Parent-child acculturation and cultural values differences: Associations with children's self-esteem and aggression

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ABSTRACT

Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in the US with children of Latino immigrants being the fastest growing sector among this group. Therefore, it is imperative to examine how living in a country that is not the family's country of origin influences their behavioral and socioemotional outcomes. Among immigrant families, some work indicates that individuals from the same family acculturate at different rates, thus creating an acculturation difference. Parent-child differences in acculturation and acculturation-related constructs have been inconsistently linked to child outcomes. The current study investigates the link between parent-child differences in acculturation and Latino cultural values (i.e., familism and respect) on self-esteem and aggression. Data was obtained from 89 Latino immigrant parent-child dyads from Southern California. Results demonstrated that differences in acculturation were not linked to child outcomes, while differences in values were unfavorably associated with self-esteem and aggression. Specifically, differences in which parents endorsed Latino cultural values more so than their children predicted lower self-esteem and greater aggression. Findings point to the importance of recognizing and understanding the complexity in parent-child differences, their contribution to child outcomes, and potential contribution to programmatic efforts.

Among the nation's 74 million children, roughly 24% are Latino, and within this particular group, over half (53%) have at least one foreign-born parent (Murphy, Guzman, & Torres, 2014). According to the Department of Health and Human Services (Koh, Graham, & Glied, 2011), ethnic minority children—in particular, those of immigrant backgrounds—experience greater health disparities. Specifically, Latinos have greater involvement in serious aggression and lower self-esteem than their White or Black peers (McNulty & Bellair, 2003; Orth, Robins, Widaman, & Conger, 2014). Furthermore, research has found that problematic socioemotional and behavioral outcomes displayed during adolescence have implications for later adulthood (Farrington, 2004; Graber, 2004). For example, aggression has been linked to later educational attainment, partner violence, and substance use (Fite, Raine, Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Pardini, 2009; Huesmann, Dubow, & Boxer, 2009); while self-esteem has been linked to life-span trajectories of affect, depression, and life satisfaction (Birkeland, Melkevik, Holsen, & Wold, 2012; Orth, Robins, & Widaman, 2012). Given the sheer number of Latino immigrant children in the country, their disproportionate representation in the health disparities literature, and life-course trajectories of aggressive behaviors and compromised self-esteem, it is critical to better understand how experiences outside of the family's country of origin may influence their outcomes.

A factor that may play a role in the well-being of Latinos is acculturation. Specifically, acculturation is "a multidimensional process consisting of the confluence among heritage-cultural and receiving-cultural practices, values, and identifications" (Schwartz,

Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010, p. 237). Acculturation is a complex process at any age, but for immigrant children, acculturation may be further complicated by living with immigrant parents. Children in immigrant families often acculturate to the host culture at a faster rate than their parents (Birman, 2006). They learn the host language faster than their parents and, in turn, have greater participation in the host culture (Birman & Trickett, 2001). Parents, on the other hand, are more likely to work in ethnic enclaves alongside people from the same country of origin and have limited exchanges with the host culture (Garcia Coll & Szalacha, 2004). As a result, parents retain more of their origin culture and acculturate at a slower rate (Schwartz et al., 2012). This differential rate in acculturation creates a parent-child acculturation difference or, as it is sometimes called in the research literature, an acculturation gap (Birman, 2006; Telzer, 2010). The current literature is inconsistent with respect to the effects of parent-child acculturation differences on child outcomes. In a review of the literature, Telzer (2010) noted that differences in findings are thought to emerge from variations in how differences are computed and constructs used to measure acculturation. To that end, the purpose of this study is to examine associations between parent-child differences in acculturation and two Latino cultural values (i.e., familism and respect) with self-esteem and aggression among Latino children.

Conceptual framework

The conceptual model guiding this investigation is the *acculturation gap distress model* (Telzer, 2010) which integrates two concepts related to the effects of acculturation within immigrant families. First, Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines and Aranalde (1978, 1984) suggest that for immigrant families *intergenerational acculturation differences* likely contribute and compound normative generational differences, which lead to greater behavioral problems. Second, Portes and Rumbaut (2006) introduced the term *acculturative dissonance* which posits that conflicts ensue between parents and children in immigrant families due to discrepant rates of acculturation. Thus, the existence of both intercultural and intergenerational differences magnifies behavior problems among immigrant children. Finally, the inclusion of values is guided by the *problem suppression facilitation model* (Weisz, 1989), which emphasizes the influence of family socialization on children's expression of socioemotional problems. Specifically, this framework suggests that the extent to which behavioral and emotional problems are expressed is partially determined by constructs such as values, beliefs, and expectations that are promoted or discouraged (Weisz, Suwanlert, Chaiyasit, & Walter, 1987). In the case of values endorsement, some work demonstrates that children's endorsement of Latino values, such as respect, was found to be associated with less internalizing and externalizing problems (Polo & Lopez, 2009; Polo, 2002, respectively).

Parent-child acculturation differences

The current literature is inconsistent in reporting the association of acculturation differences with child outcomes. Several studies testing the acculturation gap-distress model have found support for this particular framework (Lui, 2015). Acculturation differences have been linked to problematic outcomes, such as depressive symptoms (Weaver & Kim, 2008), behavioral problems (Vega, Khoury, Zimmerman, Gil, & Warheit, 1995), low self-esteem (Gil, Vega, & Dimas, 1994), externalizing behaviors (Schofield, Parke, Kim, & Coltrane, 2008), and conduct disorder (Szapocznik, Santisteban, Kurtines, Perez-Vidal & Hervis, 1984). On the other hand, other studies have not found differences to be associated with child outcomes either at all or in the expected direction (Nieri & Bermudez-Parsai, 2014; Nieri, Lee, Kulis, & Marsiglia, 2011). Previous studies found that highly acculturated parent-child dyads (Pasch et al., 2006) and dyads in which the parent was more acculturated than the child (Lau et al., 2005) were associated with conduct problems. These findings are inconsistent with the prevailing narrative in the literature which attributes problematic outcomes of acculturation to parent-child differences generally and differences involving more acculturated children. In a recent meta-analysis of the acculturation difference literature, Lui (2015) found that these inconsistencies can be attributed to methodological factors. Specifically, strategies used to calculate the difference and constructs used to assess acculturation may be implicated in these inconsistencies (Telzer, 2010), and will be the focus of the current study.

Calculating the difference

Investigations in this area of the literature have used various methods to calculate differences (Birman, 2006). Although more sophisticated methods have been utilized (Bámaca-Colbert & Gayles, 2010; Schwartz et al., 2012), for the most part, the difference score and match/mismatch methods have been used (Telzer, 2010). First, in the difference score method one informant's score is subtracted from the other. Studies utilizing this strategy have yielded inconsistent findings such that benign differences (i.e., dyads in which the parent was more acculturated than the child) were related to greater behavioral problems (Atzaba-Poria & Pike, 2007), delinquency and depression (Crane, Ngai, Larson, & Hafen, 2005), and conduct problems (Lau et al., 2005); while other studies reported that anticipated differences (i.e. dyads in which the child was more acculturated than the parent) were associated with greater substance use (Martinez, 2006) and externalizing behavior problems (Schofield et al., 2008). A concern with this strategy is that it assumes that differences will always occur, with parents being less acculturated to the host culture than children (Birman, 2006), but the differences are not always in this particular direction (see, for example, Farver, Narang, & Bhadha, 2002). In an attempt to address this problem, the absolute value of the difference score has been utilized (Merali, 2002). With this strategy any difference, regardless of the direction, is assumed to have negative implications for children. Albeit informative, this strategy ignores the importance of examining the specific type of difference that may be associated with child outcomes and does not expand the current literature.

Next, in the match/mismatch strategy, investigators divide their samples into two groups: 1) parent and child are matched on