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Associations Between Maternal Control and Child Defiance Among Puerto Rican-Origin Adolescent Mothers and Their Toddlers: A Person-Centered Examination

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Abstract

Parents use different forms of control to direct children toward their own demands and expectations; however, the literature on Latina parenting has demonstrated mixed findings on the influence of control on child outcomes (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). This study tested how maternal control relates to child dysregulated defiance within the cultural context experienced by Latina mother-child dyads. Participants included 122 adolescent mothers of Puerto Rican-origin and their toddlers. Highlighting the importance of ecologically-valid and culturally-sensitive methods of behavioral observation, mother and child behavior were observed during a clean-up task; mothers also reported on their levels of US acculturation and Puerto Rican enculturation. Using person-centered analyses, we identified groups of mothers by parenting behaviors (i.e., guidance, control, positive affect) and cultural orientation (i.e., acculturation, enculturation). Results revealed four sub-groups of mothers with distinct associations to child defiance: 1) enculturated/controlling, 2) bicultural/guiding, 3) bicultural/controlling, 4) acculturated/controlling. Toddlers of the mothers in the acculturated/controlling sub-group displayed greater defiance toward their mothers than those of mothers in the enculturated/controlling sub-group, even though the groups displayed similar levels of control behaviors and positive affect. Toddlers of the enculturated/controlling and the bicultural/guiding mothers displayed similar low levels of defiance, suggesting two different parenting approaches with favorable consequences for child behavior in adolescent mother and toddler dyads. Implications for culturally-informed research and tailored services for young Latina families are discussed.

Keywords: Latina mothers; adolescent mothers; maternal control; toddler defiance; cultural orientation

Public Significance Statement: Parenting across and within cultures is not "one size fits all," though research has infrequently or inadequately addressed the heterogeneity present in Latina families. This study grouped Latina, adolescent mothers by parenting behaviors of control, guidance, and positive affect, as well as U.S. acculturation and Puerto Rican enculturation. The results highlight the presence of two parenting approaches with relations to low child defiance, guidance within a bicultural context (equally high acculturation and enculturation) and control within a context characterized by high enculturation (traditional Latina orientation). These findings underscore the important role that cultural contexts plays in how parenting behaviors relate to child defiance.

Resumen

Los padres usan diferentes estrategias de control para dirigir el comportamiento de sus hijos hacia sus expectativas y demandas. La literatura ha arrojado resultados contradictorios acerca de la influencia que el control tiene en el desarrollo de los niños latinos (Halgunseth, Ispa & Rudy, 2006). Este estudio investiga la asociación entre las formas de control materno y el desafío desregulado de los hijos, en el contexto cultural de las díadas madre-hijo/a latinas.  Los participantes incluyeron 122 madres adolescentes de origen puertorriqueño y sus hijos/as de 24 meses. Con énfasis en la importancia de usar métodos ecológicamente válidos y sensibles al contexto cultural, se observó el comportamiento de madres e hijos durante una tarea de limpieza. Las madres también reportaron sus niveles de aculturación a la cultura americana y enculturación a la cultura portorriqueña. Usando análisis centrados en la persona, se identificaron grupos de madres de acuerdo a sus comportamientos de crianza (guíanza, control y afecto positivo) y orientación cultural (aculturación y enculturación). Los resultados arrojaron cuatro sub-grupos de madres que demostraron asociaciones diferenciales con el nivel de desafío de los niños/as: 1) enculturación/control, 2) bicultural/guianza, 3) bicultural/control, 4) aculturación/control. Los niños de las madres del sub-grupo de aculturación/control respondieron con mayor nivel de desafío a sus madres que los niños del sub-grupo enculturación/control, aunque ambos sub-grupos demostraron niveles similares de control y afecto positivo. Los niños en los sub-grupos de enculturación/control y bicultural/guianza exhibieron niveles similares y bajos de desafío, lo que sugiere dos estilos de crianza diferentes con resultados positivos para el comportamiento de los niños de madres latinas jóvenes. Se discuten implicaciones para investigación culturalmente informada y servicios adaptados para familias latinas jóvenes.

Adolescent motherhood frequently occurs in a high-risk context, including poverty, lower education, depressive symptoms, and single parenthood; in turn, their children exhibit increased risk of behavioral problems starting in toddlerhood. However, mothers’ parenting behaviors can both contribute to and buffer against such risk (Jahromi, Guimond, Umaña-Taylor, Updegraff, & Toomey, 2014; Mollborn & Dennis, 2012). Latinas have the highest birthrates among 15 through 19-year-old adolescents in the United States (U.S.), yet they remain underrepresented in parenting research (Martin, Hamilton, Osterman, Curtin, & Mathews, 2013). The goal of the current study was to identify parenting behaviors that promote the adjustment of toddlers of Puerto-Rican adolescent mothers. Guided by ecological theory and cultural frameworks, we studied mothers’ parenting behaviors and their associations to toddler adjustment within the families’ cultural context (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Harkness & Super, 1996; Rogoff, 2003). We used a person-centered approach to identify sub-groups of mothers based on observed behavior and reported levels of U.S. acculturation and Puerto Rican (PR) enculturation (i.e., endorsement of the customs, practices, and values of the U.S. culture and Puerto Rican culture, respectively; Cuéllar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). To study their associations to child adjustment, we tested how these patterns differed in their relations to toddlers’ dysregulated responses (i.e., screaming, yelling, or crying in opposition) to mothers’ bids for compliance.

Whereas Latina mothers use some parenting behaviors (e.g., sensitivity) at similar rates and with comparable consequences for child functioning as European American (EA) mothers, they also use directive and controlling-type behaviors more frequently (Grau, Azmitia, & Quattlebaum, 2009). However, the meaning behind discrete parenting behaviors is prescribed by the culture in which they are embedded (Harkness & Super, 1996; Rogoff, 2003). Latina mothers are thought to employ a more directive or controlling style of parenting as a means of fostering the socialization of values of *respeto*, by which children’s obedience and good behavior are emphasized, and *familism*, by which children’s submission to adult family members is desired (Calzada, Huang, Anicama, Fernandez, & Brotman, 2012; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007; Harwood, Schoelmerich, Ventura-Cook, Schulze, & Wilson, 1996).

As in any culture, parenting behaviors that are in line with socialization goals are expected to predict more optimal child development, because they instill characteristics and skills that are valued and needed to adapt to the specific cultural context (Harkness & Super, 1996). To date, the literature testing consequences of Latina mothers’ controlling-type behaviors has yielded mixed results (Calzada et al., 2012). For example, an authoritarian style of parenting (i.e., high control) among Latina mothers was related to more behavioral problems in young children, as is commonly found in EA samples (Calzada et al., 2012). In contrast, high levels of physical control were related to secure attachment among Puerto Rican and Dominican mothers and their infants (Carlson & Harwood, 2003). Given that Latinas vary in the extent to which they endorse Latino and U.S. cultural values, researchers have also considered the role of within-group differences in the level of use and the consequences of these behaviors. Specifically, using proxy measurements for U.S. acculturation, such as nativity and language use, studies identified differences in the mean levels of control behaviors used by more or less- U.S. acculturated Latina mothers (i.e., higher control in less acculturated mothers), as well as differential links between control and child outcomes across levels of U.S. acculturation (Erickson, Montague, Maclean, Bancroft, & Lower, 2012; Hill, Bush, & Roosa, 2003). Although findings are mixed, studies indicate that control may have fewer negative, and some positive, repercussions for child functioning, especially for less U.S.-acculturated mothers and when considering children’s functioning within the mother-child relationship (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Ispa et al., 2004).

There are several factors that contribute to the mixed findings. First, control has been operationalized in different ways across studies, with some assessing parenting styles versus specific individual behaviors, relying on self-report versus observational measures, and placing differing emphases on behaviors that are more or less physical, punitive, directive, or protective (Domenech Rodríguez, Donovick, & Crowley, 2009; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006). Second, the types of child outcomes studied have also differed, with some assessing child functioning within the mother-child relationship and others focusing on broader aspects of functioning, such as behavior problems. Third, most studies have conceptualized cultural orientation from a unidimensional perspective, failing to capture the variation that exists along the two separate dimensions of acculturation and enculturation (Cuéllar et al., 1995; Wood, Grau, Smith, Duran, & Castellanos, 2017). Moreover, studies have generally relied on proxy measures of U.S. acculturation (e.g., language use, nativity), rather than more directly assessing the attitudes, behaviors, and experiences associated with exposure to a new culture.

In an attempt to clarify these findings, scholars proposed that the difference in the way that control relates to child behavior in Latina families may be due to their use of control in conjunction with warmth, which may foster a respectful parent-child relationship and subsequently desirable child outcomes (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Ispa et al., 2013). To date, empirical work testing this prediction has yielded mixed findings (Germán, Gonzales, McClain, Dumka, & Millsap, 2013; Ispa et al., 2004; McFadden & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). In a sample of Mexican American mothers and adolescents, warmth moderated the positive association between harsh discipline and externalizing behaviors, which became nonsignificant at high levels of warmth (Germán et al., 2013). Another study involving an ethnically diverse sample found that positive regard did not moderate relations between directive parenting (e.g., imposing parental agenda on child, directing activity with low regard for child’s preferences) and child negativity, engagement, or dyadic mutuality for Latina or for EA mothers (Ispa et al., 2004). Given the mixed results, the current study included observed maternal positive affect alongside control and guidance to examine its potential influence on how maternal control relates to child outcomes.

To clarify findings on the influence of both maternal control and positive affect, and to better understand the role of cultural context in shaping maternal behaviors and their associations to child development, we used a mixed-methods approach. We relied on naturalistic observations of maternal and child behavior in their home environment, and mothers’ reported on their U.S. acculturation and Puerto Rican enculturation. Observing mothers and their toddlers interacting within their homes increases ecological validity and facilitates a better understanding of the childrearing contexts of adolescent, Latina mother-child dyads. However, self-report behavior scales and lab-based observations have been frequently utilized over this methodology. We focused on well-defined, discrete control behaviors (i.e., guidance, control) to better isolate their relations to child responses within the dyads’ cultural context. These behaviors have established links to children’s compliance and defiance in a clean-up compliance task (Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990), although this work has involved primarily EA samples. Specifically, maternal guidance (i.e., praise, encouragement, engagement) has been linked to child compliance, and maternal controlling behavior (i.e., repeated directives, commands, and prohibitions; physical intervention) to child noncompliance and defiance, both precursors of child self-regulation with associations to long-term outcomes (Braungart-Rieker, Garwood, & Stifter, 1997; Kochanska & Aksan, 1995; Kopp, 1982).

One study used this clean-up compliance task and behavior scales to examine the moderating role of cultural orientation on associations between observed guiding and controlling parenting behaviors and child compliance and defiance among adolescent, Latina mothers. For these mothers, guidance was related to higher child compliance regardless of differences in cultural orientation. In contrast, controlling behaviors were associated with higher child defiance only when mothers endorsed high levels of U.S. acculturation (Wood et al., 2017). The amount of controlling behaviors utilized by mothers did not vary by cultural orientation; therefore, similar levels of control showed different associations with child defiance depending on U.S. acculturation level.

We sought to extend these findings by considering endorsement of cultural values in a more integrative way. Specifically, to examine control within the context of the mothers’ cultural orientation and their parenting behaviors, this study employed person-centered analytic methodology. This analytic technique allows for a richer understanding of context by identifying groups of individuals that are similar to each other on specific behaviors or characteristics, rather than focusing on one characteristic or variable. Although it has been used with increasing frequency by researchers seeking to understand parenting and child development in context (Brady-Smith et al., 2013; Easterbrooks, Chaudhuri, Bartlett, & Copeman, 2010), it has seldom been used in studies of Latina parenting. This approach is consistent with tenets from cultural frameworks of childrearing, which highlight the importance of the immediate and the broader contexts in shaping behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 1986), and is especially useful in understanding immigrant families, who are embedded in contexts that integrate both their culture of residence and culture of origin. We considered mothers’ levels of both U.S. acculturation and PR enculturation to align with theories of cultural orientation that emphasize the relative independence of both dimensions, allowing for the emergence of monocultural and bicultural orientations (Sam & Berry, 2010; Cuéllar et al., 1995).

In conclusion, the first goal of the current study was to identify groups of mothers based on their use of both guiding and controlling parenting behaviors, displays of positive affect, and their reported U.S. acculturation and PR enculturation levels. Based on acculturation theories and previous studies involving Latina samples (Sam & Berry, 2010; Cuéllar et al., 1995), we expected to see at least three sub-groups of mothers clustered together by traditional Latina monocultural, primarily U.S.-acculturated, and bicultural orientations.

The second goal was to examine whether the sub-groups that emerged would differentially relate to outcomes of poorly regulated child defiance, a marker of long-term behavioral difficulties (Ispa et al., 2004; Kuczynski & Kochanska, 1990; Wood et al., 2017). Based on prior research and conceptualizations of use of control within the Latina culture, we predicted that a combination of high U.S. acculturation, low PR enculturation, and high use of control would relate to higher child defiance when compared to other constellations of parenting and cultural orientation, especially those including high PR enculturation levels (Halgunseth et al., 2006). We controlled here for child reactivity measured at 18-months to isolate the effect of maternal behaviors and cultural context on child behavior by including a temperamental-based child characteristic measured at a younger age.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Participants, drawn from a larger study (N = 170), included 122 Latina, adolescent mothers and their 24-month-old toddlers. Data was collected at home visits when the children were 18- and 24-months old; the majority of the data utilized in this study is from Wave 2 (W2) of data collection (only child reactivity was coded at W1). Of the initial 253 mothers identified through recruitment, 170 (70.5%) participated at Wave 1 (W1), and 86.6% were retained for W2. Only mothers who identified themselves as being of Puerto Rican origin (122; 82.5% of returning mothers at W2) were included in this study (72.4% of original sample). The remaining mothers were of Mexican, Dominican, and other South and Central American national origins. A small amount of missing data (self-report for 2 participants; video-recorded data for 1 participant) was retained through mean imputation.

Mothers had a mean age of 20.02 years (*SD* = 1.33) at W2 and were on average 17.93 years (SD = 1.32) at the time of the child’s birth. Mothers’ level of education was varied; 21.1% completed up through 9th grade, 40.7% completed up through 10th to 12th grade, 21.9% had received a high school diploma, and 16.3% had completed some post-secondary education. At W2, 24.4% of the participants were attending school, and 40.7% were employed. Most mothers were born in the mainland (59.3%). The sample was predominantly low-income, with 89.3% of mothers reporting receipt of some government assistance. The included toddlers had a mean age of 24.23 months (*SD* = 1.11) at W2, and 46.7% were female. Most children (86.2%) were their mother’s first or only child.

**Procedure**

The study received Institutional Review Board approval. Recruitment was conducted in low-income neighborhoods of a Midwestern city, primarily within community clinics (78.2% of original sample). Mothers and their toddlers were eligible for enrollment if the mother was 19-years-old or younger when her child was born, and if her child was 20-months or younger, not born premature, and born without any major physical or medical problems.

Data was collected during visits to the participants’ homes by two bilingual female research assistants. Informed consent was obtained from each participant; when participants were minors, consent was also obtained from a parent or guardian. Research assistants facilitated mothers’ completion of computer-assisted questionnaires, provided instructions and video-recorded several mother—child interactions, and administered a standardized cognitive assessment to the children. All measures were administered in the participant’s preferred language (74.6% English, 25.4% Spanish).

**Measures**

**Maternal and child behavior.** Maternal behaviors of guidance and control, maternal displays of positive affect, and child defiance were coded from a video-taped interaction of a cleanup task. After ten minutes of time during which a mother played with her child using a set of toys, a research assistant instructed the mother to have her child put the toys into a provided bin. The task lasted five minutes or until all of the toys were cleaned up.

Mother and child behaviors were coded using scales developed by Kochanska and Aksan (1995). Maternal behaviors described the approaches mothers used in facilitating the toy cleanup. Guidance was assigned when a mother used a playful and engaging approach and relied on strategies such as games and songs, collaborative statements and questions, or praise and encouragement. Control was assigned when mothers approached the task in a more directive manner, utilizing repeated commands and prohibitions (e.g., “Put that toy here.” “Don’t touch that.”), as well as physically controlling behaviors such as taking toys from the child or placing the child in front of the toy bin. Child defiance was assigned when a child demonstrated an emotionally dysregulated form of noncompliance (e.g., frequent and loud yelling, screaming, and crying) in response to mothers’ attempts to engage them in cleaning up. The task was divided into 30-second segments and maternal and child variables were computed to represent the proportion of time during the task in which a behavior was the predominant behavior observed.

Maternal positive affect was coded using a 5-point Likert scale by Lindsey & Caldera (see Lindsey, Colwell, Frabutt, Chambers, & Mackinnon-Lewis, 2008). For each segment, coders considered the frequency, intensity, and duration of displays of positive affect; instances of positive affect included warm vocal tone, smiling and laughing, speaking in sing-song, and affectionate behaviors. The variable was computed to represent the average amount of positive affect displayed throughout the task.

Behavior and affect were coded by separate sets of coders who were blind to other participant data and had at least some Spanish proficiency (e.g., native speakers, college-level Spanish courses). Additionally, coders had available translated transcriptions of the interactions, which were prepared by advanced language translation students and double checked by native Spanish speakers. Each team double-coded 25% of the cases to assess inter-rater agreement. Final weighted Kappas (Cohen, 1968) were .74 for the maternal behavior scale and .81 for the child behavior scale. For maternal positive affect, the final intra-class correlation was .77.

**Acculturation/Enculturation.** Mothers’ cultural orientation was measured by the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-II (Cuéllar et al., 1995), which includes independent subscales measuring orientation toward American (AOS; 13 items) and Latino cultures (LOS; 17 items). Participants provide answers on a 1-5 Likert scale in response to statements about cultural activities (“I enjoy English/Spanish language TV”), language use (“I speak English/Spanish”), social preferences (“I associate with Anglos/Latinos”), and ethnic identity (“I like to identify myself as an American/a Latina”). The scores represent a mean value for each subscale. The scales demonstrated adequate reliability (LOS: α = .86 whole sample, α = .85 English, α = .84 Spanish; AOS: α = .93 whole sample, α = .79 English, α = .89 Spanish).

**Child reactivity.** From the W1 administration of a cognitive assessment, observed child behavior was coded using the Adaptation to Change in Test Materials (e.g., consistently relinquishes materials and accepts new materials; ICC = .73) and Frustration with Inability to Complete Tasks (e.g., consistently becomes frustrated; ICC = .85) subscales of the Bayley Behavior Record Scales (BSID-II). The two correlated scales (r = .49, p < .001) were combined into a composite representing child reactivity (i.e., low adaptability and high frustration). Child reactivity was used to control for child temperamental characteristics in associations between parenting and culture to child defiance.

**Results**

**Goal 1: Cluster analysis for sub-group identification**

We conductedK-means cluster analyses to identify sub-groups of mothers by their parenting (control, guidance, positive affect) and cultural orientation (U.S. acculturation, PR enculturation); means, standard deviations, and correlations are displayed in Table 1. Solutions for three, four, and five- cluster solutions were examined, and analyses revealed a four-cluster solution to be the most meaningful for the data (Aldenderfer & Blashfield, 1984). ANOVAs tested mean differences across sub-groups on the included variables, which validated the identified four-cluster solution (Table 2).

Cluster 1 (n = 23) mothers demonstrated higher levels of control, lower levels of guidance and positive affect, and reported higher levels of PR enculturation and lower levels of U.S. acculturation; this group was labeled as enculturated/controlling. Cluster 2 (n = 25) mothers demonstrated higher levels of guidance than control, significantly higher levels of guidance and positive affect than the other clusters, and they had relatively equal levels of U.S. acculturation and PR enculturation; this group was labeled bicultural/guiding. Cluster 3 (n = 48) mothers demonstrated higher levels of control and lower guidance and positive affect, as well as higher and equal levels of U.S. acculturation and PR enculturation; this group was labeled as bicultural/controlling. Finally, Cluster 4 (n = 26) mothers exhibited higher levels of control than guidance, although somewhat more balanced than the other sub-groups that had similarly high levels of control (Clusters 1 and 3). This sub-group, labeled acculturated/controlling also had higher U.S. acculturation and lower PR enculturation than the others, and similar levels of positive affect as Clusters 1 and 3. Notably, positive affect only differed significantly between the bicultural/guiding sub-group and the other three sub-groups; thus, this was not a strongly differentiating variable across sub-groups of mothers who also utilized high control.

**Goal 2: Sub-group comparison by child defiance**

We conducted an ANCOVA to examine between-group differences in child defiance (Table 2). In order to isolate the effects of the sub-groups on child defiance, child reactivity measured at W1 was included as a covariate. Mother and child age were considered but not included, as they were uncorrelated with maternal and child behaviors. Results revealed significant between-group differences, (*F*(3,118) = 4.57, p = .005). Bonferroni post-hoc tests revealed that children whose mothers’ fell into the acculturated/controlling sub-group (*M* = .28, *SE* = .05) displayed significantly more dysregulated defiance than those in the enculturated/controlling (*p* = .05; *M* = .10, *SE* = .05) and bicultural/guiding sub-groups (*p* = .02; *M* = .08, *SE* = .05), although they did not significantly differ from those in the bicultural/controlling sub-group.

**Discussion**

We sought to understand how use of maternal control influences child defiance within the context of adolescent, Latina mother-child dyads by providing a more complete picture of the parenting and cultural contexts in which these relations occur. Using a person-centered approach to group Puerto Rican-origin adolescent mothers by cultural orientation, parenting behaviors, and affect, this study revealed that across groups, mothers using similar levels of control and affect had children displaying significantly different levels of defiance. By observing and analyzing parenting within the cultural context in which it is employed, this finding demonstrated that factors in addition to the levels of specific control behaviors used by mothers were associated with children’s responses to their mothers.

The person-centered method allowed us to examine several variables that have been proposed to contribute to differential relations between maternal control and child outcomes alongside one another, rather than each in isolation as has been generally done in previous studies. This method also allowed us to better account for the heterogeneity present in the Latino population in the U.S., especially in regard to differences in the strength with which individuals endorse both Latino and American values. Overall, this methodological strategy helped us to further the current literature by providing a richer understanding of both the behavioral characteristics and cultural contexts of distinct sub-groups of mother-child dyads. The analysis yielded four sub-groups that were varied in mothers’ cultural orientation and their predominant parenting style.

Regarding the consequences of control, we found that the children of the enculturated/controlling sub-group displayed lower levels of defiance than the acculturated/controlling sub-group. Mothers in these groups displayed similar levels of control and guidance; nonetheless, children of the Latino-oriented mothers responded to their mothers’ control in a less dysregulated manner than those of the acculturated mothers, who displayed the highest levels of defiance in the sample. Further, levels of child defiance for the bicultural/controlling sub-group did not differ from the enculturated or acculturated/controlling groups, and these three groups displayed similar higher levels of control. Thus, differences in child defiance appeared to be most pronounced between contexts of a strong Latina orientation compared with a strong American orientation. This finding supports prior work suggesting that controlling and directive parenting by Latina mothers is not always harmful, and at times can be beneficial, dependent on particular contexts and for certain aspects of child functioning (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Ispa et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2017).

Scholars have suggested that variations in affective quality of interactions may account for differential influences of maternal control on child outcomes, although study results have been mixed (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Ispa et al., 2013). In an effort to better understand these findings, we included maternal positive affect as a factor in identifying sub-groups of mothers; however, our results do not support this proposition. In our sample, the three sub-groups of mothers who used higher levels of control displayed similar lower levels of positive affect. Most notably, both enculturated/controlling and acculturated/controlling sub-groups differed in their relation to child defiance while displaying similar levels of both control and positive affect. This low variability in positive affect may be due to the compliance nature of our task. It would be helpful to continue to consider the affective quality of mother-child interactions in future studies using different tasks, such as teaching or playing tasks, that may elicit more variation in affect. Nonetheless, it is important to note that within the same task, mothers who used primarily guidance displayed substantially more positive affect than those who used more controlling behaviors.

The finding that in the context of a strong Latino orientation control related to lower defiance, even in the absence of positive affect, may be understood from the perspective of Latino cultural values. While individuals may display similar discrete behaviors across cultures, the cultural environment gives meaning to the behaviors and influences how they function within the context of a mother-child relationship (Keller et al., 2018). Given that control is more normative in traditional Latina families and may be used as a strategy to achieve culturally relevant socialization goals of *respeto* and *familism*, children may not perceive these behaviors as negative or intrusive (Halgunseth et al., 2006), and therefore respond to them with less dysregulated defiance. In contrast, control is less normative in the mainstream American culture; its use is not consistent with common socialization goals (e.g., development of autonomy, self-maximization) and it has been linked to negative outcomes (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Kochanska & Aksan, 1995). Consistently, we found that, much like in EA families, control displayed by mothers in the acculturated/controlling group appeared to have negative consequences for child regulation. Levels of child defiance may also be influenced by mothers’ use of other parenting behaviors or by aspects of their family environment that contribute to children’s development of regulation.

It is worthwhile to acknowledge the role that toddlers’ defiance may play in eliciting specific control behaviors from their mothers, signaling both task-specific and more pervasive patterns of dyadic interaction (Lloyd & Masur, 2014). Notably, within the task examined in this study, child defiance was not directly associated with maternal control. Further, in an effort to isolate the influence of maternal characteristics on child behavior, we controlled for child reactivity. In this sample, child reactivity (i.e., temperament) measured at 18 months was significantly correlated with child defiance (i.e., behavior) at 24 months. The comparisons in child defiance between sub-groups were significant when controlling for this variable; thus, the combination of maternal behavior and cultural context were associated with child defiance above and beyond the child’s observed early temperamental quality. While all interactions are certainly influenced by both members of a dyad, we found that for more enculturated mothers who utilized high levels of control, child defiance was low. Future studies should consider utilizing longitudinal methods and cross-lagged analyses to clarify directionality of the associations between maternal and child behaviors.

The person-centered analysis also revealed a group of mothers (bicultural/guiding) who displayed low levels of control. These mothers endorsed a bicultural orientation and used a guiding and affectively positive pattern of parenting that resembled that used by adult EA mothers. As is the case for EA families, their children displayed low levels of dysregulated defiance (Kochanska & Aksan, 1995). Importantly, this sub-group also utilized guidance significantly more than the other sub-groups; across the sample, guidance was negatively correlated with child defiance. As in previous studies (Brady-Smith et al., 2013), parenting behaviors characterized by warmth and encouragement are more universally associated with positive child functioning. Comparing these results to those of mothers who also endorsed higher U.S. acculturation, but reported lower levels of PR enculturation suggests that for adolescent Latina mothers who have taken on American cultural values, maintenance of a Latino orientation appears to facilitate a parenting approach that is associated with better child regulation. These findings are consistent with literature demonstrating that Latina, adolescent mothers who endorse a bicultural orientation show better psychological adjustment than those who endorse a primarily U.S. or Latino orientation (Lopez & Contreras, 2005). Further, Latino children who develop a bicultural orientation show better adjustment across domains (Gonzales, Fabrett, & Knight, 2009; Sam & Berry, 2010). In sum, bicultural mothers may gain valuable resources from their engagement in the American culture at the same time that they benefit from the supports provided by their adherence to traditional Latina culture (Gonzales et al., 2009); together these resources may help them develop supportive parent-child relationships that foster toddler’s responsiveness and regulation.

This study underscores several important methodological considerations. We used in-home observations for measuring mother and child behavior, a naturalistic approach that yields more representative data on mother-child interactions, which may be especially advantageous when studying Latina families with less contact with mainstream institutions. Additionally, frameworks of Latina parenting (Calzada et al., 2012; Contreras, Narang, Ikhlas, & Teichman, 2002) and cultural orientation theories (Sam & Berry, 2010) highlight the need to consider both acculturation and enculturation, following a bidimensional rather than unidimensional model; however, many studies have neglected to utilize comprehensive measurements or to address cultural orientation as a bidimensional construct. This study utilized a well-established, bidimensional measurement of cultural orientation, and based on the sub-groups that emerged, highlights the importance of taking such an approach.

Given that the Latino parenting literature has focused primarily on Mexican American mothers, our focus on mothers of Puerto Rican origin provides valuable information toward a more complete characterization of Latino families in the U.S. Nonetheless, the results of this study cannot be generalized beyond mainland Puerto Rican adolescent mothers; replication across mothers of different countries of origin would strengthen our results. While replication among adult mothers would also enhance the generalizability of the findings, the current results may be especially meaningful within an adolescent sample. Given that much of the variation in parenting among adolescent mothers is influenced by factors such as age, income, and resources, it is noteworthy that our results also point to cultural variation as an important influence on their parenting (Jahromi et al., 2014). Although we were able to control for pre-existing child characteristics associated with defiance, we assessed other variables cross-sectionally, limiting the ability to draw directional conclusions. It would be interesting for future longitudinal studies to examine how changes in cultural orientation may result in changes in preferred parenting behaviors across time. Finally, it would be helpful to observe the examined maternal and child behaviors in several types of tasks that may elicit greater variation in expected control, guidance, and affect and provide a more representative estimate of mothers’ overall parenting.

In closing, by using a person-centered and context-oriented approach to examining control by Latina mothers, we found relatively low levels of dysregulated defiance demonstrated by children of both enculturated/controlling and bicultural/guiding mothers when compared to acculturated/controlling mothers, demonstrating different pathways to successful parenting of regulated children. Both guiding parenting within a bicultural context and controlling parenting within a largely enculturated orientation appear to be beneficial in deterring child defiance. The results provide strong support for the need to study parenting behaviors within a contextual framework to better understand their repercussions for child development. Considering cultural contexts when studying Latino parenting can inform a more nuanced understanding of positive parenting in the unique contexts of these minority families. Approaching intervention efforts for these young families from the perspective that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to parenting can help tailor services that are sensitive to their individual contexts and circumstances.

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Table 1.

*Correlations among main study variables and considered covariates*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| *Main study variables* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Gentle guidance | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Control | -.71\*\*\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Acculturation | .09 | -.07 | - |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Enculturation | -.13 | .05 | -.41\*\*\* | - |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Positive affect | .37\*\*\* | - .18\* | .22\* | -.11 | - |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Defiance | -.22\*\* | .10 | -.15 | -.16 | -.07 | - |  |  |  |
| *Considered covariates* |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| 1. Child reactivity | .05 | -.04 | .11 | -.11 | .13 | .32\*\*\* | - |  |  |
| 1. Maternal age | -.05 | -.06 | -.23\* | .13 | -.07 | -.07 | -.05 | - |  |
| 1. Child age | -.02 | -.06 | .03 | .07 | -.03 | .16 | .06 | .15 | - |
| Means | .27 | .57 | 3.53 | 3.81 | 2.23 | .19 | -.04 | 20.02 | 2.05 |
| Standard deviations | .32 | .32 | .87 | .66 | .67 | .27 | 1.65 | 1.33 | .09 |

\**p* <.05; \*\**p* <.01;\*\*\**p*<.001.

Table 2.

*Means for variables included in parenting clusters and between group differences on child defiance*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Enculturated/  Controlling  (n = 23) | Bicultural/  Guiding  (n = 25) | Bicultural/  Controlling  (n = 48) | Acculturated/  Controlling  (n = 26) |
| Guidance | .182 | .551,3,4 | .162 | .272 |
| Control | .62 | .413 | .662 | .52 |
| Acculturation | 2.022,3,4 | 3.931 | 3.941 | 3.751 |
| Enculturation | 4.522,3,4 | 3.531,3,4 | 4.061,2,4 | 3.001,2,3 |
| Positive Affect | 1.91 | 3.181,3,4 | 2.04 | 1.94 |
|  |  |  |  |  |
| Defiance\*\*\* | .104 | .084 | .23 | .281,2 |

\*\*\**p*<.001