


Raising American Citizens: Socialization Goals of Low-Income Immigrant Latino Mothers and Fathers of Young Children

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Abstract Based on ecocultural theory, this study utilizes focus group interviews to explore the ways Latino immigrant mothers and fathers transmit the values and beliefs they wish their young children to internalize. Findings suggest that parents purposely “pick and choose” values they deem “Latino,” such as the importance of family and values they deem “American,” such as independence, to pass on to their children. Parents recognized three main barriers that might stand in their way of teaching their children to adapt to two cultural groups: balancing work and family, low self-esteem, and lack of good parental role models. However, they also pointed out two sources of strength that can help them overcome these barriers: optimism and motivation. This study provides a basis for generating hypotheses to be tested with larger datasets and informs the development of theory and culturally sensitive interventions and measures to evaluate Latino parenting.

Keywords Immigrant families · Latino · Biculturalism · Socialization

Introduction

Research on the socialization of Latino children has yielded important insights about the values, beliefs, and practices

Latino parents use to teach their children to adapt to the American society. Overall, these studies have highlighted the sociocentrism of Latinos, focusing on how mothers emphasize values of *respeto* and familism as central goals for their children, and how they foster a sense of understanding and connection to the ethnic heritage culture (e.g., Halgunseth et al. 2006). Less attention has been paid to the *process* by which this occurs and the characteristics of the context in which this process unfolds.

Latino immigrant parents socialize their children in a *bicultural context*; that is, they teach and pass on the norms and values of both Latino and mainstream American cultures. Being bicultural means benefitting from selected aspects of both cultures (Gonzales et al. 2009). Although research has shown that being bicultural is most adaptive because it provides flexible coping strategies to deal with multiple, competing demands and different social contexts (Berry et al. 2006), the existing research has not focused on the process through which biculturalism is transmitted to children. How do parents identify which values from each culture to pass on to their children? Which values and norms from each culture are they more likely to pass on to them? How do constraints (e.g., economic) and resources (e.g., psychological) facilitate or hinder this process? Finally, most studies only include mothers and consequently we know even less about the socialization practices of fathers.

The inclusion of fathers is important because most Latino children live in two-parent households and engage with their fathers in a daily basis (Vespa et al. 2013). Emerging research shows that although there are similarities between mothers and fathers in how they interact with and influence their children, there are also differences in what they think is important for their children as well as how they interact with them (Cabrera et al. 2006). The socialization goals of

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parents with different cultural backgrounds are of great practical importance to researchers interested in understanding the multiple pathways to child wellbeing in a multicultural context. Moreover, practitioners interested in helping families promote their children's development can also benefit from this type of research.

According to ecocultural theory, parents organize their children's environment (e.g., routines) by balancing aspects of culture (e.g., values and beliefs) with aspects of the ecological context, including constraints and resources, in which families live (Weisner 2002). Parents create meaningful daily routines (e.g., meal times) that reflect their values and beliefs (e.g., familism) and incorporate the social expectations (e.g., children should be independent) and economic demands (e.g., working) of the host country by adapting or making changes. Thus, children's socialization experiences are the product of both environmental circumstances (e.g., work hours) and the way parents adapt to them, which may entail balancing competing values (Arzubiaga et al. 2000). In line with Weisner's approach, understanding parents' values and beliefs are windows into the way parents shape the developmental context for their children and can tell us something about how it might influence developmental outcomes.

Although the transmission of beliefs/values is a universal process, the content of such beliefs/values varies by cultural group. This process is also expected to be different in the context of two sets of beliefs/values that immigrant families are likely to encounter living in the United States. For immigrant parents, the process of socializing or rearing their children in the host country may be particularly complex, as they must learn the values and norms of the host country at the same time as they help their children to learn the values and norms of the host country and those of their country of origin.

Parents of Latino heritage in the United States, regardless of socioeconomic status, place relatively greater emphasis on promoting values and beliefs associated with socio-centrism—*respeto*, *educación*, and *familismo*—than their European American counterparts (Calzada et al. 2010; Leyendecker et al. 2002). However, there is evidence that Latino parents also socialize their children with the norms and customs of mainstream American culture. In contrast to European American mothers, mothers of Central American origin reported valuing socialization goals related to being respectful and obedient, but they also endorsed selected aspects of individualism such as being independent (Leyendecker et al. 2002). Other studies show that immigrant families, including Latinos, want their children to be bicultural and therefore actively and consciously select both American and country of origin values to pass on to their children, which may coexist but also compete with one another (García Coll and Marks 2009; Tamis-LeMonda

et al. 2008). For example, in a small-scale study, mothers of Dominican and Mexican descent uniformly highlighted the importance of children's learning, achievement, and personal growth (Ng et al. 2014).

Descriptive studies have shown that parents of adolescents generally report using several socialization strategies including giving *consejos* (i.e., anticipatory guidance or advice), monitoring their children, and “being a role model” to guide their children through the “*buen camino*” (good path of life) (Azmitia and Brown 2002). For young children, parents' strategies are more likely to include verbal commands, spanking, and behavioral monitoring. Qualitative studies of Mexican American mothers and fathers have shown that while many Mexican American mothers of 4-year-old children first used verbal commands (e.g., do this) followed by reasoning if their child was non-compliant (Livas-Dlott et al. 2010) other mothers of Mexican and Dominican descent used spanking to teach their children to be respectful and obedient (Calzada et al. 2010). Although there are no parallel data on fathers, some studies of fathers of older children have found that they use behavioral control strategies such as tracking their children's whereabouts, activities, and behaviors to monitor them (Behnke et al. 2008).

Similarly, developmental and ecocultural approaches emphasize that the socialization process is influenced by several contextual factors that can serve as either constraints or resources (Weisner 2002). In terms of constraints, researchers have focused on the association between levels of education, income, and English proficiency and parents' prospects. In the United States, Latino immigrant families, on average, have the lowest level of SES and the highest level of poverty compared to other immigrant groups and to the general American population (Brown and Patten 2014). In contrast to parents with high levels of education, parents who have low levels of education and income are more likely to be stressed and less likely to have the resources to cope with it, which can have a negative effect on parenting behaviors (Jung et al. 2012). Low-income parents are also likely to live in poor neighborhoods characterized by low-wage jobs and weak social support, which can further increase levels of psychological distress and negative parenting (Crosnoe and Cooper 2010; García Coll and Marks 2009).

In addition to constraints or barriers that may impede parents' ability to parent effectively, many low-income parents also have resources that can facilitate or support their parenting behaviors. Little research has explored in depth what these resources might be, but some researchers have pointed to immigrants' psychological disposition, including optimism and work ethic as important protective factors (García Coll and Marks 2012). Taylor and colleagues found that optimism protected mothers of Mexican

origin against the adverse consequences of economic pressure and was associated with positive self-reported parenting practices (Castro-Schilo et al. 2013; Taylor et al. 2012). We found no studies that have examined how these potential resources (and constraints) play out in the life of Latino immigrant parents who are raising their young children to be American citizens.

Studies to date give us insight into the bicultural values and strategies held by many Latino mothers. However, these studies do not speak to the process of identifying values and beliefs from each culture, especially in the early years, a foundational time of development for children and a very demanding time for parents. How do parents “pick and choose” which values to pass on to their children during toddlerhood? What do Latino parents like about “the American way of raising children”? How are Latino parents’ values and beliefs reflected in their daily practices and routines? Examining these question and understanding both resources and constrains of these families would enable programs serving these families to allocate resources judiciously and efficaciously. In the present study we examine: (1) What are Latino immigrant parents’ socialization goals for raising their U.S.-born children? (2) How do Latino parents incorporate the values and beliefs as well as strategies into the socialization process of their young children? And (3) what constraints and resources characterize the contexts in which Latino immigrant parents rear their children?

Method

Participants

We recruited 20 mothers and 10 fathers from an Early Head Start Center in the Washington, DC metropolitan area to participate in eight focus groups about parenting. The majority of the families enrolled at this center have household incomes at or below the poverty level, and more than 90 % are immigrant families where both parents were born outside of the United States.

Participants had, on average, two children (range 2–5) and the focal child ranged in age from two to four years of age. Parents’ mean length of stay in the United States was 10.4 years (range 4.5–22). One participant reported having a college degree, two reported some college, seven reported having a high school diploma or equivalent (GED) (26 %), 17 had less than high school education (63 %), and three dropped out of elementary school in 2nd grade. Based on the Census data, our sample is slightly less educated than the general Latino foreign-born population living in the United States (Motel and Patten 2012). In El Salvador and Nicaragua around 38 % of the population has at least high

school education, which in El Salvador corresponds to 11th grade. In Mexico more than half of the population (54 %) has at least high school education (12th grade) (Malik 2013).

Most of our sample reported either being married (52 %) or single (40 %); only 7 % ($n = 2$) reported being divorced or separated. Compared to national data on the Latino population in the United States our sample had a higher rate of married couples (52 % compared to 39 %) (Brown and Patten 2014). Of the 30 participants, 50 % ($n = 15$) were from Central America (El Salvador and Nicaragua) and 40 % ($n = 12$) were from Mexico, while the remaining 10 % ($n = 3$) were from South American (Colombia and Peru). Of the 30 participants, three were born in the United States. Our sample mirrored the demographic composition of Latinos living in the Washington, DC area (U.S. Census Bureau 2007). For this analysis only immigrant parents ($n = 27$), that is, born outside of the United States, were included. Thus, we use the term Latino immigrant to refer to mothers and fathers who were born outside of the United States in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico, Colombia, and Peru.

Procedure

Our team of bilingual researchers recruited participants in their preferred language (90 % Spanish) during children’s drop off and pick up times. At recruitment, we informed parents about the methodology and objectives of the study and told them that we were interested in hearing about their experiences raising children in the United States. To be selected for the study, parents had to (a) identify themselves as Latino and (b) have at least one child enrolled in the Head Start Center. We asked parents to base their answers on the child who was attending the Head Start Center, and we thanked them for their participation with an educational toy for their children. Recruitment continued until the last focus group provided little new insight or information related to our questions (saturation) (Small 2009), which happened in this study by the eight group.

We conducted each focus group in a quiet room at the center, and each lasted 100–120 minutes; all sessions were audiotaped and the research team took field notes. The conversation sessions started with an introduction and a general description of the study objectives. Two research assistants took care of technical issues and/or entertained the children if parents brought them to the focus group session. As soon as parents entered the already set up room, we greeted them and offered refreshments while they completed the consent form. Most of the parents were familiar with the researchers but not with all of the other parents. The introduction phase was a time to share experiences and create a relaxed atmosphere.

Measures

Focus groups are a good method to use with low-income participants and underrepresented groups, because they may see the group as a welcoming and non threatening setting in which to share difficult experiences (Umaña-Taylor and Bámaca 2004). We conducted two large focus groups (five and eight participants) and six smaller focus groups with two to four parents each. The initial focus group protocol included five non-leading central questions with specific probes: (1) parenting (e.g., what are, for you, the characteristics of a good father/mother?); (2) goals/expectations (e.g., what are the goals and dreams you have for your child?); (3) Latino and American parenting (e.g., do you think American families teach their children different values from Latinos?); (4) support (e.g., who helps you raise your child?); and (5) routines (e.g., what are the things you do on a regular basis with your child?). The initial protocol was then modified from one focus group to the next to reflect the input from the participants as they redirected attention to other questions. This less structured approach helped to elucidate participants' thinking and facilitated the exploration of new directions depending upon the information that emerged in the conversation process (Morgan 2001).

Data Analyses

All data were transcribed verbatim, translated into English, and back translated into Spanish. We analyzed the English versions of the transcripts using the qualitative software package Atlas-Ti following the principles of Grounded Theory (LaRossa 2005). This approach views data and analysis as created from shared experiences and relationships with participants (Charmaz 2006) and is primarily conducted through discovery of emergent themes in the data (LaRossa 2005). We incorporated sensitizing concepts derived from Weisner's ecocultural framework (e.g., values, constraints, and resources) into this study to guide the process of understanding participants' experiences (Weisner 2002).

The analysis of the data followed three stages of coding: open, axial, and selective coding (LaRossa 2005). First, we examined our data looking for salient words, phrases, paragraphs or ideas participants repeatedly used to describe their experience (open coding). Then, we organized the codes by drawing relationships between categories and subcategories (axial coding). During this stage we collapsed similar categories into larger and more abstract categories and developed preliminary interpretations linking the participants' narratives to our research aims. Finally, we developed a storyline linking the data with the theoretical framework that guided the study (selective coding). To ensure data quality, codes, emerging themes, and the

storyline were discussed and compared until agreement on important subthemes and categories was met.

Results

The goal of this study was to shed light on the values and beliefs Latino immigrant mothers' and fathers' want to pass on to their young children as well as the ways in which they transmit them. Moreover, we were interested in understanding how both constraints and resources facilitated or hindered their parenting strategies and behaviors to rear children in the United States.

Latino Parents' Goals for Their Children

Consistent with past studies of parents and older children, almost all the participating parents in our study expected their toddlers to have *respeto* towards themselves and others (Leyendecker et al. 2002). Both mothers and fathers believed that teaching these values to their young children was central to being "a good" Latino and differentiated them from the American way of raising children. One mother elaborated on this issue, saying, "[Americans] don't teach them how to behave well, and someone like a Latino does care about respect..."

As others have found, parents considered the *family unit* to be fundamental and distinctive to Latino culture. Parents spoke with pride of this characteristic and viewed it as a central aspect of their ethnic identity. Parents expressed pride that "Latino families are very together" and maintain closeness with their children, even as they get older, as well as disapproval of the American way to encourage children to leave the family home by 18. A father said this strong sense of family is taught to young children:

Mainly the Latino people are very united in family. We are used to the fact that our children are 22, 23 years old and they live in the house with us and that is very nice. It's nice to have the children always there and know what they are doing. A lot of times American parents... they have an 18-year-old and the child has left, disappeared and comes back every month, two months...

While parents disapproved the American way of encouraging children's complete independence, especially in late adolescence, they viewed the fostering of autonomy and independence in early childhood as essential to their adaptation. When discussing the importance of including "American" values in the childrearing process, such as giving children more freedom (thus promoting autonomy) to make their own decisions, a Mexican mother shared with the group the following thought: "[...] for me it is very

important that my daughter knows how to make decisions for what you all said before, prepare them for life, but if I am making all of their decisions, in what moment are they learning to make their own?"

Consistent with the idea that distinct cultural beliefs can coexist, parents in our study expressed the view that endorsing values from their country of origin and from the main United States was compatible and necessary (Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2008). Parents talked about promoting American values without losing their Latino identity. The testimony of a Mexican mother reflects this point:

That they be self-sufficient, that they struggle to move forward, that they be self-sufficient but not too liberal either... that when they get older that they make their life over there and they forget that they have a mom and their other siblings...no.

This sentiment was echoed by a Nicaraguan father who said that he wants his children to go to college, but he also wants to keep them close:

I understand the system because the children look for opportunities, look for jobs and studies. I understand the topic and I think I am going to experiment with [my daughter]. But I do think that it is something very beautiful of the Latino family, have the children, be aware if they need anything, help. If she decides to move, perhaps at 18, 20 and she wants to go, I would not like that she would go from one state to the other [...]. So it is something from the Latinos that I would like to stress ... that the family always stays united, close.

We also found evidence that parents endorse “new” beliefs that they may not have been exposed to in their country of origin and thus do not need to “coexist” with existing beliefs but rather are added as new values to their new repertoire of “bicultural beliefs.” For example, participating Latino immigrant parents whose children attend childcare might be constantly exposed to messages about the importance of reading to their children at home that they eventually internalize and put it into practice in their homes. They understand that they have a role to play in supporting their children’s development and many parents reported incorporating literacy activities into their daily routine. These activities included, for example, encouraging their children to read for a certain amount of time each day or reading a book as part of the bedtime routine. Parents who said they initiated reading also reported taking parenting classes or reported higher educational levels than those who did not. A Mexican mother who participated in parenting classes shared her literacy routine:

I have always given him [her son] the rule that he has to read to his little sister a book. He reads... he is three

years old, but he reads to his sister, he cannot read it but he reads the figures [...] and the teacher asked me how do I do it? It is because I have a rule, I took a course on how to be better parents [...] it helped me a lot.

However, reading to their children daily was not an easy task for all parents. Many parents said that reading did not come naturally to them. Often they were tired and did not want to read themselves but were receptive if the child initiated the activity. They attributed children’s interest in reading to the childcare center. For example, a Mexican mother stressed the initiative of her four-year-old daughter: “...she grabs her book and looks for me all over the house until I sit down to read it...” There is some support in the literature that children’s interest in reading explains why parental reading is linked to children’s language skills (Malin et al. 2014). Our findings suggest that children’s interest might be a factor that predicts parental reading, especially among parents with low levels of literacy skills.

The coexistence of beliefs from differential cultural group is possible if they are valued and held in high esteem, but it is not possible if they are not or if they are rejected. Our participating parents were clear in articulating which American values they felt were not compatible with their own. One such value was centered on how to discipline children. Participating parents shared with the group that their belief in the use of physical punishment was incompatible with the “no physical punishment” value in American society. Parents felt conflicted and expressed concern about how to best discipline their children. A Mexican father said:

In this country you can’t hit your children like before in your country... because at six or seven years of age the children here already go to school and they tell them, if their parent wants to spank their children, they say “No, I am going to call the police.”

When two sets of incompatible beliefs are held simultaneously, there is a resulting dissonance or tension that may cause conflict (Atzaba-Poria and Pike 2007; Farver et al. 2007). Conflict due to incompatible beliefs can be a source of stress, depending on whether it is accepted or rejected. In our study, participating parents seemed to have resolved this apparent conflict by accepting the “American way” of disciplining. Participating parents reasoned that they like the American way of using “time out,” and, as suggested by their children’s childcare providers, they often take away privileges, such as TV or favorite games, when their children are misbehaving. The issue of what modes of discipline are culturally appropriate across socioeconomic status (SES) groups and what modes of discipline should not be promoted regardless of the cultural practice is an

important issue that merits further investigation (Gershoff 2002). Our findings with low-income immigrant parents suggest that many immigrant parents are open to non-physical forms of behavioral control practices (Calzada et al. 2010).

Strategies Parents Use to Teach Their Children Values and Beliefs

A second aim of this study was to examine *the strategies parents used to transmit values and beliefs to their children*. Our data revealed that parents use three strategies with their young children: *consejos* (giving advice or talking to their children), modeling or teaching by example, and setting routines.

Giving consejos to toddlers might seem developmentally inappropriate, but our participating parents reasoned that it is better to start early. A father explained the importance of giving advice to his 3-year old daughter:

... that is something that I am going to explain to my daughter, how she has to behave, so she knows the consequences that come with it [consequences of joining a gang]. I have to tell her “this is bad and do not do this because it is going to cause problems... look at what happens,” put the example of other people; tell her what to do, give her advice... I believe it is very important also so that she can look and say “oh yes, that is bad”

Another father of a girl added to this, saying:

I think that the most important thing is to teach since they are kids...the good thing is to say, “Listen.... Do you think it is good for these kids to do this or that? No, that is bad” talking to them since they are little kids, that is the most important “Look at those kids over there, they are not doing the right thing,” then they start developing a sense of what is right and was is not and they say “OK.”

Parents in our study also emphasized that *being a good role model and teaching by example* were important ways for children to do the right thing. Parents believed that no matter how young children are, they are observing and learning from their parents. In the words of a Mexican mother of a 4-year old girl: “Being...a good mom, a good dad is to give the kids a good example [...] because we are the models, the parents... and our kids are going to be our reflection.” For example, one way that parents hoped to teach by example is by enrolling themselves in school and teaching their children the value of education. Showing by example and talking about the sense of sacrifice and self-motivation that it takes to work and go to school at the same

time will help their children to work hard and succeed in their own lives. The same mother later added:

My girls always ask me “Mommy, why do we go to school?” or “Why do you go to school?” and I tell them that I go to school because I want to learn and I want to study because it is very important to study [...]. “Only if you have studies and preparation you are going to move forward, so you all have to study.” You have to give them a desire to go to school and with them, well, I do my homework on the weekends and there I give them a book that they read [or] painting and as they see me learning English... it also helps.

Parents in our study also recognized the importance of *establishing routines* to teach children the rules of comportment but were also painfully aware that this was very difficult given their hectic lives. The majority of the parents were aware that it was difficult for them to visit family members, go to church, and “be there” for their children because of the competing demands that work placed on their time. As one mother commented: “My life is... [chaotic]. I don’t have a routine and it worries me.”

Despite feeling stressed because of their inability to sustain routines for their children, many parents told us of their efforts to mitigate the impact of work-related pressures on their children’s daily lives. A father talked about the stressful work schedule during the week that leaves him with little time with his two children. Like many parents in this study, for him weekends are the time to spend with the family and a great opportunity to establish routines:

Every day the same thing [long working hours and no time to spend with his children], except Saturdays, for example today she woke up first and she came “daddy, I want waffles, I want to go to *Los Gringos*.” Saturdays we automatically have breakfast together in *Los Gringos*...

Constraints in Raising Children

In our third aim we explore *the constraints that parents face in raising their children*. Our data revealed three sets of constraints, ability to balance work and family, low levels of human capital, and negative intergenerational parenting experiences. These constraints may have differential impact on how parents interact and provide for their children. In particular, balancing work and family is a relatively new emerging issue that has been less extensively studied among low-income families (for a review see Bianchi et al. 2010)

Balancing work and family is a consistent source of stress for participating parents, who reported that the demands of work (long hours at work and changing

schedules) compete with the demands of being a parent (spending time with children, establishing routines). This was especially difficult with young children who demanded a lot of attention and care. Being a worker and meeting all the demands of working many jobs for many hours was incompatible with their belief that being a “good parent” means spending time with your child. They felt that the pace of life in the United States is very hectic, leaving little time to engage in activities they value with their children, and instilling in them fear and apprehension that they are not being good parents and that their children will suffer. A mother explained:

It is difficult to raise the children here...here I feel like it is harder to give them time...[...] I feel that one is always over time, that you run to school [...] so, I feel that it is time, time to be with them, to pay attention to them, to what they do or don't do... time.

Similarly, a Mexican father of a four-year-old boy spoke with stress about the lack of time he has to spend with his child in fun activities:

...once I get out of work I pick him up from her [grandmother's] house ... and once we get home, we cook something, and then it is already too late to go out, so I can't take him out [to the park]; it is 7 or 8:30 pm.

Parents in this study shared the stress of many low-income families in the United States whose employment conditions often include irregular and inconsistent work hours that make it more difficult to establish regular, organized family routines (Vernon-Feagans et al. 2012)

The majority of our participants reported being limited by their *low levels of human capital* that included little formal education and low English proficiency. They viewed their lack of education as a major constraint to raising children in the United States because it limited opportunities—such as good jobs—for them and their children. Having low levels of education appeared to be a source of insecurity and lack of confidence that may threaten parents' adaptation as well as their self-esteem and sense of efficacy in believing they can help their children succeed. A Mexican mother of a four-year-old boy noted: “... sometimes, since one does not know the language, one cannot help [with their school work].”

One Salvadorian father of a 3-year old girl spoke about this:

Yes, I believe that it [formal education] is the most important thing. It is good to go to school, not like us who we did not go. They [the children] want us to help them with their homework...but how can I help?”

Negative intergenerational parenting is another constrains and consequently a source of stress about which

participating parents spoke emotionally. They viewed their often negative experiences with their own parents as important barriers to being good parents, particularly affecting how they express love and concern for their children. Many participating parents reported being left behind as children in the care of relatives, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, when their own parents immigrated to the United States (Suarez-Orozco et al. 2002). These separations were painful, and they prevented them, now parents themselves, from developing healthy and strong relationships with their caregivers and attachment bonds with their own parents when they reunited with them. These difficult emotional experiences left them without good role models, not knowing how to express love and affection to their own children. A Mexican mother of a 3-year old boy said:

For example in my case I grew up without a dad, without mom because my parents came for the American dream [...] I grew up as, “why my parents leave me behind?” When I was 14 my mom came back and my dad was already dead. I never met him and then I say, “I did not have that, so I'll give that to my children,” then I say that many parents make the mistake of coming here and leaving the children there, and it is not worth it. Many parents are dedicated to work, not to their children, they are not dedicated to the children and the children grab gangs, walk in the streets...

A similar situation of abandonment, this time for a different reason, was narrated by a Mexican father of a three-year-old who said: “...my mother worked and left me alone, I stayed with my brothers... we took care between siblings.” Our parents' psychological reality of not having had a close relationship with their parents made them more reflective about the value of family. As with most people, the ideal belief (e.g., familism) is often difficult to attain because of barriers or challenges (e.g., family is not close by) but it is still a worthy goal. A young couple in the focus groups discussed the difficulty of raising children in the United States; they raised the possibility of sending their 2-year old child back home to spend quality time with her family. However, they were emphatic saying that it would be only for a period of time: “But not to stay, because he is so young, that when he sees he is there for a long time he will say “ok, I'm here alone, my parents left me and now I'm here alone”, he will get angry.”

Resources in Raising Children

We also asked participants to talk about the *resources* in their lives that help them cope with adversity and stay focused. Our data revealed that optimism and motivation to

do the best for their children were important psychological resources.

Almost all participants talked about being *optimistic* as an important source of psychological wellbeing. Dispositional optimism, a general sense of hope and wellbeing in the face of adversity and a disposition to look on the more favorable side of events, might be a protective factor in immigrant families (Kao and Tienda 1995). Optimism might motivate people to persevere in time of crisis and use more effective coping strategies (Carver et al. 2010). Many of our parents echoed this sentiment and firmly believed that being positive and optimistic will help them and their children to cope with difficulties. This quote from a Mexican mother of a 3-year old boy illustrates this point:

And our kids are going to be our reflection and if we always are taking in the bad things, by the first thing they are going to be destroyed. If we look at life positively, they are going to see things positively, and they will go on overcoming the obstacles that are presented to them in life.

Parents' optimism was evident in their strong beliefs that the United States is a "land of opportunity" where individuals who are self-motivated can achieve their goals. Fathers and mothers in this study believed that despite the difficulties of living and working in the United States, they and their children will find more opportunities here than "back home." A Mexican father stated: "I think that it is not difficult, [to succeed in the United States] at all, the difficulty is created by one alone, everyone is able to do it here... here there are opportunities for all."

Parents' narratives also revealed high levels of *motivation to succeed*, which is another resource they use to work and raise their children. To be motivated means to be moved to do something; people who are intrinsically motivated engage in activities that interest them without the necessity of material rewards or constraints (Ryan and Deci 2000). Parents in our study revealed that although they may be not able to spend as much time as they would like with their children, they are motivated to make many sacrifices and put their children's wellbeing above their own by giving them an education that they could not do "back home". The story of a Salvadorian mother reflects this unflinching desire to get ahead. She enrolled her child in a bilingual childcare center even though she had to wake up at 6 am every day after working past midnight to make it to the center on time: "I bring her [to childcare], it does not matter what time I get out [from work]... for example yesterday I got out at three in the morning." Other couples reported organizing their work shifts (e.g., the mother worked during the day and the father at night) around their child's childcare to closely monitor their child.

Many parents used the adversity in their lives as a "teaching moment" and source of motivation for themselves and their children. The story of a 24-year-old Mexican father who did not finish third grade reflected this point: "I tell him [his son] all the time that he needs to study hard, because he can't be like me, I want him to be better than I am." Other parents, despite their tight schedules and multiple obligations, reported making great efforts to build their own human capital. For example, a father who works in the construction field and described the hard conditions of his job stated:

My education was through GED, but I missed out and that is what I am working on right now... it gives more advantage, many more advantages, to look for a better job. For example, at my work, I work outside for 8 hours in the cold or heat or for many more hours...and there are days when I don't want to, that I wake up and ahh!... I am studying now, English and after that I am going to start with my GED and after I am going to see if I can look for a career, something technical.

Discussion

Using Weisner's (2002) ecological framework as a conceptual guideline, we explored the values and beliefs, as well as the strategies, that Latino immigrant parents use to raise their young children in the United States. We also explored both the constraints that create challenges and the resources that make childrearing easier for these parents. Overall, important themes emerged that point to challenges as well as opportunities in both understanding the context in which immigrant parents raise their children and hypotheses that can be tested with future research.

The main parenting goal that emerged in this research is that parents wish to rear children who are bicultural and want them to learn values that reflect both mainstream American society as well as their country of origin so they can adapt to the mainstream culture and live happy and productive lives. In this way, our findings are consistent with previous research that has explored the process of being bicultural from different disciplinary perspectives (e.g., Parra-Cardona et al. 2012; Portes and Rumbaut 2001, Santiago-Rivera and Altarriba 2002). These past studies suggest that immigrant parents actively and intentionally foster their children's competencies in the mainstream culture even if they do not perfectly match their own personal values (e.g., Farver et al. 2007). However, our findings go beyond research that shows parents' desire to rear bicultural children by including parents' views of the resources and constraints that facilitate or hinder the adaptation process,

especially when their children are toddlers, a period in development that is especially demanding for parents and foundational for children as they must develop autonomy, self-regulation, and language capabilities needed to succeed in school and beyond (Thomason and La Paro 2009).

In line with previous research (Harwood et al. 1995; Leyendecker et al. 2002) mothers in this study talked about the importance of *respeto* and strong ties to the family as characteristics of their culture of origin. However, a new finding is that fathers also view *respeto* and familism as important values signaling that these couples might parent in a context of support an agreement that is beneficial for children. Our findings are in line with the process of “selective acculturation” (Portes and Rumbaut 2001) suggesting that immigrant Latino parents are willing to adopt values and beliefs they considered American, such as independence, in order to create a meaningful context of socialization for their children. Our findings go beyond what is reported in the literature by suggesting that Latino parents purposely and selectively chose “good” values from each culture, such as autonomy and independence from American culture and value of family from Latino culture, because they believed that being “bicultural” would support adaptation in the United States. Although there is coexistence of beliefs, as others have found, we also find evidence that some beliefs, such as those about discipline, are amenable to change if parents are given alternative ways to discipline their children. Parents in our study were willing to reject their Latino value of using physical punishment and accept the American value of timing out or reasoning to get children to comply. These findings are in line with Calzada et al. (2010) qualitative data that showed that even though Latino mothers considered spanking to be necessary for children, parents could adopt an American approach of punishing children by taking away privileges. This is an important adaptation process and speaks to the value of childcare centers in the lives of children of immigrant families.

Lastly, many parents were also willing to include into their repertoire of beliefs, “new” values such as the importance of reading to young children. Although they recognize that this is not the norm “back home,” they fully endorse it because they see it as important for their children to succeed. Overall, our findings shed light into the complex process of adaptation and becoming bicultural and go beyond coexistence of beliefs by including an active process of rejection of some beliefs and endorsement of new ones (Keller 2003; Tamis-LeMonda et al. 2008).

The process of raising bicultural children described by our participants needs also to be understood in the context of class (Cheadle and Amato 2010; Lareau 2002, 2003; Sherman and Harris 2012). While adapting norms and values of the host country can increase the chances of

becoming successful by, for example, moving into a middle class status, it is individuals’ levels of education or human capital that is most important (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). For example, our participant by being part of the community of Early Head Start become more familiar with the “middle-class American parenting practices” (Lareau 2002) and consequently may be more likely to incorporate some of them into their parenting practices. Head Start Centers or parenting programs may be beneficial for parents by encouraging them to adapt more “concerted cultivation” type of strategies in their parenting practices such as literacy practices and discipline strategies (Tam and Lee 2010). These findings suggest that being of a particular SES or class is not deterministic, parents can adapt different strategies if exposed to them.

Fathers and mothers in our study seemed to favor reasoning and talking or giving children *consejos* and teaching by example (i.e., modeling) to promote positive behaviors in their children. Consistent with previous studies on older children (Azmitia and Brown 2002), parents in our study described using *consejos* to communicate their expectations to their children, especially when they are still young. Participating parents firmly believed that incorporating “life lessons” in their everyday conversations with their young children gave them an opportunity to shape them into good people. Not only is this finding important from a socialization point of view—using reason to explain and pass on important lessons to children—but it is also important from a language development perspective. Contrary to many studies that suggest that Latino children are not hearing a lot of language at home (e.g., Guerrero et al. 2013) this finding suggests that this view might be an artifact of our measuring tools. Children may not be exposed to formal literacy support such as reading, but they are exposed to informal literacy support including hearing *consejos* on a daily basis. Thus, giving *consejos* and advice could be considered culturally specific literacy practices that promote language skills. Studies with African American children have highlighted the importance of exposure to storytelling from their parents in their language skills (Gardner-Neblett et al. 2012).

Another strategy reported by parents in this study was the importance of learning by observation or teaching by example; that is, *showing* their children the behaviors and attitudes they value (Rogoff et al. 1993). Fathers and mothers said they use the example of their sacrifice and perseverance as an important modeling technique for their children to learn from these experiences, helping them to succeed in life. Parents in this study felt an enormous responsibility to set a good example for their children, because they recognized the central role of parents in children’s socialization. They also recognized that because of their low human capital they can be role models only in

some ways, such as promoting motivation, sacrifice, and work ethic. Why parents enrolled their children in childcare was not a question addressed in this study; however, based on our findings, it could be that enrolling their children in childcare is a way to ensure that their children have other role models (i.e., teachers) who promote areas in which they feel less qualified, such as academic achievement.

Our findings also suggest that Latino parents, like all parents, face constraints that add additional stress to the parenting process. One of these was balancing work and family. As previous studies with middle class samples have shown, the balance between being a parent and being a worker often creates tension, conflict, and stress (Parasuraman et al. 1996). Our findings show that balancing work and family is an important source of stress, not just for middle-class families, but also for low-income families. Parents in our study realize that being employed is important for economic stability, and in several cases both the mother and the father work outside the home, which may disrupt family functioning. Parents expressed special concern regarding the difficulty of establishing family routines and engaging with their children. They are not able to spend as much time as they would like with their children, but they revealed various ways in which they try to overcome this constraint. These workarounds included adjusting their work schedules (e.g., the mother worked during the day and the father at night) in order to closely monitor their child, keeping their 2-year-old up at night until very late so that she can spend some quality time with her father who works evenings or waking up early after working late in order to ensure their child's attendance at Head Start. These findings highlight the importance of understanding the developmental niche of Latino children and offer insight into how some aspects of their lives that can offer economic support, such as having a job, can also create stress if they interfere with parenting and child development (Super and Harkness 2002).

Many parents in our study had a distant relationship with their own parents, which contributed to their perception of negative parenting experiences during their childhood. The parents in our study were themselves left behind in their native country by their parents who immigrated to the United States looking for economic opportunities. As they grew up, many of these children immigrated to the United States in search of their parents. Their narratives of feeling abandoned by their parents and lacking positive parenting roles while growing suggests that having an absent parent may influence one's own parenting style in negative ways. Studies have noted that the impact that absent parents can have on the parenting style of their children may depend on the reasons for the absence. For example, a study of Mexican families showed that migrant fathers who were absent from their children had better relationships with them than fathers who were absent due to divorce (Nobles 2011).

However, our study shows that father absence might have a negative impact on children even under benevolent conditions if this absence is perceived by children as abandonment. Participant's narratives suggest that the lack of parenting roles may add a new source of stress for these parents and make it harder for them to related in a positive way with their children. A robust body of research shows that individual's attachment patterns are important predictors of their parenting behaviors (van IJzendoorn 1995), but studies of immigrant parents do not always include parent's attachment behaviors. There is no reason to think that this association (i.e., attachment and parenting) would differ among this sample, thus including this aspect when studying Latino immigrant families may help to better understand the sources of variation in parenting as well as the points of intervention.

Despite multiple stressors, parents' narratives also spoke about optimism and motivation as important psychological resources. The disposition to look on the more favorable side of events has been conceptualized as a protective factor in immigrant families (immigrant optimism hypothesis) and a condition that may help explain the immigrant paradox (Kao and Tienda 1995). The few studies linking optimism to later outcomes in immigrant families have shown that parents' positive attitudes in life are related to better parenting and social skills for their children (Castro-Schilo et al. 2013). Parents in this study consider optimism and motivation to be important dimensions in the socialization process that will help their children succeed. These findings suggest that the way parents in this study cope with the constraints of the context may function as protective factors for their children's development. The exploratory character of this study, however, constrains the possibility of making definitive statements about the impact of these parental characteristics on children's outcomes.

This study faces other three main limitations. First, as is typical of qualitative research, this study has the limitation of being based on a small non-random sample and may suffer from self-selection-bias due in part to the way the sample was recruited (from Early Head Start Centers). According to national data, only 52 % of Latino three to six years of age attends early childcare centers (Child Trends 2015). The characteristics of our sample may be related to the immigration circumstances of these families and other unobserved characteristics that may affect the levels of vulnerability and psychological stress with which they have to cope (García Coll and Marks 2009). These sample characteristics restrict its generalizability to other Latino parents raising children in the United States.

Second, due to space constraint, parent availability, and difficulty in recruiting fathers, we were not able to recruit more fathers consequently the focus groups sessions were conducted with fathers and mothers. Although, we did not

observe that fathers were intimidated by mothers (or vice versa), in the future, it might be important to conduct separate focus groups for each mothers and fathers.

Third, this study relied exclusively on parents' perceptions. Parents described their values and parenting practices; however, we can't know how they actually parent. Observational data of parent–child interactions may have contributed with direct information about their daily socialization practices. However, in light of this limitation, using narrative data may be beneficial in the sense that parents are able to share their thoughts, explanations, and perspectives related to the phenomenon under examination. While sharing their stories in a narrative format, parents are able to express an elaborated account of their experiences, helping the researcher understand the how and why of the process under analysis.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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