's strong sense of family duty and togetherness may represent a new way to understand the meaning of *Familismo* for this group and explain their increased parenting involvement. Future research testing this set of values and those from mainstream culture—autonomy and self-sufficiency—cross-culturally, with both Anglo American and Latino couples, could inform the field about real cultural differences in developmental pathways leading to Shared Parenting (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003).

Theoretically, our findings are important as they provide support and strength for the Family System view (Minuchin, 1985) of the relevance of the coparental subsystem to explain family functioning. The present study's findings provide support to the potential cross-cultural applicability of the theory as a lens to understand family functioning (*Family Climate*) even with Mexican families. A specific feature of our work

with theoretical relevance is that it tested the role that couples' shared values play in practices. Values are cognitions and pertain to the symbolic world within day to day family interactions. Thus, our study is relevant not only because it provides support for systemic views but also because it recognizes the importance of shared meanings within the intimate context of couples' functioning (Reiss et al., 2000).

Clinical Implications

Hispanics represent the second largest and fastest growing ethnic group, with 50.5 million comprising 16.3% of the total population of the U.S. Census Bureau (2010). Given such numbers, it is important to seek strong evidence and research-based knowledge to inform us about the cultural context of this growing ethnic group. This knowledge would increase the ability of practitioners to successfully intervene with this minority group (Falicov, 2009).

As we have explained before, Mexicans' socio-cultural context differs substantially from that of mainstream society. The fact that *Familismo* and *Simpatia* values predicted shared parenting within this group of low acculturated, low SES, recent immigrants of Mexican origin strengthens the theoretical background as one with potential for universality. This very finding should also be of help for practitioners to sustain their interventions with Mexican couples in a culture-sensitive approach (Baumann, Domenech-Rodriguez, & Parra-Cardona, 2011; Bernal & Domenech-Rodriguez, 2009; Falicov, 2009; Parra-Cardona et al., 2009). Using their cultural roots to tailor intervention may result in enhanced levels of engagement and retention in therapy (Falicov, 2009).

For couples counseling, there is a need for research evidence to design interventions with Mexicans that foster good partner alliances. For instance, Cowen, Cowen, Pruett, and Pruett (2007) focus on enhancing the couple relationship and father involvement in their intervention to prevent marital discord and divorce among Mexican American parents. Our findings may strengthen the position of these authors by means of reinforcing father involvement as one feature of Mexican men's familismo (i.e., deep concern for their family well-being). Additionally, we believe the value of our findings for clinical settings has to do with the ability of therapists to avoid a *deficit view* of Mexicans (Cromwell & Ruiz, 1979). In this case prevention may highlight the functionality that sharing values between partners has on their coparental alliances. For practitioners seeing *Simpatia*—for instance—as a valued interactional style for Mexican families instead of as sign of a pathological confrontational style, should be of a major benefit as it exhibits a better understanding of the world of Mexicans and avoids a *deficit* view (Diaz-Guerrero, 1994, 6th ed.).

This study has some limitations that provide caution when interpreting the findings. While we controlled for acculturation, indicating that our findings are not due to more or less exposure to mainstream belief system, we did not control statistically for important variables such as parents' age, education, employment, and occupational status, as well as total number of children in the home. All these are important variables to understand couples' arrangements around parenting duties. Thus, level of education or mother involvement in the work force may at some level explain sharing the responsibility of parenting. The age of the parents could be responsible for part of the results through its association with higher levels of education and income; which in turn is associated with more progressive gender roles in Mexicans (Adams et al.,

2007). This, along with number of children at home, could explain higher levels of father involvement in coparenting. We are aware of these limitations for future work. In this study, small sample size prevented us from including more parameters to be estimated. Despite all that, we are confident that our findings remain valuable given the homogeneity of our sample regarding these important aspects. All of the participants were Mexican American, Head Start families who were of low income and low educational and occupational status. Also, they were mostly recent immigrants, and were likely functioning within the same U.S. labor force dynamic, where the lack of extended family support affected their family lives in a similar fashion.

Regardless there are not exact estimations of all Mexicans living in the U.S. as a large number of them are in this country illegally. We know that about 42% of all Hispanics and immigrants come from Mexican heritage (The Urban Institute, 2010). It is estimated that nearly four million children born in the United States have undocumented immigrant parents, who must raise their children under stressful work and financial conditions, with the constant threat of discovery and deportation, narrowed social contacts, and limited participation in public programs (Yoshikawa, 2011). Also, they usually tend to have fewer reliable social ties to assist with child care or share information on child-rearing. Compared to legal-status parents, undocumented parents experience significantly more exploitive work conditions, including long hours, inadequate pay and raises, few job benefits, and limited autonomy in job duties. Again, although we have not total certainty that our 61 couples live under this conditions, it is reasonable to assume most do based on their previously described demographic characteristics. On the other hand, this very same homogeneity among respondents makes our findings potentially less generalizable to other groups of Mexicans or Latinos within the U.S. or elsewhere.

Cross-cultural studies are currently underway to cross-validate these findings in Latin America and the American Southwest. We are currently conducting a study to test the contribution of both shared parenting and total parental effort—derived from an evolutionary perspective of childrearing—in explaining young adult children's Life History Strategy across Mexican, Costa Rican, and U.S. college students.

We have tested and empirically supported a structural model that indicates that a positive emotional climate within the family is fostered when Mexican American couples practice a sufficient level of shared parenting. Furthermore, this model also indicates shared parenting is promoted when the Mexican cultural values of *Familismo and Simpatia* are endorsed and practiced. The logical implications of the combination of these two related findings for practitioners working with this underserved population leads inescapably to the conclusion that this represents an avenue of culturally appropriate and culturally sensitive intervention that can be used to promote shared parenting and thus, a more positive emotional climate within Mexican American families. The opportunities revealed by these insights for promoting the social well-being (World Health Organization, 1946) of the Mexican American Community should not be missed.

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