

Parent-Child Communication and Parental Involvement in Latino Adolescents

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This study examines the associations among parent-child relationship characteristics, acculturation and enculturation, and child externalizing symptoms in a sample of 40 Latino parent-adolescent dyads. Specifically, the associations between parent-child relationship characteristics (i.e., communication and parental involvement) and adolescents' externalizing symptoms are examined. Also examined is whether the relationship between these two aspects of the parent-child relationship and adolescent functioning would be moderated by acculturation and enculturation differences between parents and their children. Significant relationships are found among parent-child communication, parental involvement, and child externalizing behaviors; however, neither the acculturation nor enculturation gap moderates these associations.

Keywords: *parent-child communication; parental involvement; Latino families; Latino adolescents*

Research has shown that parenting practices and family relationships, such as the parent-child relationship, have a major influence on child and adolescent well-being (e.g., LeCroy, 1988; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). In particular, studies have found that poor parenting practices, such as lack of monitoring, inconsistent discipline, and an absence of positive parenting, have been associated with delinquent behavior in children and adolescents (e.g., Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Zelli, & Huesmann,

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1996; Forehand, Miller, Dutra, & Watts Chance, 1997; Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984). Similarly, several characteristics of the parent-child relationship, such as low levels of parental warmth, acceptance, and affection, have also been associated with delinquent and antisocial behavior (Henggeler, 1989). Two specific components of the parent-child relationship that have been found to be particularly important in child and adolescent well-being are parent-child communication and parental involvement (e.g., Brody, Flor, Hollett-Wright, McCoy, & Donovan, 1999; Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986; Smith & Krohn, 1995).

One limitation of the existing literature has been the lack of emphasis on the role of the parent-child relationship on child and adolescent functioning in racial and ethnic minority families. Although a few studies have examined these constructs in racial and ethnic minority families (e.g., Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 2005; Smith & Krohn, 1995), considerable gaps remain in the literature. For example, few studies have examined how particular experiences that are relevant to ethnic minorities, such as acculturation and enculturation, might affect family processes and adolescent functioning. One population that has been particularly underrepresented in this research is Latinos. This is a notable problem given the rapidly increasing Latino population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). In this article, we contribute to the efforts that have begun to address this gap in the literature by examining the associations among parent-child communication, parental involvement, and adolescent functioning in a sample of Latino families. By way of background, however, we first briefly review the parent-child literature, focusing on communication and involvement. We next review several studies that have focused on this relationship within Latino families, including those studies that have explored how acculturation might be associated with both the parent-child relationship and adolescent functioning.

Parent-Child Relationships: Communication and Involvement

Research has well established that parent-child communication can affect both overall family functioning and the child's psychosocial well-being (Shek, 2000). Specifically, several studies have found that open communication, which consists of the exchange of factual and emotional information (e.g., expressing of needs, discussion of problems) between parents and their children, can facilitate healthy family relations and adolescent development

(Hart, Olsen, Robinson, & Mandleco, 1997; Caprara et al., 1998), safeguard adolescents against delinquent behaviors (Brody et al., 1999; Clark & Shields, 1997), and provide adolescents with a context in which they can learn appropriate interpersonal behaviors that will prepare them to build healthy relationships, resolve conflict, and become responsible adults (Huff, Widner, & McCoy, 2003). Overall, research suggests that children who come from families that practice open communication are happier, healthier, and more satisfied with their lives (Jackson, Bijstroe, Oostra, & Bosma, 1998). However, when communication is constrained, conflict can arise in the parent-child relationship and, in turn, may lead to the adolescent evidencing higher rates of depression, delinquency, substance and alcohol abuse, sexual promiscuity, and lower school performance (Brody et al., 1999). Similarly, other researchers have suggested that delinquency may be related to the perceived lack of communication in families (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 2005).

In addition to highlighting the importance of parent-child communication, many researchers have found that high levels of parental involvement are significantly associated with child and adolescent well-being (e.g., LeCroy, 1988; Wenk, Hardesty, Morgan, & Blair, 1994). In general, parental involvement has consistently been shown to be positively correlated with child and adolescent well-being in the areas of school and academic achievement (e.g., Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004), self-esteem (Gordon, Nowicki, & Wichern, 1981), and life satisfaction (Wenk et al., 1994). High levels of parental involvement have also been found to act as a buffer against delinquency and drug use (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986). Conversely, low levels of parental involvement have been associated with delinquency and substance use behaviors (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986).

Importantly, the literature suggests that parental involvement can be conceptualized in numerous ways, such as taking part in school and home activities (e.g., Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994); furthermore, some have distinguished between behavioral involvement, which focuses on time spent with the parent, and emotional involvement, which has to do with feeling close to parents (e.g., Wenk et al., 1994). Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) have noted that involvement can vary across domains of life, defining parental involvement as occurring in four dimensions: involvement in school (e.g., taking part in parent-teacher meetings), at home (e.g., helping with homework), in the child's personal life (e.g., parents knowing names of friends), and in cognitive activities (e.g., talking about current events). Englund and colleagues (2004) have made the argument that a limitation of

past research on parental involvement has been the inclusion of different dimensions of parental involvement into one composite scale. They suggest that this approach makes it difficult to determine exactly which component of parental involvement may be contributing to an adolescent outcome (e.g., academic achievement) within a particular domain. As such, the current study examined two domains of parental involvement (i.e., school and personal) as unique predictors of child functioning.

Parent-Child Relationships in Latino Families

Despite the extensive literature examining the effects of parenting on children and adolescents, there have been only a limited number of empirical studies that have focused on Latino families (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). This lack of research is unfortunate, given that many scholars have highlighted the importance of the cultural construct of *familismo* in Latino families, a value that emphasizes loyalty, reciprocity, and a strong commitment to family members (Cuéllar, Arnold, & Gonzales, 1995; La Roche, 2002; Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, Marín, & Pérez-Stable, 1987). Given this importance of familial relationships, research that investigates the Latino family system, and more specifically the Latino parent-child relationship, could yield significant insight into the psychological functioning of Latino children and adolescents. As noted earlier, the research among Anglo-American families that has examined parenting practices has consistently found a significant relationship between parenting and child and adolescent functioning (e.g., Wenk et al., 1994). The limited research that has focused on Latino families has tended to find similar results. For example, positive parenting practices, such as higher levels of parental monitoring, familial connectedness, and parental support are associated with lower levels of delinquent and risky behavior among children and adolescents (e.g., Kerr, Beck, Shattuck, Kattar, & Uriburi, 2003; Gorman-Smith et al., 1996; Vélez-Pastrana, González-Rodríguez, & Borges-Hernández, 2005).

With regard to parent-child communication and parental involvement specifically, researchers have found that these characteristics of the parent-child relationship are important for Latino child and adolescent well-being (e.g., Davalos et al., 2005; Florsheim, Tolan, & Gorman-Smith, 2006; Smith & Krohn, 1995). For example, in a sample of Latino adolescents, Ellickson and Morton (1999) found that adolescents who reported poor parent-child communication were at increased risk for drug use. Similarly, Davalos and colleagues (2005) found that adolescents' perceptions of

family communication (e.g., perception of emotional support, ability to communicate with parents, parent's attention to activities and interests in child's life) were negatively related to delinquent behavior for both Mexican American and White adolescents. More specifically, adolescents who reported less family communication were more likely to engage in delinquent behavior (e.g., vandalism, theft). A similar pattern of findings exists regarding the role of parental involvement in Latino families. In particular, parental involvement has been negatively associated with several problem behaviors in Latino adolescents, including delinquency, drug use, and risky sexual behavior (e.g., Coombs, Paulson, & Richardson, 1991; Smith & Krohn, 1995; Vélez-Pastrana et al., 2005).

Although these studies have found early support for the importance of the parent-child relationship among Latino families, there remain important limitations to this work. One important limitation is that most of these studies have not taken into account the tremendous heterogeneity that is found within the Latino population (Moreno & Lopez, 1999). Two important variables that are relevant to this issue of heterogeneity are *acculturation*, defined as the process by which individuals and families adapt to the mainstream culture while maintaining connections with their native culture (Berry, 1980), and *enculturation*, defined as the process of being socialized into and/or retaining one's indigenous cultural norms (Kim, 2007). Both acculturation and enculturation vary considerably throughout the Latino population. Despite the fact that researchers have increasingly argued for the importance of measuring acculturation when conducting research with Latinos (e.g., Marín, Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, & Pérez-Stable, 1987; Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993), and more recently enculturation (e.g., Kim, 2007), only a few of the existing studies on the parent-child relationship in Latinos have explicitly considered the possible influences of acculturation and enculturation on the family.

Acculturation, Enculturation, and Latino Families

Many scholars have noted that the acculturation process can be stressful for families, particularly when parents and their children acculturate to the mainstream culture at different rates, with children typically acculturating more quickly than their parents (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). Few studies have specifically focused on the stress that acculturation can have on family relationships (e.g., Brooks, Stuewig, & Lecroy, 1998; Barrett, Joe,

& Simpson, 1991; Samaniego & Gonzales, 1999), and more specifically, the parent-child relationship (e.g., Brook, Whiteman, Balka, Win, & Gursen, 1997; Gil & Vega, 1996; Lau et al., 2005; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1980). Some researchers have theorized that different levels of acculturation in a family could produce stress in the parent-child relationship (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993) and subsequently lead to negative outcomes for children. Some studies have found that this difference is associated with increased family conflict (Baptiste, 1993), increased family dysfunction (Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994), and decreased family involvement (Brooks et al., 1998).

Two studies specifically examined the effects of differences in parent-child acculturation on the parent-child relationship. Cosden and Elliott (1999) found that Latino parents reported higher levels of familial stress when they had lower ratings of "Americanism" than their children. Dinh, Roosa, Tein, and Lopez (2002) found similar results: Latino children with higher levels of acculturation than their parents reported lower levels of parental involvement, which in turn predicted gang involvement and substance abuse. Thus, there is some evidence suggesting that different levels of acculturation between Latino parents and their children may lead to significant stress in their relationship. However, others have found contradictory results. Specifically, Lau and colleagues (2005) found that acculturation differences between Mexican American parents and their children were not related to family distress or youth problems. One possible explanation for these discrepant findings is that they have focused on the direct effects of the acculturation gap on child mental health and family processes. We further discuss this idea below.

Research examining the effect of enculturation on familial relationships and, more specifically, the parent-child relationship, has not until recently received as much attention as acculturation. The likely reason for this lack of attention has been a generally unidimensional conceptualization of the acculturation process, whereby acculturation and enculturation have been opposite ends of the same process (e.g., Marín et al., 1987; Szapocznik et al., 1978). More recent conceptualizations of the acculturation process have recognized its complex and bidimensional process (e.g., Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995; Berry, 2003), whereby increases in acculturation do not necessarily result in decreases in enculturation.

To our knowledge, there have not been any published studies to date that have examined the relationships among enculturation differences between parents and their children, the parent-child relationship, and child functioning. However, there is reason to believe that enculturation differences might be associated with increased stress between parents and their children, as

parents strive to maintain their children's connections with their culture of origin (e.g., speaking Spanish) while their children may prefer and adopt the customs and values of the mainstream culture.

The discrepant findings between the possible influence of acculturation on the parent-child relationship and child mental health suggest that even though acculturation differences, and perhaps enculturation differences, may be common among immigrant families, they do not always produce direct adverse effects on the familial relationship or youth well-being. In fact, given that acculturation and enculturation are dynamic processes, it is unlikely that most studies will be able to accurately examine their direct effects on functioning. Rather, it may be more productive to examine how differences between parents and children on acculturation and enculturation moderate existing familial processes as a way to further examine the heterogeneity within Latino families. Thus, although the field has made significant progress in its understanding of how acculturation and, more recently, enculturation are associated with mental health among Latino families, more research is clearly needed to better understand their impact.

Current Study

In this study, we focused on early adolescence because children's relationships with their parents are central at this age, and the level and quality of involvement that parents have with their children can form a basis for well-being in adulthood (Wenk et al., 1994). Drawing from existing research with non-Latino children, we hypothesized that poor parent-child communication would be associated with more adolescent externalizing behaviors. We chose to focus on externalizing behaviors given past research, which has found that stress in the parent-child relationship is associated with conduct problems such as delinquency, drug use, and vandalism (e.g., Coombs et al., 1991; Davalos et al., 2005). Second, we hypothesized that low parental involvement would also be associated with more adolescent externalizing behaviors. We explored the possibility that the relationship between parental involvement and adolescent problem behaviors would differ depending on domain of involvement; thus, we examined school involvement and personal involvement as unique predictors. Finally, we hypothesized that acculturation and enculturation differences between parents and their children would moderate the relationship between the parent-child relationship and child functioning. For example, we expected that children from dyads with large acculturation gaps and

who had poorer communication (or lower levels of parental involvement) would report more externalizing symptoms when compared to children from parent-child dyads that had more congruent levels of acculturation. For all interactions, we expected that a larger acculturation or enculturation difference would increase the negative association between parent-child relationship variables (e.g., communication) and child externalizing symptoms. For all analyses, we examined both child and parental reports.

Method

Participants

Participants were 40 Latino parent-child dyads from Worcester, Massachusetts. Children were between 10 and 14 years of age.

Parents. The majority of parents in our sample were women (92.5%). Parents' age ranged from 27 to 52 years ($M = 36.98$, $SD = 5.88$). A total of 45% of the parents reported that they were married, with the remaining participants reporting never being married (20%), or currently separated or divorced (35%). Forty five percent of participants reported having at least 2 children living in the household. The remaining participants reported having 3 children (32.5%), or 4 or more children (22.5%). With regard to religion, parents primarily identified themselves as either Catholic (57.5%) or Christian (35%). Twenty percent of parents did not finish high school, 37.5% finished high school, 25% completed some university studies, and 17.5% completed four years of university study. With regard to yearly income, 60% reported that their yearly household earnings were under \$25,000. A majority (85%) of parents reported being born outside of the mainland United States, with the largest number of parents reporting that they were born in Puerto Rico (40%). The remaining participants reported being from the Dominican Republic (10%), and from Central and South American countries (i.e., Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Uruguay, Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia). The number of years living in the United States ranged from 1 to 21 years ($M = 11$, $SD = 8.76$). A majority (62.5%) indicated that Spanish was their preferred language, and 25% reported that they considered themselves fluent in both Spanish and English.

Children. Boys ($n = 19$) and girls ($n = 21$) were approximately equally represented in the sample and their ages ranged from 10 to 14 years ($M = 12.17$, $SD = 1.64$). A majority (55%) of children were born outside of the

mainland United States.¹ Similar to the information provided by parents, the largest number of children who were born outside the United States were born in Puerto Rico (27.5%). The number of years living in the United States ranged from 1 to 9 years ($M = 5$, $SD = 3.77$). A total of 52.5% indicated that English was their preferred language, 25% preferred to speak in Spanish, and 22.5% considered themselves fluent in both languages.

Measures

Acculturation and enculturation. Both parents and their children completed the Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AMAS-ZABB; Zea, Asner-Self, Birman, & Buki, 2003). The AMAS-ZABB is a 42-item bidimensional scale that measures individuals' level of *acculturation* toward the U.S. culture and level of *enculturation* toward their culture of origin via the following factors: cultural identity, language competence, and cultural competence. Responses range from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*), and a mean score across all factors is created for acculturation and enculturation. Internal reliability for the measure in this study was high for acculturation for both parent report (English $\alpha = .96$; Spanish $\alpha = .90$) and child report (English $\alpha = .98$; $\alpha = .93$). We found similarly high estimates of internal reliability for enculturation for child report (English $\alpha = .97$; Spanish $\alpha = .93$). Internal reliability was higher for parents when completing the measure in Spanish ($\alpha = .85$) than in English ($\alpha = .64$).

To calculate parent-child differences in acculturation and enculturation, we used absolute values of the discrepancy scores between parents and children on both the U.S. and native culture dimensions. We chose to use absolute values of the differences because we were interested in investigating absolute differences between parents and children, rather than differences in a specific direction (e.g., child more acculturated than parent).

Child functioning. To assess child functioning, parents completed the 113-item Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach, 1991), which provides a standardized measure of symptoms and behavioral and emotional problems among children ages 4 through 18. Children completed the Youth Self Report (YSR; Achenbach, 1991), which is the 112-item adolescent self-report version of the CBCL. For this study, we only analyzed the externalizing subscale of the CBCL and the YSR. Responses for externalizing items ranged from 0 (*not true*) to 2 (*very true*). Internal consistency was satisfactory for English versions of the parent ($\alpha = .76$) and child reports ($\alpha = .76$), as well as Spanish versions of the parent ($\alpha = .70$) and child reports ($\alpha = .73$).

Demographics. Parents reported on demographic variables such as gender, marital status, number of children in household, religion, education level, current employment, yearly household income, country of birth, time living in United States, and preferred language. Parents were also asked to report on their children's age, gender, grade in school, country of birth, time living in United States, and preferred language.

Parent-child communication. We administered the Parent-Child Communication Scale, (Krohn, Stern, Thornberry, & Jang, 1992) to parents and children to assess communication between parents and children. This 7-item measure was adapted from the *Revised Parent-Adolescent Communication Form* (Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Van Kammen, & Farrington, 1991). The parent report assesses parents' perceptions of their openness to communication and their children's communication skills. The child report assesses children's perceptions of their primary caregivers' openness to communication. Responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*often*), and a total sum was used for all analyses. Internal reliability in this study was good for English versions of the parent ($\alpha = .85$) and child report ($\alpha = .80$), and satisfactory for Spanish versions of the parent ($\alpha = .79$) and child report ($\alpha = .75$).

Parental involvement. To assess parental involvement in the home, we administered the 56-item Parent Involvement Scales (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994) to parents, which assesses parental involvement within four domains: school, home, cognitive, and personal. Youth completed the 22-item child version, which assesses parental involvement from the child's perspective within the same four categories. In this study, we focused on the school and personal domains. Responses ranged from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*a lot*) for all items, and a total sum score was created for each subscale. Internal reliability for report of school involvement in this study was good for English versions of the parent ($\alpha = .89$) and child report ($\alpha = .83$), and satisfactory for Spanish versions of the parent ($\alpha = .70$) and child report ($\alpha = .76$). Internal reliability for report of personal involvement in this study was good for English ($\alpha = .81$) and Spanish ($\alpha = .89$) versions of the report ($\alpha = .83$), and satisfactory for child English ($\alpha = .72$) and Spanish ($\alpha = .75$) versions.

Translation

Most of the standardized measures used in this study were previously published in both English and Spanish. However, the parent and child versions

of the Parent-Child Communication Scale were only available in English. These measures were translated into Spanish by a native speaker translator and back-translated into English by a second translator. Any discrepancies between the original English version and the back-translation were resolved by having both translators discuss the discrepancies and come to a mutual agreement on final translation. Participants were given the option of completing the measures in either English or Spanish; 87.5% of parents and 25% of children completed the questionnaire in Spanish.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from two primary sources: a local organization serving the Latino community and a community health clinic. When recruiting participants at the Latino community organization, the first author explained the goals of the project and gave interested children information about the study and a contact information form to take home to their parents. The contact information sheet allowed interested parents to contact the first author if they wished to participate in the study, at which time an appointment was scheduled for them to provide formal consent and complete the questionnaires. At the community health clinic, families were first provided information about the study by the child's pediatrician. Interested families then met with the first author in a private room at which time they provided formal consent and completed the questionnaires. The questionnaires took approximately 45 minutes to complete.

Results

Analytic Strategy

Our analytic strategy was constrained by the limited sample size of our study. We initially examined bivariate Pearson correlations among parents' and children's reports of communication, parental involvement, and child externalizing behaviors. We next conducted multiple regression analyses to investigate the contributions of communication and the individual dimensions of parental involvement on externalizing behaviors. Finally, we examined the extent to which acculturation and enculturation gaps (tested in separate models) would moderate the relationship between communication and parental involvement on child externalizing behaviors, through the use of hierarchical multiple regressions. For all analyses that used interaction terms, we centered the variables prior to testing for moderation.

Table 1
Correlations Among Parent and Child Reports of Study Variables^a

	Communication-P	Personal Involvement-P	School Involvement-P	Externalizing-P
Communication – C	.35**	.18	.12	-.23
Personal involvement – C		.21	.30	-.08
School involvement – C			.24	-.42***
Externalizing – C				.38**

Note: C = Child Report; P = Parent Report.

a. Parent $n = 40$; Child $n = 40$.

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

Preliminary Analyses

There was some consistency across parent and child reports of study variables (see Table 1). Specifically, parents' and children's reports of parent-child communication and child externalizing symptoms were positively correlated. However, parent and child reports of involvement were not significantly correlated with one another for either dimension. We also examined whether study variables varied significantly by demographic characteristics. Findings indicated that age of parent, age of child, yearly family income, and number of children living in the home were not significantly correlated with any study variables (all $ps > .05$); furthermore, there were no significant mean differences on study variables by gender, preferred language, or marital status (all $ps > .05$).

Parent-Child Relationship and Child Functioning

As we hypothesized, there appeared to be a general pattern that a better parent-child relationship was associated with improved adolescent functioning (see Table 2). Specifically, children who reported better communication also reported fewer externalizing behaviors. Similarly, we found that parents who reported better communication also reported fewer externalizing behaviors in their children. With regard to parental involvement, children's reports of parental involvement were negatively correlated with externalizing behaviors in both school and personal domains. There was no relationship, however, between parent reports of involvement and parent reports of child externalizing symptoms.

Table 2
Correlations Among Study Variables by Reporter^a

Subscale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	<i>M</i> ^{child}	<i>SD</i>
1. Acculturation	—	-.20	-.10	.07	-.14	.04	.16	-.01	3.03	.65
2. Enculturation	-.09	—	.09	-.20	.13	.26	.36**	-.16	3.05	.59
3. Acculturation gap	-.05	-.03	—	.09	.17	.05	-.01	-.17	.44	.64
4. Enculturation gap	-.32**	-.44***	.09	—	.19	.03	.19	-.25	-.39	.63
5. Communication	.35**	.09	-.03	.09	—	.34	.35**	-.42***	21.97	4.00
6. School involvement	.20	.38**	-.24	-.27	.09	—	.52****	-.33**	10.33	2.46
7. Personal involvement	.00	.11	-.01	-.12	.12	.33**	—	-.50***	16.30	2.76
8. Externalizing symptoms	-.07	-.16	.16	.16	-.43***	.07	.02	—	57.15	8.93
<i>M</i> ^{parent}	2.60	3.44	.44	-.39	24.47	39.30	17.50	53.87		
<i>SD</i>	.67	.39	.64	.63	3.51	10.65	1.99	9.01		

Note: Correlations for children are reported above the diagonal; correlations for parents are reported below the diagonal.

a. Parent $n = 40$; Child $n = 40$.

** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$. **** $p < .001$.

To determine the contributions of communication and the individual dimensions of parental involvement on externalizing behaviors, we conducted a multiple regression analysis in which we simultaneously predicted child report of externalizing symptoms from child report of communication and child report of both dimensions of parental involvement (i.e., school and personal; see Table 3). The overall model was significant, $F(3, 37) = 5.53$, $p < .01$, with personal involvement a significant predictor of child externalizing symptoms and communication demonstrating a trend towards significance. School involvement was not a significant predictor.

Similar analyses were conducted with parent reports of study variables. Results indicated that none of the study variables were significant predictors of parent reports of child externalizing behaviors, $F(3, 37) = 2.22$, *ns*.

Acculturation and Enculturation Moderation Analyses

To investigate whether the acculturation and enculturation gaps between parents and children would moderate the relations between parent-child relationship variables and child externalizing behaviors, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis (see Table 4). Step 1 was repeated from the earlier analyses. In Step 2, we added the absolute value of the acculturation difference between parents and their children, and in Step 3 we added the

Table 3
**Regressions Examining Child Reports of Communication,
 Parental Involvement, and Externalizing Behaviors^a**

Predictors	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	β	<i>t</i>
Communication	-.27	.33	-.61	-1.82*
School Involvement	-.05	.60	-.15	-.26
Personal Involvement	-.38	.54	-1.22	-2.28**
Adjusted cumulative R^2	.26			
Final <i>F</i>	5.53***			

a. Parent $n = 40$; Child $n = 40$.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

interaction terms between the acculturation gap and the three parent-child relationship variables (i.e., communication, school involvement, and personal involvement). Neither the main effect of the acculturation difference nor the addition of the interactions significantly improved the variance explained in the model. However, the interaction between the acculturation gap and parent-child communication approached significance. We followed the same analytic procedure for enculturation, with similar findings. Again, the addition of the absolute value of the enculturation difference was not significant, and neither were any of the interaction terms between the enculturation difference and the three parent-child relationship variables. The same procedure was conducted examining parent report of the study and outcome variables. As above, neither the addition of the absolute value of the acculturation and enculturation difference nor the interaction terms were significant.

Discussion

The primary goal of this study was to examine the relationships among parent-child communication, parental involvement, and child functioning in a sample of Latino parents and adolescents. We addressed some of the limitations of earlier research by uniquely examining different domains of parental involvement, by using both parent and child report, and by examining the possible effects of the acculturation gap on these relationships. In general, our results are consistent with those of prior research.

Table 4
Hierarchical Multiple Regressions: Testing Acculturation and Enculturation Gaps as Moderators Using Child Report^a

Predictors		Incremental Change in R^2	B	SE	β	t
Acculturation gap						
Step 2	Acculturation gap	0	-.12	3.46	-2.94	-.85
Step 3	Interactions	0.05				
	Comm \times AccGap		-.60	1.17	-2.20	-1.88*
	School \times AccGap		-.12	1.82	-.68	-.37
	Personal \times AccGap		-.42	1.57	-2.45	-1.55
Adjusted cumulative R^2		0.31				
Final F		3.51***				
Enculturation gap						
Step 2	Enculturation gap	0.04	-.25	3.11	-5.64	-1.81
Step 3	Interactions	0.05				
	Comm \times EncGap		-.48	1.14	-1.78	-1.58
	School \times EncGap		-.16	1.75	-.96	-.55
	Personal \times EncGap		-.39	1.38	-2.26	-1.64
Adjusted cumulative R^2		0.35				
Final F		4.06***				

Note: Results for Step 1 are provided in Table 3.

a. Parent $n = 40$; Child $n = 40$

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$

Parent-Child Communication, Parental Involvement, and Child Functioning

We found some support for our first hypothesis, as our correlation analyses indicated that both parents and children who reported higher levels of parent-child communication endorsed fewer child externalizing symptoms. This finding is consistent with the literature, which highlights the important role that open communication plays in the healthy development of children and adolescents, not just for Anglo-American families, but for Latino families as well (Brody et al., 1999; Clark & Shields, 1997; Davalos et al., 2005). Furthermore, Davalos and colleagues (2005) have also suggested that good communication allows parents to provide their children with feedback on what kinds of behaviors are acceptable and which ones are not, which could also lower the risk for delinquent behaviors.

Given the limited research examining various domains of parental involvement on child well-being, our second hypothesis focused on exploring the relationship between parental involvement along the school (e.g.,

helping with homework) and personal (e.g., knowing friend's names) dimensions, and externalizing symptoms. Based on child reports, each of the two dimensions was significantly and positively correlated with child functioning, such that more school and personal involvement was associated with lower child externalizing symptoms.

Interestingly, however, when we simultaneously examined the contributions of communication, school involvement, and personal involvement in a regression equation, the only significant predictor was parental involvement in the personal dimension (although there was a trend toward significance for communication). Perhaps personal involvement (e.g., knowing the names of peers; knowing what their child did during the day) has a stronger influence on child externalizing behaviors because it demands more investment and effort on the parent's part, thus leading children to feel like their parents are not only interested in what goes on in their everyday lives but also finding it important. We find it interesting that parental involvement in the school dimension was not a significant predictor of child externalizing behaviors. It is possible that the absence of an effect of school involvement may be a function of our sample, which consisted mainly of immigrant families, most of which preferred to answer the questionnaires in Spanish. Because these parents speak English with difficulty, it is possible that they feel less comfortable engaging with the school system (e.g., attending school meetings, volunteering on field trips). We have received some support for this perspective through informal conversations with principals, teachers, and parents, who have articulated concern about difficulties with school-parent communication and parental engagement with the school system.

Our specific conclusions about the importance of personal involvement over school involvement remain speculative, given the small sample size. Moreover, given the high correlation between school and parental involvement ($r = 0.52$), we cannot rule out the possibility that multicollinearity may make the estimates of the individual predictors less reliable. Nevertheless, taken as a whole, these findings are consistent with the literature, which has found that more open communication and parental involvement is associated with child well-being.

It is important to note that, when parents' reports were examined, no significant associations emerged in the multiple regressions examining communication, involvement, and externalizing symptoms. We discuss possible interpretations of these discrepant findings for parents and children below.

Moderation Effects of the Acculturation and Enculturation Gap

Given the limited number of studies focusing on the effects that differences in acculturation may have on Latino family dynamics, the final goal of this study was to examine the possible influences of parent-child acculturation and enculturation differences on the relationship between the parent-child relationship and child externalizing behaviors. More specifically, we sought to investigate the extent to which differences in acculturation and enculturation between parents and their children would moderate the relationship between parent-child communication, parental involvement, and child externalizing behaviors.

Our findings did not find support for the role of either the acculturation or enculturation gap as a moderator. The absence of this relationship has several possible explanations. First, it is possible that the lack of effect related to the acculturation gap is that it falls outside the realm of communication and parental involvement and may affect other aspects of the parent-child relationship, such as relationship satisfaction and support (Dinh & Nguyen, 2006). Thus, it is possible that researchers need to be more attuned to domain-specific effects of acculturation and enculturation, as well as intrafamilial differences. Second, it is possible that the effects of the acculturation and enculturation gap have been overstated by previous research, and it is a less important variable for Latino families than previously thought. Finally, we may have missed some important contextual variables that may play an important role in understanding the effects of intrafamilial differences in acculturation and enculturation. One particularly important variable might be the meaning that families make of differences in acculturation and enculturation. For some parents, having children who are more acculturated to the U.S. culture might evoke sentiments of fear and concern, as they worry that their children will adopt the values of the mainstream culture and lose those of the native culture. For other parents, however, having children who are more acculturated to the U.S. culture might be understood as a positive event, as they may associate knowledge of U.S. culture with increased access to educational, economic, and social opportunities. With regard to enculturation, some parents may prefer that their child remain more enculturated (e.g., maintaining cultural values, speaking Spanish), but other parents may feel that by remaining more enculturated, their child may not fully take advantage of the aforementioned opportunities. It seems plausible that for these hypothetical sets of parents, an acculturation or enculturation

gap may lead to different consequences for the family. Thus, we believe that future research would do well to move beyond simplistic main effect analyses of the effect of acculturation and enculturation gaps and instead consider relevant contexts in which these variables might play a role.

Parent and Child Report of Study Variables and Child Functioning

In this study, we used both parent and child report to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships between the parent-child relationship, acculturation, and child functioning. The use of multiple informants allowed us to observe some noteworthy differences in relationships between perceptions of the parental relationship and perceptions of adolescent functioning. Specifically, while communication proved to be an important variable in predicting functioning as reported by both parents and their children, only child reports of parental involvement were consistently associated with child reports of externalizing behaviors. Parental reports of involvement were not related to parental reports of externalizing symptoms. Perhaps in our sample, parents were not as aware as their children as to how influential their involvement is on their child's functioning. It could also be the case that parents completing the questionnaires wanted to present their child's behavior in a better light and as such could have underreported their child's externalizing symptoms.

Limitations and Strengths

This study has several limitations that are important to mention. First, our sample included a small number of Latino families in the Northeast United States, and although we had a diverse sample of Latino families (i.e., Central and South America), the majority of our participants were from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic; thus, our sample may not be representative of Latinos living in other parts of the country. Furthermore, it is important to note that while our study included a variety of different nationalities, our sample size was too small to separate these groups for the analyses, and as such, results cannot be generalized to any specific group. A second limitation is that several of the measures we used have not been extensively validated with Latino parents and children. Although the majority of our measures demonstrated good internal consistency, caution is warranted as there may be specific items that do not adequately capture the experiences of participants in our study.

On the other hand, this study has several notable strengths. First, we used a multidimensional scale of parental involvement to examine what particular components of involvement were associated with child functioning. Second, given that acculturation and enculturation have been associated with family dynamics within the Latino population, we assessed differences in acculturation and enculturation between parents and their children to examine their possible effects on the association between characteristics of the parent-child relationship and child functioning. In addition, we used a bidimensional measure of acculturation, which allowed us to assess both acculturation and enculturation, to gain a better understanding of the acculturative process and its impact. Finally, this study is one of a few that have measured both parent and child reports of communication and parental involvement, acculturation, enculturation, and child functioning, a strategy that provides a more comprehensive assessment. By examining both parent and child reports, we were able to note differences in participants' reports of both the parent-child relationship and symptoms that the child may be experiencing. The latter is of particular significance given that research has consistently found that children's reports of their symptoms often differ substantially from parents' reports of children's symptoms (e.g., Youngstrom, Loeber, & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2000).

We are encouraged by the findings of this study. Several important relationships emerged among parent-child communication, parental involvement, and child externalizing behaviors. More specifically, we found that more personal involvement and open communication between parents and their children were significantly related to less endorsement of externalizing symptoms. Given the unique demographics of our sample, and the limited sample size, we do not recommend that these findings be broadly generalized. It is our hope, rather, to provide preliminary findings that guide and encourage avenues for future research. As the Latino population continues to grow, more research is needed to more fully understand how parenting variables can affect adolescent functioning in Latino families and to examine the possible impact that acculturation, enculturation, and other immigration challenges that immigrant families face can have on familial relationships and child outcomes.

Note

1. For ease of discussion, we will use the term United States to refer to the mainland United States throughout the remainder of the article.

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