



# The Early Experiences of Latino Children: A Positive Look



Natasha J. Cabrera, Jenessa L. Malin, Elizabeth Karberg, & Daniela Aldoney

## Introduction

- Many Latino children are growing up in poverty and adversity, but there is also noted variability.
- We present data from our lab that examines family and individual factors that promote positive development.
  - Positive mothering and fathering
  - Positive psychosocial functioning
  - Social support
  - Cultural beliefs and practices
  - Engagement in literacy activities

## Positive Mothering

- Latino immigrant mothers are sensitive and warm with their children, and this is central to children’s development (Cabrera, Shannon, West, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006).
- Factors that predict differences in maternal sensitivity are:
  - Mothers’ age
  - Mothers’ education
  - English proficiency (i.e., proxy for acculturation)



## Positive Fathering

- Latino fathers are also warm and sensitive with their young children (Cabrera, Shannon, Mitchell, & West, 2009).
- Factors that explain variability in paternal engagement are:
  - Wanting the pregnancy
  - Low relationship conflict (Cabrera, Shannon, & La Taillade, 2010).
  - Education
- Latino fathers’ control strategies promote their children’s regulatory skills (Malin, Cabrera, Karberg, Aldoney, & Rowe, 2014).
- Latino fathers’ talk during reading promotes their children’s vocabulary skills (Malin, Cabrera, & Rowe, 2014).

## Psychosocial Functioning

- Parents’ mental health is an important source of variation in explaining their children’s development.
  - Depressed mothers talk less to their children, which may put them at risk for language difficulties (Mensah & Kiernan, 2010; Paulson et al., 2009).
  - Depressed fathers talked less to their children, who had less grammatically complex language (i.e., smaller MLUs)(Malin, Karberg, Cabrera, Rowe, Cristofaro, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2012).

## Social Support

- Parents with social support tend to be more supportive of their children (Evans, et al., 2008).
- In our sample of low-income Latino immigrant parents, there was reported variability in types of support (Malin, Lillard, & Cabrera, 2014).
  - Mothers and fathers reported higher levels of family and partner support and lower levels of friend support.
  - Parents with high family support were observed to be more responsive (i.e., sensitive) with their children and to use less negative control (i.e., intrusiveness).

## Cultural Beliefs/Routines

- Variation in cultural values (e.g., familism) as well as parents’ developmental goals for children are related to parenting and child outcomes (Aldoney, Cabrera, Malin, 2015).
- Latino parents’ goals for their children are to be happy and honest and these goals were related to sensitive parenting.
- Latino parents reported that they most valued familism and respeto.
- About 40% of mothers and fathers reported eating dinner with their child every night.
- Latino parents endorse “Latino” as well as “American” values for their children.

## Literacy Activities

- Our data show that Latino mothers talked often to their children, and many spoke in both English and Spanish (Malin, Aldoney, & Cabrera, 2015).
- Latino mothers’ talk in English and Spanish was associated with their toddlers’ inhibitory control skills.
- Mothers reported reading more often than fathers but fathers engaged in higher quality reading than mother (Malin, Cabrera, & Rowe, 2014).
- Mothers’ and fathers’ reading at 24 months mattered for children’s receptive vocabulary skills at pre-kindergarten.
- This association was explained by an increase in children’s interest (i.e., attention, affect, and engagement) during reading (Malin, Cabrera, & Rowe, 2014).

## Discussion

- There is much variability in the early experiences of Latino children growing up in low-income families.
  - Many Latino children are growing up in supportive and caring homes.
  - Parents speak Spanish and some English enhancing their language skills.
  - Homes are organized around routines that promote self-regulation.
  - Children participate in literacy activities.
  - Latino children live with both parents.
  - Fathers are highly engaged.