



Do Low-Income Latino Children’s Narrative Representations of Parenting Predict their Academic Skills and Social Relations at the End of First Grade?

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Introduction

A child’s academic success and social adjustment are influenced by values and cultural beliefs that guide parenting. Parenting styles are typically looked at through the dimensions of warmth, parental control and autonomy expectations and are self-reported by parents (Domenech, Donovick & Crowley, 2009). Studies have found that higher levels of parental warmth, control and autonomy are associated with academic achievement. In contrast, harsh control, neglectful and permissive parenting styles have been shown to negatively impact children’s academic success (Pinquart, 2016).

Mother’s education is another important predictor of academic success. Studies have repeatedly found that a positive correlation exists between her education level and children’s test scores and academic success. This is especially true for children in low-income households, who start school at a disadvantage (Magnuson, 2007).

The values of “respeto” and “familismo” are Latino family values that parents try to teach their children. The value of respeto stresses that children respect and listen to adults without interrupting. Family is viewed as a strong social and emotional support and the guidance of the family is valued (Calzada, Fernandes & Cortez, 2010). We believe that when children internalize the positive values of their parents’ culture, children may be more successful in school. High warmth and high control is a parenting style associated with the best social and academic outcomes for white, middle class children (Domenech, Donovick & Crowley, 2009). However, in a Latino cultural context studies have added the dimension of protectiveness. In a study of 46 fathers and 49 mothers of Mexican (81%) or other Latino (17%), the majority of parents were categorized as protective, while about one-third was categorized as using both high warmth and high control (Domenech et al., 2009). Parenting styles also varied by children’s gender. Warmth was relatively equal across gender, but parents were found to grant girls less autonomy than boys and also to show more control and to have higher expectations for girls (Domenech et al., 2009).

The Current Study

The current study looks at parenting and academic achievements through a new lens: through children’s narrative representations in response to story stems about challenging family interactions.

Research Questions

- Q1: Do children’s narrative representations of protection, affection and discipline predict their academic skills and social relations at the end of first grade?
- Q2: Do these findings differ for boys and girls?
- Q3: Is mother’s education level correlated with academic outcomes and does it correlate with the amount discipline is represented/ the kind of discipline the mother uses?

Methods

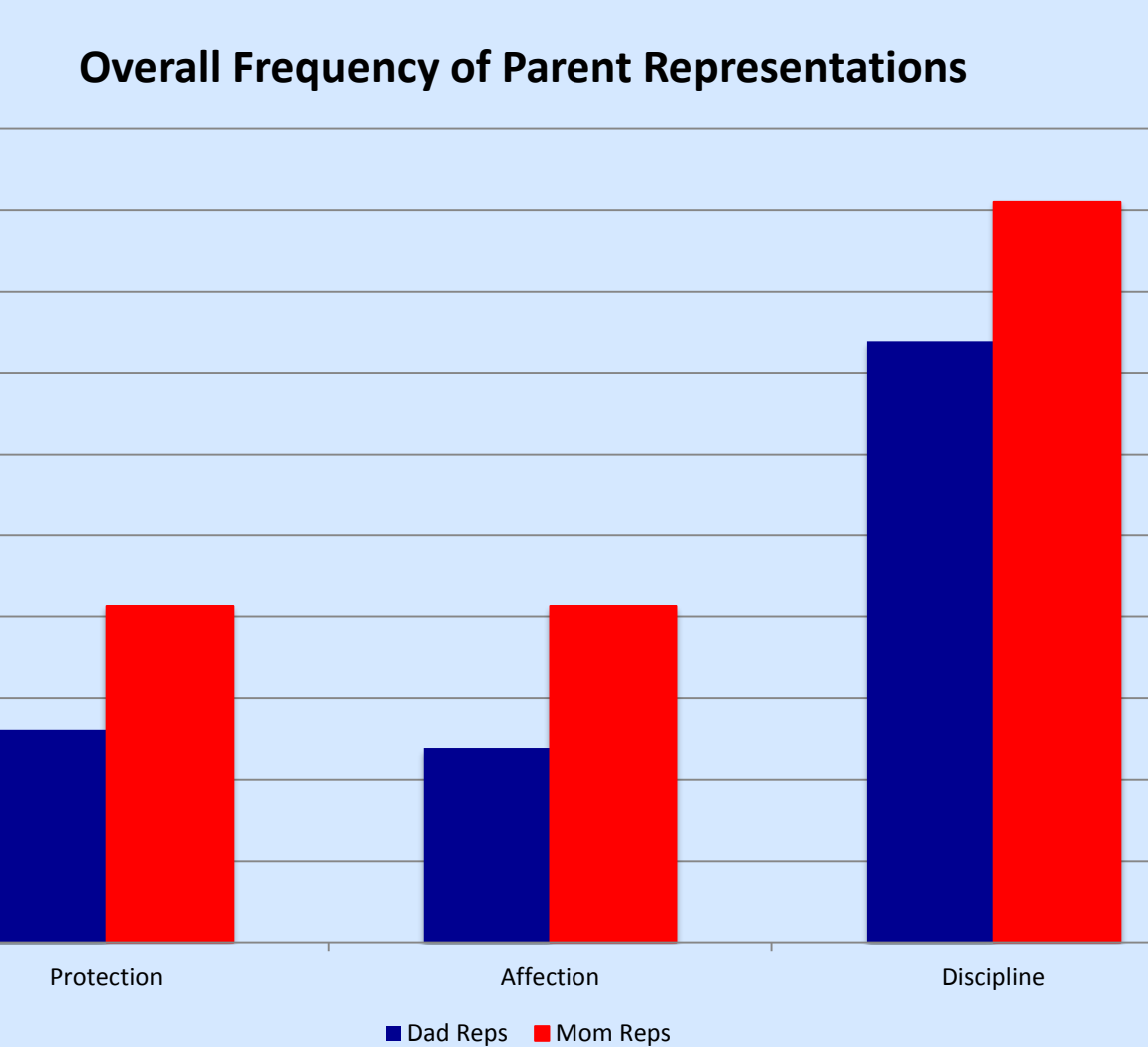
Sample

- Participants were 46 English speaking seven-year-old Latino children (24 girls and 22 boys). They were a part of the longitudinal Early Head Start National Research and Demonstration Project (Love et al., 2005)
- Mothers were enrolled in the study when they were pregnant or their children were less than one year old
- The average age of mothers at enrollment was 22 years old
- Majority (64.4%) of mothers were married
- 54.3% of mothers at enrollment had completed less than a high school degree

Procedures

- Data from age 7 assessments conducted in the children’s homes were used
- During this visit, each child was invited to complete the story stem assessment and the narratives were recorded. Four stems: Band-Aid, Hot Soup and Stolen Candy (MSSB; Bretherton, Oppenheim, Buchsbaum, Emde, & MacArthur Narrative Group, 1990) and Bedtime (FAST; Shamir, Schudlich, & Cummings, 2001)
- Through the use of small dolls (mom, dad and two child siblings) and props, examiners told the beginning of each story and then after the dramatic high point of the story the child was invited to tell the examiner what happened next
- Examiners also administered assessments of children’s academic skills during this visit
- Teacher ratings were obtained for the children at the end of first grade

Description of Story Stem Narratives in Two Contexts	
Story Stem	Dilemma
Band-Aid (Injury)	While breaking the rules and cooking with a knife, the child cuts his/her hand and screams out for a Band-Aid. The parents rush in to see what happened.
Hot Soup (Injury)	As the child is cooking with the mother, he/she is told to wait until the soup cools. The child is impatient and reaches for the hot soup regardless. The child ends up spilling it all over his/her hand.
Stolen Candy (Defiance)	While on a trip to a local store, the child asks the parents for a candy. The parents say “no.” As the parents turn their backs and walk out of the store the child steals a candy of the shelf, but is caught by the store clerk.
Bedtime (Defiance)	While watching TV with his/ her parents, the child is told to go to bed because there is school tomorrow. The child refuses.



	Injury + Misbehavior		Misbehavior	
	Band-Aid N=35	Hot Soup N=46	Stolen Candy N=46	Bedtime N=46
Dad Rep	14.3%	4.3%	10.9%	4.3%
Mom Rep	31.4%	17.4%	6.5%	2.2%

	Injury + Misbehavior		Misbehavior	
	Band-Aid N=35	Hot Soup N=46	Stolen Candy N=46	Bedtime N=46
Dad Rep	8.6%	4.3%	6.5%	15.2%
Mom Rep	14.3%	8.7%	8.7%	23.9%



Measures

Story stem parent representations: focused on the presence or absence of positive and disciplinary parental representations in children’s narratives.

Positive Representations included:

- **Affection.** Actions by parents considered to be affectionate, warm or caring
- **Protectiveness.** Representations of a parent protecting a child from possible or actual harm
- **Helpfulness.** A parent that helped or assisted the child when needed
- **Caretaking.** A parent that showed successful caretaking actions such as tucking them into bed or feeding them
- **Discipline.** A parent that acted as an authority figure, set limits or told the child what to do
- The initial variable was coded as zero if discipline was not present, and one if it was. The discipline representations used in this investigation were then categorized as positive or purely disciplinary. To aid in the reporting of our results, we coined the terms Just Discipline and Warm Discipline. When just discipline by itself was represented, without any positive rep the story was coded as Just Discipline. When a story had both any positive representation and also limit setting it was coded as Warm Discipline.
- **Woodcock-Johnson Achievement Tests** (Woodcock & Johnson, 1989): post-first grade assessments from Letter Word Identification, Passage Comprehension, and Applied Problems
- **Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)** (Dunn & Dunn 1997): age 7 Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test scores
- **Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS)** (Pianta 2001): STRS is a report of teachers’ perceptions of their closeness to individual students- conflict, dependency, and closeness scales of the STRS
- **Social Skills Rating System (SSRS)** (Gresham & Elliott 1990): SSRS teacher reports focusing on the social skills of self-control, assertion, and cooperation
- Measure of **mother’s education** – ordinal scale: 1= less than high school, 2= High school or GED, 3= more than high school

Discipline/ Control Representation	Injury + Misbehavior		Misbehavior	
	Band-Aid N=35	Hot Soup N=46	Stolen Candy N=46	Bedtime N=46
All Discipline/Control	25.7%	10.9%	52.2%	32.6%
Warm Discipline	20%	2.2%	13%	15.2%
Just Discipline	5.7%	8.7%	39.1%	17.4%

Discipline/ Control Representation	Injury + Misbehavior		Misbehavior	
	Band-Aid N=35	Hot Soup N=46	Stolen Candy N=46	Bedtime N=46
All Discipline/Control	45.7%	43.5%	69.6%	73.9%
Warm Discipline	42.9%	39.1%	13%	28.3%
Just Discipline	2.9%	4.3%	56.5%	45.7%

Significant Correlations Found for Boys

	Protection		Affection		Mom Discipline		Dad Discipline	
	Mom	Dad	Mom	Dad	Just	Warm	Just	Warm
Letter Word Identification								
Passage Comprehension								
Age of Mother								
Mother’s Education								
STRS Conflict								
SSRS Assertion								

Significant Correlations Found for Girls

	Protection		Affection		Mom Discipline		Dad Discipline	
	Mom	Dad	Mom	Dad	Just	Warm	Just	Warm
Letter Word Identification								
Passage Comprehension								
Age of Mother								
Mother’s Education								
STRS Conflict								
SSRS Assertion								

Results

Distribution of mother and father representations across stories:

- Reps of mothers and fathers differed in frequency
 - Discipline most frequent representation- especially by mom (almost entire sample at least once)
 - Overall- mom represented in more stories in all representations
- Reps differed based on story- children responded to the stories differently- injury vs misbehavior
 - Stolen candy is only story not based in the home, without a direct “caretaking” action

- **Q1:** No relationship was found between parent reps and academic skills and social relations using Pearson correlations for the sample as a whole.
- **Q2:** Important gender differences- Independent t-tests reveal differences between boys and girls representation of Mom Warm Discipline: $t(44) = 2.425, p = 0.019$ – Girls represented more than boys. Protection and affection did not differ by gender.
- **Q3:** Children of mothers that had a higher education level had better language ($r = .322, p < 0.05$) and math ($r = .268, p < 0.1$) and children represented mothers in the story stems as Just Discipline more frequently ($r = .386, p < 0.01$)

Discussion

Story stems tap children’s internalized scripts for how to resolve challenges with parents

Implications

- For convenience, it was useful to label discipline as warm vs just (meaning without positive representation).
- There is a possibility that the absence of warmth reflected in our variable Just Discipline may be seen as rejecting to a child. The behavior of the parent may not be intentional, but the child’s perception is what affects their outcomes (Rohner, Khaleque & Cournoyer, 2012)
 - Just Discipline by mom led to negative academic outcomes for boys and Dad Just Discipline was associated with higher conflict ratings for girls
- Parent boys and girls differently? Strictness/ varying expectations
 - more protective mom = less assertion (SSRS) for girls
 - findings suggest that children’s internalized representations of discipline may reflect high expectations of them
 - Older moms more affectionate towards girls and less affectionate towards boys → also seen in use of Warm Discipline
- It is important to listen to children – what they have to say through story stems is important

Limitations

- Small sample size, missing data for the Band-Aid story
- Mom Discipline is represented so frequently partially because in 3 of the 4 stems Mom is the one who sets the initial limit