ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:	LATINO FATHERS' MOTIVATIONS, PARENTAL PLAY, PARENT AND FRIEND RELATIONSHIP SUPPORT, AND CHILDREN'S SOCIOEMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD TO ADOLESCENCE IN RACIALLY-ETHNICALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES
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Parenting practices and parent-child relationship quality, shaped in part by parenting cognitions and beliefs, have a strong proximal contribution to the course and outcome of children's development from early in the lifespan. However, much existent empirical knowledge about parenting comes from studies of White middle-class mothers and children, and there is far less evidence from racially, ethnically, and economically diverse families – especially from fathers. Through a collection of three interrelated studies, the present dissertation contributes to this literature with an examination of fathers' parenting motivations, and mothers' and fathers' independent and interactive influences on child and adolescent socioemotional outcomes among diverse families. Empirical Paper 1 qualitatively explored what motivated first-time Latino fathers in the U.S. to be good parents for their infants, and examined differences in their motivations by nativity status. Fathers described five primary themes, with variation by nativity,

in their parenting motivations: 1) personal rearing history, 2) desire to rear a well-adjusted child, 3) relationship with their child, 4) intrinsic motivations, and 5) sense of duty and responsibility. Empirical Paper 2 examined associations between mothers' and fathers' quality of play (i.e., challenging parenting behaviors, playfulness) at 18 months and toddlers' social competence at 24 months, and tested whether child negative emotional temperament moderated these associations. Contrary to hypotheses, there were no significant associations between mothers' or fathers' two types of play and children's social competence, and no significant moderation effects by negative emotionality. Empirical Paper 3 examined the interactive effects of adolescents' level of support in their relationships with mothers, fathers, and best friends in the 8th grade and associations with depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and externalizing problems in the 9th grade, as well as differences by adolescent sex. There were several interactive effects of the relationships on later depressive symptoms, though not on anxiety symptoms or externalizing problems, and few differences by adolescent sex. More support from one parent was related to fewer depressive symptoms when youth experienced an unsupportive relationship with the other parent or with a best friend. Taken together, the findings of these studies advance developmental theory and provide nuance to our understanding of mothering, fathering, and children's and adolescents' socioemotional developmental processes. These studies have implications for research and programs aimed at promoting the normative, healthy development of diverse youth through recognizing and capitalizing on the contributions of different members within the family system.

LATINO FATHERS' MOTIVATIONS, PARENTAL PLAY, PARENT AND FRIEND RELATIONSHIP SUPPORT, AND CHILDREN'S SOCIOEMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT FROM EARLY CHILDHOOD TO ADOLESCENCE IN RACIALLY-ETHNICALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES

by

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my partner, Stephen Casella. Stephen, I could write this entire dissertation, but I could never fully put into words just how grateful I am for everything about you. From the very first day we met, you have whole-heartedly praised and shown admiration for my research and professional goals (even when I had no idea what I was doing as a 1st semester grad student). From that day forward, you have always been there for me, in the early mornings and the late nights, on the good days and the hard days, to support me on this journey. From waking up to make me breakfast while I got ready to teach, to bringing me endless supplies of coffee and tea while I wrote, to traveling across the country to attend my conference presentations (in Minnesota in the winter, no less), to flowers and champagne when I've reached a big milestone…there is nothing you haven't done to help me be successful and enjoy life to the fullest along the way. And let us never forget the time I even went viral on academic Twitter because of the framed manuscript you gifted me for my first ever publication. Just reading this now, I think one would assume you are a professional PhD boyfriend by trade, but you've managed to do all of this for me while also going through so much personal and professional growth and success yourself. You are one of a kind. I could go on and on, but ultimately I am deeply thankful for the life we've built together over the last five years, especially with our little girl, Pepper (who is the world's absolute best study buddy). I hope you feel the immense amount of respect and love I have for you, and I cannot wait to see where the next chapter takes us.

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General Introduction

Parenting practices and parent-child relationship quality, shaped in part by parenting cognitions and beliefs (e.g., satisfaction, knowledge, goals, attitudes about child rearing), have a strong proximal contribution to the course and outcome of child development from early in the lifespan (Bornstein, 2015; Cox & Harter, 2003). There is ample work demonstrating that parents' positive attitudes toward the parenting role, and their sensitive and responsive interactions and relationships with their children, are related to children's optimal developmental outcomes (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). However, much of what researchers know regarding the developmental impact of parenting cognitions, behaviors, and relationships comes from studies of primarily White, middle-to-high socioeconomic status, mothers and children from two-parent families. We have relatively far less empirical evidence about parenting in racially-ethnically and economically diverse families, and especially from fathers. This is not to say there is a scarcity of knowledge about the impact of fathers on their children; from over four decades of fathering research, many prominent fatherhood researchers contend that we know a great deal more about fathering than we used to, including the predictors, types, and implications of father involvement for child and youth development (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). Research has shown that the quality and quantity of fathers' early involvement are important for children's social skills, academic and cognitive outcomes, and psychological adjustment, both independent from and in combination with mothers' involvement (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013).

Despite this collection of knowledge about fathers, there are still clear gaps in the parenting literature for researchers to address. Ethnic-minority fathers remain largely absent from studies of parenting and child development (Cabrera et al., 2018). Yet, African Americans and

Latinos are the two largest racial-ethnic minority groups in the United States, comprising 12% and 19% of the population, respectively (Jensen et al., 2021). Notably, sociocultural developmental theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1995) argue that not all aspects of parenting are generalizable or homogenous across all groups of parents (i.e., across racial-ethnic groups) due to variation in cultural, environmental, and contextual influences. Since fathering is so culturally embedded, different cultural practices, norms, and values are expected to differentially shape one's parenting beliefs, cognitions, and behaviors (Cabrera et al., 2014). This necessitates additional research with diverse groups of fathers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the variability in fathering beliefs, practices, and contributions to children's wellbeing.

While some researchers have studied the topic of fathering among more diverse samples, many of these studies focus on describing and predicting father involvement (Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013). Comparatively, there is less work that examines the longitudinal associations, and especially the mechanisms, relating fathering to child and youth development in diverse families. While main effects in research are important for understanding direct relations among variables, it is essential from a policy and program perspective for scientists to also test mediating and moderating variables. According to developmental theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Cabrera et al., 2014), development is contextually-driven and complex; there are many factors at multiple time points that directly and indirectly influence one's developmental trajectory. Testing indirect mechanisms enables researchers to better understand the processes and nuances of development, pinpoint how context contributes to children's outcomes, and identify potential points of intervention.

Additionally, a great deal of parenting research has applied theoretical models and assessments/measures of parenting that were developed specifically for mothers and mother-

child relationships (Cabrera et al., 2018). For instance, studies of parenting have commonly focused on assessing behaviors that are associated with mothers, such as sensitivity and responsiveness. While mothers and fathers do show many similarities in parenting behaviors, research has also documented a number of differences (Cabrera et al., 2014, 2018). Yet, fathering researchers have struggled to move beyond a "maternal template" in exploring the potentially unique behaviors, experiences, and relationship qualities of fathers with their children (Cabrera et al., 2018, p. 154). While there are risks to employing an equally-narrow "paternal template" in studying parenting, it is valuable to examine behaviors that are commonly observed among fathers (e.g., challenging parenting behaviors) and to employ various methods (e.g., qualitative and quantitative) to further explore father-child interactions (Cabrera et al., 2018).

Finally, existing research does not often simultaneously account for the effects of mothers and fathers and other relevant figures (e.g., best friends) in children's lives, which poses the risk of overstating the developmental influence of any one person. Accordingly, researchers have argued that it is important to consider children's *network* of close relationships to understand the relative effects of all those who proximally influence children's development (Cabrera et al., 2018; Cox & Paley, 1997). Relatedly, while parent-child relationships remain important during adolescence, friends take on an increasingly influential role during this period. Abundant research demonstrates that parents and friends independently influence adolescents' psychological adjustment (e.g., Furman & Rose, 2015 Laursen & Collins, 2009). But, few studies have tested the interactive nature of mother-adolescent, father-adolescent, and best friend relationship quality in predicting youth adjustment, despite the many psychological and behavioral problems that are common during adolescence (Isomaa et al., 2013).

The current dissertation addressed these gaps in the parenting and child development literatures through a qualitative investigation of Latino fathers' early parenting motivations and quantitative investigations of diverse mothers' and fathers' play behaviors and parent-child relationship quality as related to toddlers' and young adolescents' subsequent socioemotional development, as well as moderators of these relations.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation is comprised of three interrelated empirical studies that explored parenting cognitions, parenting behaviors, parent-child relationships, and children's socioemotional and psychobehavioral development in infancy, early childhood, and young adolescence with ethnically-racially and economically diverse families. Empirical Paper 1 qualitatively explored how a sample of 85 Latino fathers described what motivated them to be good parents for their 18-month-old infants, and variations by nativity status (Ghosh et al., under review[b]). Empirical Paper 2 examined the longitudinal associations between diverse mothers' and fathers' challenging parenting behaviors (CPB) and playfulness at 18-months and toddlers' social competence at 24 months, and tested whether child negative emotional temperament moderated these associations (Ghosh et al., in preparation). Empirical Paper 3 examined the interactive effects of young adolescents' support from their mothers, fathers, and best friends in the 8th grade and longitudinal associations with adolescents' depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and externalizing problems in the 9th grade (Ghosh et al., under review[a]). Taken together, these papers examine within-group variability in parenting cognitions and various pathways linking maternal and paternal involvement to child adjustment among three diverse samples of families.

In the following sections, I review the primary theoretical framework guiding the current dissertation, and I review three key areas of research relevant to the empirical studies in this dissertation. First, I discuss Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) expanded model of father-child relationships. This heuristic model outlines the dynamic and reciprocal processes through which fathers influence their children's development across time, and the model is also applicable to mothers (Cabrera et al., 2014). Then, I briefly review research on fathers' motivations regarding parental involvement. Next, I review literature on mothers' and fathers' play-based behaviors and children's early socioemotional development. Finally, I review research discussing the role of mothers, fathers, and best friends as related to adolescent psychobehavioral adjustment. I conclude with a brief overview of the three empirical papers comprised in this dissertation.

Theoretical Framework

A notable issue in the fatherhood literature is the absence of a grand or universally-accepted theoretical framework of fathering. Thus, fatherhood researchers typically have relied on numerous content-specific microtheories to guide their research (Cabrera et al., 2014). However, Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) expanded model of the ecology of father-child relationships (Figure 1) captures many of the dynamic and reciprocal processes through which fathers (and mothers) influence their children's development. Accordingly, their model is one of the most comprehensive frameworks available to guide and integrate research on father involvement and child development. This model was developed from and incorporates ideas of several other foundational theories in the parenting and development literatures, such as Bronfenbrenner's (1995) ecological theory and Belsky's (1984) process of parenting model.

Cabrera and colleagues (2014) posit that parenting behaviors directly and indirectly influence children's development, and that parenting is multiply determined by various

contextual factors, such as one's personal characteristics, history and culture, work, community, SES, other family members and relationships, and their children. The model also refers to the influence of macro-level factors (e.g., social and cultural circumstances) on parental involvement and family processes. Additionally, the expanded model assumes that the paths linking fathering and child development are mediated and moderated by other variables in the model (e.g., child characteristics). For this dissertation, I explored three primary aspects of the model: 1) parents' personal characteristics (i.e., motivations), which are bidirectionally related to 2) parenting behaviors, which are bidirectionally related to 3) children's development. I also considered factors related to fathers' personal characteristics, such as their history (e.g., biological, cultural, rearing), their socioeconomic status, and other family members (e.g., their child, their partner).

This dissertation used Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) model to consider the various personal and contextual factors that influence parenting cognitions, parenting behaviors, and child outcomes. The first paper in this dissertation qualitatively explored what motivated Latino fathers to be good parents for their young children using thematic analysis. Thus, we framed and discussed our results according to the theoretical predictors outlined in the model, and we used our findings to build upon the model and generate novel insights regarding influences on fathers' parenting motivations. The second and third papers tested associations between fathers' and mothers' play behaviors and parent-child relationship quality and children's developmental outcomes, as well as examined moderators of these associations (i.e., child temperament, best friend support). Therefore, the findings of these three studies contribute to the empirical evidence base regarding the proposed links in Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) model, and moreover they test potential moderators of the relations between parenting and child and adolescent outcomes.

Latino Fathers' Parenting Motivations

Conceptually, fathers who are motivated to be "good parents" maintain higher levels of positive involvement with their children over time and contribute to their children's healthy developmental outcomes (Bouchard et al., 2007; Hofferth et al., 2013). Despite the developmental significance of parents' motivations for involvement, there is a dearth of information about fathers' parenting motivations among socio-demographically diverse fathers, particularly low-income Latino fathers. Low-income and immigrant fathers often face structural, economic, and material hardships which are known to disrupt positive parenting practices and impede paternal involvement (Karberg et al., 2017). Theory and research indicate that men's early commitment to the fathering role lays the foundation for an enduring father-child relationship. There is therefore a need to explore what motivates Latino fathers to be positively involved early on, as well as to examine the within-group variability of these motivations.

Existing research and theory suggests that fathers may be influenced to be good parents by a range of factors (Cabrera et al., 2014). Fathers' motivating factors exist at various contextual levels: the individual, child, family, and cultural levels. For instance, individually, fathers may be driven by their own personal goals and aspirations, their parenting self-efficacy (Bouchard et al., 2007), and their beliefs and attitudes about the paternal caregiving role (Hofferth et al., 2013). Fathers may also be motivated by their child, such as their love for their children, and their desire to support their children's overall wellbeing and success (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016). At a family level, fathers may be motivated by their rearing history and intergenerational factors, such as wanting to either compensate for or model after their experiences with their parents, especially their fathers (Cooper et al., 2019). Fathers may also be motivated by perceptions, feelings, and attitudes regarding their partner or co-parent (Bouchard et al., 2007). From a cultural perspective, Latino fathers may be motivated to be good parents

through the internalization of Hispanic cultural beliefs and values regarding themselves and their children, such as *respeto*, *familismo* and *machismo* (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012). All of these factors may also differ by men's nativity status, which is known to be related to differences in Latino fathers' income, education, and parenting beliefs and practices (Karberg et al., 2017). However, there is a lack of empirical research that explores how U.S. Latino fathers describe what motivates them to be good parents for their infants. Thus, the first paper in this dissertation examined this topic using thematic analysis.

Parents' Play Behaviors

Parent-child play interactions in early childhood are known to be promotive of children's positive developmental outcomes. For instance, parents' physical play with infants (e.g., bouncing, tickling, dancing) help children learn how to focus, follow rules, and get along with others (MacDonald & Parke, 1986). More recently, researchers have examined the influence of mothers' and fathers' challenging parenting behaviors (CPB), or those that encourage children to push their limits, go outside their comfort zone, and exhibit "risky" behaviors in a playful manner (Majdandžić et al., 2016). CPB is theorized to excite and promote assertiveness in children through physical *and* verbal play behaviors, such as tickling, chasing, wrestling games, teasing noises, and cognitively-challenging statements Most available evidence has demonstrated negative associations between (especially) fathers' CPB and children's internalizing symptoms. However, the majority of research has been conducted with White, middle-to-upper class families, and has primarily examined relations with childhood anxiety (Feldman & Shaw, 2021).

Another more recent line of inquiry in the parent-child play literature is the quality of parental playfulness, or the creative and curious manner by which parents play with their children (Cabrera et al., 2017). Playfulness is defined as a special combination of creativity and

fun, as well as positive affect (i.e., enjoyment, amusement) together with a cognitive component (e.g., curiosity and imagination), and it has been positively linked to children's social, language, and self-regulation skills (Cabrera et al., 2017). Although considerable work has examined children's play interactions with peers and with mothers, there is little extant research on the relations between mothers' and fathers' different types of play and children's socioemotional outcomes, especially within diverse families. Accordingly, the second paper in this dissertation examined the longitudinal and relative associations between two types of mothers' and fathers' play (i.e., CPB, playfulness) and toddlers' social competence. We also tested if these associations were moderated by children's negative emotionality.

The Role of Mothers, Fathers, and Best Friends in Adolescent Adjustment

Adolescence is a developmental time period commonly afflicted by the onset and proliferation of internalizing problems (e.g., depression and anxiety) and externalizing problems (e.g., aggression), which may be exacerbated by the co-occurring and stressful transition from middle to high school (Isomaa et al., 2013; Murray et al., 2014). Adolescents' relationships with their mothers, fathers, and close friends are known to influence the development of internalizing and externalizing problems. For instance, research has demonstrated that supportive parent-child relationships promote adolescent well-being (Laursen & Collins, 2009), while unsupportive parent-child relationships place adolescents at risk for socioemotional difficulties (Murray et al., 2014). Adolescence is also a time when peers become increasingly influential in youths' close-relationship networks, and studies have found that supportive friendships may protect adolescents from developing a host of negative outcomes (e.g., loneliness, low self-esteem, behavioral problems; Furman & Rose, 2015).

Despite strong evidence that parents and friends individually impact adolescents' psychological adjustment, these relationships have rarely been studied simultaneously, particularly across the transition to high school. Therefore, it is largely unknown how the relationship with one important figure (e.g., a father) may interact with another (e.g., a best friend) in predicting adolescents' internalizing and externalizing symptoms, and whether this differs by the sex of the adolescent. Accordingly, in the third paper of this dissertation, we examined the interactive influences of mother, father, and best friend support on adolescent depression, anxiety, and externalizing problems across the transition to high school, as well as differences in these associations by adolescents' sex.

Present Empirical Studies

This dissertation comprises three empirical studies that investigate parenting beliefs, parenting behaviors, parent-child relationships, and children's socioemotional development from infancy (beginning at 18 months) to early adolescence (ending at the 9th grade). The studies include three different racially-ethnically diverse samples of mothers, fathers, and children ranging from low-to-high income backgrounds.

Empirical Paper 1, entitled "A Qualitative Study of What Motivates U.S. Latino Fathers to be Good Parents" (Ghosh et al., under review[b]), examined how a sample of 85 first-time U.S. Latino fathers participating in a parenting intervention, Baby Books 2 (BB2), described what motivated them to be good parents to their infants. Using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we explored emergent themes and dimensions of themes from fathers' interview responses that were collected during home visits when children were 18 months old. The findings showed that fathers' sources of motivation to be good parents spanned several time points – their past, present, and future – and the major themes included their 1) personal rearing

history, 2) desire to rear a well-adjusted child, 3) relationship with their child, 4) intrinsic motivations, and 5) a sense of duty and responsibility. Findings also showed variability by fathers' nativity status. This paper contributes to and builds upon existing fathering theories by centering the voices and meaning of immigrant and U.S.-born Latino fathers to elucidate what motivated them to be good parents.

Empirical Paper 2, entitled "Ethnically-Diverse Mothers' and Fathers' Play and Toddlers' Social Competence: Moderation by Child Temperament" (Ghosh et al., in preparation), examined how two types of observed parental play qualities during toddlerhood (i.e., CPB, playfulness) were related to children's subsequent maternal-reported social competence at 24 months, and whether these associations varied based on children's level of negative emotionality. We found no significant relations between mothers' or fathers' CPB or playfulness at 18 months with child social competence at 24 months. Further, children's negative emotionality did not emerge as a significant moderator of these relations. Contrary to past studies, which have identified developmentally promotive effects of CPB and playfulness in primarily White, middle-to-upper class families, the current findings indicate that these play constructs may not be universally beneficial for all children and all socioemotional outcomes. However, further research is needed to replicate and understand these patterns.

Empirical Paper 3, entitled "Moderators of the Associations between Parent-Child Relationship Support and Adolescent Psychological Adjustment During the Transition to High School" (Ghosh et al., under review[a]) examined the interactive influences of mother-adolescent, father-adolescent, and best friend-adolescent social support on adolescents' depression, anxiety, and externalizing problems across the transition from middle school to high school. Results indicated several interactive effects of the different relationships on later depressive symptoms,

though not on anxiety symptoms or externalizing problems. Specifically, more support from one parent was related to fewer depressive symptoms when youth experienced an unsupportive relationship with the other parent or with a best friend, supporting a compensation hypothesis. Multi-group analyses revealed few differences by adolescent sex (i.e., girls vs. boys). The findings highlight the importance of considering networks of close relationships, including with best friends, in the study of depressive symptoms during adolescence.

Taken together, the three empirical papers in this dissertation advance theory and empirical knowledge on mothering, fathering, and children's socioemotional development in early childhood and adolescence. From early parenting beliefs, to playful parenting behaviors and parent-child relationship support, to child and adolescent socioemotional adjustment, the findings highlight and demonstrate several important theoretical linkages and moderation effects regarding the processes of parenting and child development. Specifically, these studies contribute in novel ways to the understanding of factors that motivate Latino fathers' involvement, and how diverse mothers' and fathers' various types of play behaviors and supportive relationships promote children's later social and psychological functioning. They provide compelling reasons for exploring within-group variability in parenting, for including both fathers and mothers in developmental research, and for considering the contextual factors (e.g., best friend support) that influence variability in children's development. Ultimately, these studies also hold significant implications for research, policy, and practice that aims to promote the normative, healthy development and functioning of youth and families from diverse backgrounds.

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**Paper included in this dissertation*

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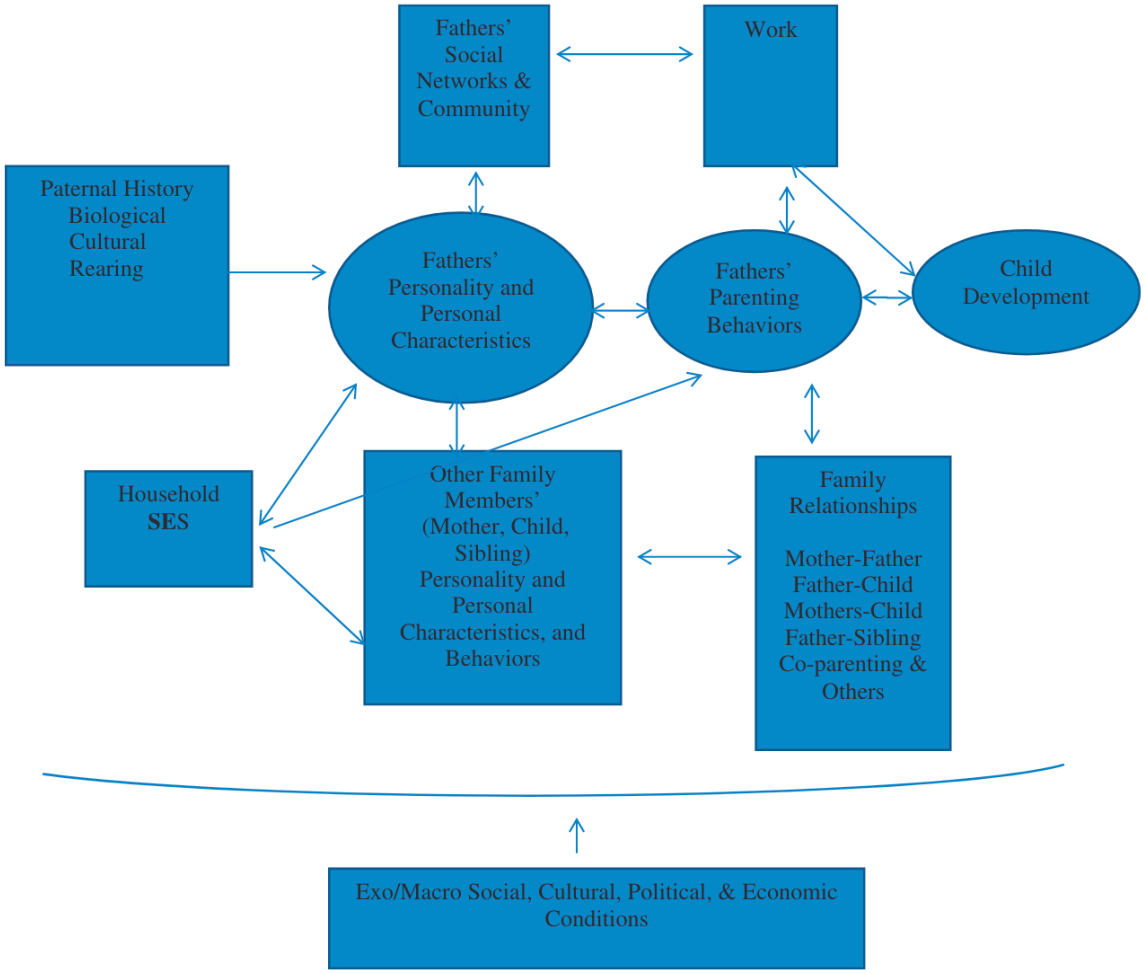
Figure 1

Cabrera et al. (2014) Expanded Model of Father-Child Relationships



Note. Figure is taken from Cabrera et al. (2014), p. 342.

Empirical Paper 1

A Qualitative Study of What Motivates U.S. Latino Fathers to be Good Parents

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A Qualitative Study of What Motivates U.S. Latino Fathers to be Good Parents

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Data availability statement: The study used primary data collection. Thus, the data are not available to the public.

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Abstract

Though ample research and theory suggest that parents' beliefs and cognitions are important predictors of their parenting behaviors, there is little understanding of the parenting motivations of Latino fathers. We explored resident Latino fathers' motivations to be good parents in a sample (*n*=85) of first-time, ethnically and economically diverse Latino parents participating in a parenting intervention in the Washington D.C. area and southern California. Data were collected through structured interviews that were recorded during home visits when infants were 18-months old; the interviews were transcribed and translated into English by bilingual research assistants. We used thematic analysis to explore emergent themes regarding fathers' motivations to be "good parents." Analyses revealed five main themes in why Latino fathers are motivated to be positively involved with their children: 1) personal rearing history, 2) desire to rear a well-adjusted child, 3) relationship with their child, 4) intrinsic motivations, and 5) sense of duty and responsibility. We further explored whether the reasons that motivated fathers to be good parents varied by their nativity status (i.e., U.S.-born or immigrant). We found variations in each of the themes, including that immigrant fathers were more likely to prioritize their children's morals and values, whereas U.S.-born fathers emphasized their child's future success. This study contributes to the limited research on Latino fathers' parenting beliefs. The findings can be used to inform programs geared at strengthening Latine family functioning in the face of adversity through leveraging the personal reasons behind why fathers want to be good parents.

Keywords: motivation, fathers, Latino, nativity, thematic analysis

A Qualitative Study of What Motivates U.S. Latino Fathers to be Good Parents

Although everyone has different ideas of what it means to be a "good parent," most parents have a general idea, a system of culturally-shaped beliefs and values, of what it means to be a good parent and why they want to be one. Being a good parent in the United States generally includes providing for children both emotionally and financially, and keeping them safe, sheltered, and healthy (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). It also entails engaging in goal-directed behavior, such as spending time, energy, and resources on children, which is driven in part by parents' motivations to be a good parent. Motivation to act towards a goal (e.g., to be a good parent) is understood as a force that explains why people initiate, sustain, and terminate a certain behavior (Graham & Weiner, 2012). Theoretically and empirically, fathers who are motivated to be good parents are more involved with their children and have children with better developmental outcomes (Hofferth et al., 2013). Because motivations are key determinants of parenting behaviors and practices (Bornstein et al., 2018), it is important to understand what motivates men to be good parents. Yet, little is known about these beliefs early in children's lives – an important time for growing and learning (Cabrera et al., 2008). We have even less information about parenting motivations among Latino fathers, who face myriad barriers and challenges that may make parenting difficult (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012; Cabrera & Hennigar, 2019). In this study, we use thematic analysis to examine what motivates Latino fathers in the U.S. to be good parents, and we explore differences in their responses by nativity status.

Theoretical Framework

We draw upon Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) expanded heuristic model of father-child relationships that lays out the dynamic and reciprocal processes through which fathers impact

their children's development, as well as fathers' personal characteristics (e.g., their beliefs, role identity) that predict to parenting behaviors. In particular, this model highlights five potential influences that may shape fathers' parenting beliefs/motivations: 1) his personal history, including his cultural (e.g., race, ethnicity) and rearing history; 2) his social networks and community; 3) household SES; 4) other family members' personality, characteristics, and behaviors, such as those of the mother and child; and 5) his own parenting behaviors. In addition, there are several indirect influences to fathers' parenting beliefs, such as his employment situation, his family relationships (e.g., mother-father or father-child relationship), and his child's development. Finally, all of these factors are overarchingly influenced by the larger social, political, cultural, and economic conditions that families are living in. We use the Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) model because it explains how individual, child, family, social, and cultural influences play a role in shaping fathers' cognitive processes and beliefs. The qualitative nature of our study allows for generation of novel insights that can be used to build upon and expand this model to more specifically capture the experiences of Latino fathers.

Barriers to Being a "Good Father" for Latino Men

Being a good parent is not always easy, especially for parents who face economic, material, and sociocultural hardships and stressors, such as Latino fathers (Lee et al., 2023). Though most Latino fathers live together with their children, this does not necessarily mean high quality and quantity of Latino father engagement (Karberg et al., 2017). Some studies with national samples of Latino fathers and their young children find them to be positively involved (e.g., spend time with them, show warmth and responsivity) in their children's lives (Cabrera et al., 2008, 2011; Wildsmith et al., 2020). However, other studies using national data and comparing levels of involvement across racial/ethnic groups have found resident Latino fathers

of children ages 0 to 18 are less engaged in daily caretaking (e.g., changing diapers, feeding; Jones & Mosher, 2013) and cognitively stimulating activities (e.g., reading books) than are resident Black and White fathers (Wildsmith et al., 2020).

Barriers to optimal parent engagement for Latino fathers could come from individual (e.g., mental health), work, and cultural sources. For instance, a potential barrier to involvement might be Latino fathers' high rates of labor force participation (Karberg et al., 2017). Most Latino fathers, especially immigrant Latinos, report working long hours (Wildsmith et al., 2020). A culturally-related barrier is the circumstances of their migration to U.S.A. Latino fathers can face immigration-related separation from family, or experience racial discrimination, which can result in depression and negatively impact the quantity and quality of involvement (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012; Paredes & Parchment, 2021). Paternal involvement is also related to fathers' adherence to traditional cultural gender norms such as *machismo* (Planalp et al., 2021) and parenting beliefs that emphasize the mother as the nurturing caretaker and the father's role as more instrumental (Karberg et al., 2017; Wildsmith et al., 2020). These beliefs may be especially relevant for foreign-born and less-acculturated Latino fathers. Ultimately, U.S. Latino fathers face a set of barriers that may negatively impact their level or types of father-child involvement, which may in turn compromise their children's developmental outcomes. Fathers' sense of motivation may be a key factor for those men who maintain high levels of engagement with their children (Wildsmith et al., 2020), despite barriers and contextual difficulties.

What Motivates Latino Fathers to be "Good Parents"?

Because research on parenting motivations of Latino fathers is quite limited, we review the few studies that identify fathers' (and mothers') motivations to parent more broadly, and we review studies on Latino parents whenever possible. We organize this literature review in line

with contextual influences described in Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) model that are relevant to parenting motivations, namely, fathers' rearing history, personal characteristics, the family context, and the cultural context.

Fathers' Rearing History

According to Cabrera and colleagues (2014), fathers' rearing history and childhood experiences with their own parents is predictive of their personal characteristics (e.g., parenting motivations). A study of 185 African American men with adolescent children showed that men's intergenerational factors (e.g., childhood involvement with their father, beliefs about their father figure) were related to their fathering role ideologies (Cooper et al., 2019). Oftentimes, the effect of men's experiences with their parents on their own beliefs and parenting is framed through either a compensation hypothesis or a modeling hypothesis (Floyd & Morman, 2000). Meaning, fathers either report having a negative childhood and parenting experience that motivated them to compensate with their own children, or they had a positive experience that they wanted to model after. This similar idea was expressed among a sample of Mexican and U.S. Latino fathers, in that the men described both a transmission (i.e., parenting similarly) and a transformation of the fathering values and behaviors they had experienced with their own fathers (Taylor & Behnke, 2005).

Fathers' Personal Characteristics

Fathers may also be driven to be good parents by their personal characteristics, such as their goals and aspirations, their sense of parenting competence, and their beliefs and attitudes about the father role (de Haan et al., 2009; Hofferth et al., 2013; Macon et al., 2017). A study with low-income, racially diverse fathers found that fathers who perceived their parenting role as an investment in their children's development had more involvement in caregiving than those

who perceived financial provision as their primary parenting role (Macon et al., 2017). Alternatively, a study of expectant Canadian fathers found that men with stronger biological essentialist beliefs (e.g., believing women are better caregivers than men) had weaker intentions regarding their future childcare involvement, whereas men with a greater sense of control over external barriers in their life had stronger involvement intentions (Ross-Plourde et al., 2022). Fathers' sense of interest, satisfaction, challenge, or meaningfulness regarding the parenting role, or their feelings of internal and external pressures to be involved, are also motivating factors (Jungert et al., 2015). In a qualitative study of immigrant Latinx mothers (n = 20) and fathers (n = 10) with young children (ages two to four), parents' personal experiences with external adversities were a main source of motivation to do better for themselves and their children (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016). In an explorative study of five Latino fathers, the men viewed themselves as personally responsible to be involved in their child's education, and drew upon their own experiences with schooling, as well as their religious beliefs, as motivating factors (FitzGerald et al., 2019).

Family Context

Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) model describes several influential aspects of the family context, including child characteristics, the father-child relationship, and the mother-father relationship. Fathers may be motivated to be good parents because they love their children and want to ensure their children's wellbeing (Li & Meier, 2017). Aldoney and Cabrera (2016) found that immigrant Latine parents with young children wanted to make sacrifices for their children's wellbeing and education, and Latino fathers deeply believed in the importance of children and their innate responsibility to care for and promote the success of their children. Additionally, FitzGerald and colleagues (2019) found that fathers felt motivated to support their children's

educational success in part because of invitations they received from their children to be involved in their schooling. Relatedly, Taylor and Behnke (2005) found that Latino fathers were concerned with generativity and intergenerational transmission of values to their children, especially the importance of a good education, strong work ethic, and *respeto* (i.e., respecting parents and elders; Cruz et al., 2011). At a family level, fathers may be motivated to be good parents by their partner or spouse, such as their perceptions of partner and coparenting support (Ross-Plourde et al., 2022). For instance, Bouchard and colleagues (2007) found with a sample of educated French-Canadian fathers of preschoolers, that men's perceived partner support for their parenting competence was related to fathers' own sense of parenting competence, which was then related to fathers' parenting motivations (Bouchard et al., 2007).

Cultural Context

The cultural context in which fathers live and rear their children shape their parenting beliefs, including their motivations to be good parents (Planalp et al., 2021). Cultural norms and values are important determinants of expected and socialized behavior in each particular cultural group. Latine cultural values such as *respeto*, *familism* and *machismo* emphasize respect, commitment to family, and masculine gender roles, and are important to Latino fathers and shaping fathering behaviors (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012; Planalp et al., 2021). Aldoney and Cabrera (2016) found that immigrant Latine parents highly prioritized socializing their toddlers to have Latine cultural values and beliefs such as *respeto* and a strong sense of family, as well as American cultural values such as autonomy. Further, a study of Mexican-origin U.S. fathers found that fathers with higher levels of positive *machismo* (i.e., *caballerismo,* including dignity, honor, respect, and commitment to family and providing; Arciniega et al., 2008*)* had 5th-grade children who reported greater positive father involvement than fathers with lower positive

machismo (Cruz et al., 2011). Similarly, in a study of low-to-moderate income Mexican-American fathers with 5th-grade children, Mexican-identified men were more likely than U.S.-acculturated men to engage in caretaking and participate in "feminine" activities, contrary to macho stereotypes (Coltrane et al., 2004). Overall, Latino fathers may feel encouraged to be good parents because of their adherence to cultural norms that emphasize fulfillment of family roles (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012).

Overall, there is little information about the reasons that motivate Latino fathers to be "good parents" despite the challenges and barriers they face. The few existing studies with Latino fathers do not shed light on the types of motives that underly their fathering behaviors (Cabrera & Bradley, 2012). Theoretically, multiple factors at different levels of the ecological system encourage parents to be involved, such as rearing history, love of the child, and cultural values. But, as described by Cabrera and Bradley (2012), "Research on Latino fathers is insufficient to warrant definite or highly specific conclusions…and it is not at all clear how findings apply across Latino subgroups" (pp. 235-236). Accordingly, more research is needed to understand and investigate the within-group heterogeneity of Latino fathers' parenting motivations among a larger and more diverse sample of Latinos with young children.

Differences in Motivations by Nativity Status

As evidenced by recent events, immigration is a source of political and social strife in the United States. Regardless of the level of documentation, immigrants, who are born elsewhere, have a different set of lived experiences and access to resources that have short- and long-term consequences for family well-being (Campos, 2008). Nativity status (i.e., native-born or foreign-born) is an important lens through which to understand variability in Latino fathers' parenting motivations because it reflects differences in men's context, culture, and life experiences, which

differentially shape one's beliefs and cognitions (Campos, 2008; Karberg et al., 2017). Efforts to understand the heterogeneity of Latines has revealed stark differences by nativity status in Latino fathers' characteristics, values and beliefs, and parenting behaviors (Karberg et al., 2017; Planalp et al., 2021; Taylor & Behnke, 2005; Wildsmith et al., 2020). Moreover, immigrant fathers face a distinct set of pressures and barriers in their day-to-day lives compared to native-born fathers, which can uniquely shape their beliefs and behaviors. For instance, immigrant Latino fathers report significantly lower incomes and education levels than U.S.-born fathers (Karberg et al., 2017; Wildsmith et al., 2020), and they more often work non-standard hours (Crosby & Mendez, 2017), all of which might jeopardize their ability to parent (Cabrera et al., 2014). Indeed, Wildsmith and colleagues (2020) found that immigrant Latino fathers reported engaging in fewer daily activities (e.g., reading, bathing, playing) with their young children (ages zero to four years) than did U.S.-born fathers.

Additionally, immigrant fathers tend to endorse more traditional views from their home culture on parenting roles (Karberg et al., 2017; Planalp et al., 2021; Wildsmith et al., 2020). D'Angelo and colleagues (2012) found with a large dataset ($N = 787$) that immigrant Latino fathers showed lower levels of caretaking and positive engagement with their infants than did U.S.-born fathers, which was partially explained through immigrant fathers' more traditional attitudes (e.g., gender division of labor in the home). Although we did not find any studies that examined nativity status differences in fathers' parenting motivations, there is ample evidence to suggest that immigrant and non-immigrant Latino fathers have meaningfully different parenting experiences, beliefs, values, and behaviors. Therefore, we would expect Latino fathers' parenting motivations may also differ based on nativity status, and this topic warrants further exploration.

The Current Study

There is limited empirical evidence that identifies the sources from which Latino fathers draw meaning to sustain positive engagement with their young children. Most of our current understanding of parenting beliefs and cognitions comes from studies with mothers, while few studies have examined variation in parenting motivations with a sample of ethnic-minority, economically-diverse fathers, particularly those with infants. Thus, we draw on Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) model of father-child relationships and explore the following question using thematic analysis: How do Latino fathers in the U.S. describe what motivates them to be good parents? In order to explore the variability in our sample of 85 first-time fathers with 18-month-old children, we also explore descriptive differences in motivations between U.S.-born and immigrant Latino fathers.

Method

Participants

Data for this study were drawn from a subset of the Baby Books 2 (BB2) project (Authors blinded for review, 2017). BB2 is an NICHD-funded bilingual (i.e., English, Spanish) eight-wave parenting intervention involving 210 ethnically and economically diverse families from the greater Washington D.C. area and Orange County, California. Mother and father couples were recruited from community spaces (e.g., community centers, physician offices, hospital waiting rooms, farmers' markets). Parents had to meet the following criteria to qualify for the initial home visit: be co-residing (i.e., mother, father, and child must be living together), be first-time parents, and have an annual household income of up to $75,000 or 300% of the federal poverty line for a family of three.

For the current study, fathers who self-identified as Latino or Hispanic and had complete data at the 18-month home visit were included ($N = 85$). The fathers in this sample ranged in age

from 18 to 41 years (M = 28.5, SD = 6.0). The level of education varied: 28% had less than a high school education, 25% had a high school degree or equivalent, and 47% had some college or more (see Table 1 for sample demographics). Most of the fathers in this sample were immigrants and not born in the United States (N = 58; 68%); see Figure 1 in the Supplemental Materials for a bar graph of fathers' countries of origin. The majority of fathers was English/Spanish bilingual (73%). There was also variation in reported household income: 24% of fathers reported household incomes of $20,000 or less per year, while another 24% of fathers reported an annual family income of $60,000 or more. All of the fathers lived with their child and their child's mother; 45% were married and 42% reported "living as married/engaged."

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected during home visits with a team of Spanish-English bilingual researchers interviewing fathers when children were 18-months-old. To understand what motivated fathers to be good parents, a structured interview procedure was utilized in parents' homes. The researchers followed a set script and began by saying: "Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about being a parent" or the equivalent sentence in Spanish ("Ahora le queremos hacer algunas preguntas sobre ser padre"). Then, the researcher asked fathers a set of six open-ended questions, and provided ample time for fathers to give their verbal responses. For the current study, only responses to the following question were analyzed: "What makes you want to be a good parent?"; "¿Qué le hace querer ser un buen padre?" due to our specific interest in fathers' perceived parenting motivations. The researchers were also instructed: "If parents don't understand the questions, try rephrasing them or ask them to provide examples," though this was infrequently required. On average, fathers did not have extensive responses to the set of questions (i.e., interviews lasted around five to eight minutes on average), and fathers' responses

were video-recorded on an iPad. All fathers consented to participation and all procedures and materials were reviewed and approved by two universities' Institutional Review Boards.

Interview Transcriptions

A team of 15 Spanish-English trained bilingual research assistants (RAs) transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim. Spanish interviews were transcribed and then translated into English. After the initial transcription/translation, a second group of RAs read the transcriptions as they watched the video. Any discrepancies between the video and the transcription/translation document, were corrected. A third RA verified the transcript by watching the interview video and reading the transcript.

Thematic Analysis

We used a 6-phase thematic analysis to identify, analyze, and interpret themes in our data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012; Terry et al., 2017); by becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. This process was done using an inductive or "bottom-up" approach, meaning our themes were data-driven and strongly tied to the data themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, as developmental scientists who are familiar with the fatherhood literature, we inevitably applied our own positioning and theoretical lens (Terry et al., 2017) which can narrow our "analytic field of vision" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86).

Each member of our research team began by reading the transcripts several times to gain familiarity with the data. We then took preliminary notes and made memos about our global impressions and thought processes, which was followed by initial code generation to identifying recurrent patterns. We structured these as potential codes with labels, descriptions, and example quotes and excerpts from the interviews in a shared spreadsheet. We also added our thoughts,

questions, ideas, and memos on the shared spreadsheet so everyone could view each other's memos. We allowed the data to invoke and provoke a set of meaningful labels, and we named the various extracts of data to define our emergent codes (e.g., "intergenerational," "child happiness"). Most of this semantic coding (i.e., identifying themes at a 'surface' level based on what participants explicitly said; Braun & Clarke, 2006) was first done independently. We then met once a week as a team over Zoom during a period of six months to discuss our thoughts and to reach consensus on our set of codes. We engaged in lengthy dialogue and debate on our choice of language and interpretations of meaning, with all changes to the codebook requiring agreement from all four researchers doing thematic analysis. We also brought with us sensitizing concepts to the analysis (i.e., existing theoretical ideas and concepts that helped guide our inquiry).

Next, we progressed to searching for, reviewing, and defining themes by consolidating, expanding, comparing, and modifying codes and themes. For example, our theme of "intergenerational motivations" was divided into several distinct sub-themes or dimensions of the theme (e.g., "wants to be like his parents," "wants to be different than his parents," "didn't have a father"). This step involved group discussion and consensus building among the researchers, as we re-assembled the fragmented data by examining how different codes and themes fit together. We worked on generating specific definitions and names for each main theme and dimensions of the themes, and we examined the overall story being communicated through our data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This ended with a final codebook. However, after taking a three-month pause from the project, we completed another round of transcript reading and engaged in another, briefer round of reviewing and defining our themes. This resulted in the emergence of several codes we had not clearly observed before (e.g., "wanting his child to have

more than what he had"), removal of codes that were deemed less salient, and some re-organization and re-definition of our existent codes and categories (e.g., "relationship with his child" became a main theme, rather than a dimension under the previous main theme of "motivated by sense of family"). Finally, three researchers from the team (including the first author) used Dedoose software to code the 85 transcripts using the established codebook. Each transcript was coded by at least two of the researchers in order to establish consensus, and the codebook continued to be updated throughout this coding process whenever necessary.

Data Quality

To establish a rigorous and credible process, we used several commonly recommended strategies based on Guba's (1981) model of trustworthiness of qualitative research, including reflexivity (i.e., assessing the influence of our own personal history, background, perceptions, and interests on the research process), triangulation of investigators (a team of five researchers), and peer examination/peer debriefing with multiple impartial colleagues versed in qualitative methods and fatherhood research. Regarding reflexivity, as a team of heterosexual women, one of our biggest barriers was our lack of matching identity with fathers. Further, as primarily non-Latine academics, we brought to the data coding particular sets of norms, values, beliefs, and expectations. The identity differences between us as researchers/authors and the fathers in this study likely influenced our interpretations of their words, leading to more etic than emic interpretations. However, given that this study relies on structured and fairly brief interviews with fathers, the analysis did not require extensive personal interpretation.

To aid in determining the dependability of the findings (i.e., the consistency), we provide a rich description of our research methods in this paper (e.g., data gathering, analysis, and interpretation), and we engaged in a code-recode procedure for peer examination. We chose not

to calculate statistical measures of inter-coder reliability because some researchers have argued this measure to be unwarranted or inappropriate (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020). Further, researchers have argued that this type of numerical measure may be less important than peer debriefing and reaching consensus as a team.

Differences by Nativity Status

We further investigated patterns and frequencies among the coded excerpts to identify descriptive differences in themes between immigrant versus non-immigrant fathers. We used the Code Application by Descriptor charts in Dedoose (i.e., "Codes x Descriptor") with the normalize function turned on (i.e., to normalize the raw counts based on the demographic descriptor ratio; Dedoose, n.d.). These charts represent the number of excerpts that have been associated with a particular code separately by each sub-group within the descriptor field (e.g., U.S.-born versus foreign-born within the nativity status descriptor). We used the normalize function in Dedoose because a graphical representation for code application frequency by sub-group can be misleading if there are unequal numbers of individual cases (i.e., fathers) across the sub-groups (Dedoose, n.d.). Specifically, in our sample, our subgroup of foreign-born fathers is disproportionally larger (68%) than the subgroup of U.S.-born fathers (32%). Regarding each proportion we report below, the appropriate interpretation would be: of the fathers who were coded as having X motivation (e.g., "motivated by their rearing history"), Y% were immigrant (or U.S.-born) fathers. Notably, this was not a formal statistical test of differences in fathers' motivations by nativity status, but rather a qualitative investigation of differences in our applied codes based on graphs of the relative frequencies.

Findings

Five themes emerged from the data regarding how first-time Latino fathers described what made them want to be good parents: 1) personal rearing history, 2) desire to rear a well-adjusted child, 3) relationship with their child, 4) intrinsic motivations, and 5) sense of duty and responsibility. We also examined the themes that were most salient for immigrant versus non-immigrant fathers in order to more deeply explore the variability in our sample.

Motivated by their Personal Rearing History

When asked about what makes them want to be good parents, fathers frequently discussed their own experiences, positive or negative, of being parented and how it motivated them to be good parents for their children. Four dimensions of this theme emerged: a) modeling their own practices after their parents/childhood experiences, b) rejecting/avoiding parenting as they were parented, c) wanting their child to have more than what they had growing up, and d) lacking a father role model growing up. Many fathers, the majority of whom were immigrant (2/3, 66%), shared positive experiences growing up and described wanting to model their parenting based on their own parents. They described re-living their positive childhood experiences with their own child. For instance, an immigrant Peruvian father described how he was inspired by his own father:

> What drives me to be a good parent is looking at the success that my father has created with us as a family. I think we all came out pretty okay in terms of our siblings and looking back at it…I guess I can say it's a tribute to the parenting that our parents gave us…to be able to just come out in the real world and make good choices because there is always…the right path and the wrong path in everything we do.

Similarly, a U.S.-born Latino father stated he too was motivated by his father, "I don't know, he [child] just reminds me of myself when I was younger and I know how much my dad and them cared for me so it's, you know, lead by example…" Other fathers shared how they rejected and

avoided the way their own parents reared them. This was more common among immigrant fathers (3/5) who intentionally strived to be different from their own parents. For instance, a U.S.-born Mexican-American father said:

> Oh, the fact that my relationship with my father was not perfect growing up, and not because of me but because of issues, my parent's marriage. And I feel that I need to give my son the best blueprint that I can give him.

Moreover, a Latino father born in El Salvador reported that he wanted to break away from traditional Hispanic cultural norms and opposed the traditional use of corporal punishment among Latine parents. He hoped to break this cycle of violence and educate his child through different means:

> What motivates me to be a good dad is not repeating the chain that one brings like the family. Because in the Hispanic culture…we always say 'I raise my kids because this is how they raised me' so, but that is like a taboo that us Hispanics have especially in the Hispanic culture, but I do not want, I do not want to raise my daughter like they raised me because a lot of things occurred...hitting. Like one who is Hispanic says you educate with hitting. I personally do not think that with hitting you educate a child, so not committing the same mistakes that were made with me, that is a priority.

Some fathers, especially those born in the U.S. (over ¾), wanted their child to "have more" or have a better life than what they themselves had growing up. These fathers did not criticize their own parents, they just wanted different for their children. For example, a father born in Honduras said "Just to give my child, it sounds cliché, but, a better life than I had." Furthermore, although some fathers, only US-born, had no father role model growing up, they wanted to be a good role model to their child. A U.S.-born Latino father said:

> I was raised without a dad so I want her to have what I did not have and I just want to see my kid be successful in life, like you know, do things that I didn't do that I wish I would have done but couldn't have.

Another U.S.-born father of Mexican and Salvadorian origin said that he did not grow up with a father, and he would not want to put his son through that experience:

> I grew up pretty much without a father figure, so I always told myself that I wanted more for my child. I wouldn't want him to, I wouldn't want him or her to go through what I went through growing up.

Motivated by their Desire to Rear a Well-Adjusted Child

Fathers were also determined to be good parents so that their children would develop into well-adjusted individuals. This theme included five dimensions focused on fathers' goals for their child: a) happiness/healthiness, b) development of good morals and values, c) becoming a good person/member of society, d) having the best/have everything/having resources, and e) successful future and life. Many fathers described wanting to be a good parent simply because they wanted their child to be happy and healthy (e.g., "…making sure everything is fine and that he has very good health.") and several expressed how that goal was rewarding in itself (e.g., "Just seeing her smile every day.") Similarly, fathers often reported wanting their child to "have the best" or "have everything," and some were specific to opportunities, materials, and education. For instance, a Salvadorian-born father stated "Giving him a good clean healthy space, making sure he always has his food, toys to play with, giving him everything he needs, that he has clothes."

Related to this idea were fathers' motivations to ensure their child would have a successful life and future. Though individual fathers may define success differently, various men (over half of whom were U.S.-born), made statements such as: "I just want to see my kid…be successful in life" and "So that (she) can be happy, have the best future possible." These men were focused on the more distant future. Another aspect of child adjustment that motivated

fathers, mostly commonly immigrant fathers (3/4), was for their children to have good morals and values. One Latino father born in Ecuador said, “It is important to be a good father so that we can leave children with good teachings, children with good values, children with good principles, hardworking children, honest children.” As included within these principles, some fathers described wanting their children to value the family unit and uphold family traditions. A Latino father born in Colombia said:

> What makes me want to be a good father is to want to make my kid the habit of being at home with the family. To keep a family tradition and make a citizen able to provide for the people.

Relatedly, fathers described wanting their child to grow up to be a good person and member of society, contributing to their communities, the world, and future generations. One Mexican-born father said “I want her to be able to have a great heart so that she can help other people.” Further, an Ecuadorian-born father stated:

> My greatest concern as a father is that they can be people for good, responsible and that they can contribute to being a better society or a better community, a better country, a better world for them and for the future generations that they have.

Finally, a Latino father born in Peru stated “I dream that she is a good person, a person with a good future who can contribute something to this life, to this world and that is my wish, that’s my motivation, to being a good father.” These men spoke to not only their generativity, but the future generativity of their children, and showcased the more community-oriented, collectivistic values of *bien educado* and *familismo.* Ultimately, for many fathers it was not just about their child turning out well, but that their child would be of service to others and make a lasting impact on their family, community, and world.

Motivated by their Relationship with Their Child

A distinct theme of Latino fathering motivations, especially for immigrants, was that many fathers wanted to be good parents because of their regard for their relationship with their child. This included four dimensions: a) wanting to have a positive father-child relationship, b) loving the child, c) wanting to watch the child grow up, and d) wanting to be a good role model. Several fathers, mainly immigrants (3/4) reported that they wanted to have and maintain a strong, positive relationship with their child. For example, a Latino father from El Salvador said "It is very important for me to be a friend for my daughter, that is something I want before being a father." Fathers also mentioned wanting their child to have a secure base, or for their child to have a comfort zone in them. These men communicated wanting their child to feel loved and not alone, as well as to feel securely attached with the family.

Numerous fathers described that they were motivated to be a good parent simply because they loved their child. A U.S.-born Latino father highlighted his strong feelings of love for his son, "The fact that he's here and he's the beacon in our life for both my wife and myself." Another U.S.-born Latino father stated "First and foremost, my love for him. Ever since I met him, I suddenly fell in love with him, and so that makes me want to be a good parent." Incorporated within this dimension, many fathers also said that the child in the is what motivated them to be good fathers. Often, fathers would respond to the interview question simply by saying "she does," or "him," and pointing at their child. Further, a father born in Mexico said:

> Her smile, at first when I first found out that I was going to be a parent I was scared, I had no idea what I was going to do, and now I am here and like, it just random thoughts pop up in my head of her make me want to work harder, she is the motivation herself.

Fathers' desires to watch their child grow up was expressed as wanting to be present for their child's life journey and to see their development unfold over time. One Mexican-born father said

"What makes me want to be a good parent? To see how she's growing every day." Additionally, a father born in Bolivia said "Just being there for his experience, or being present for his growth, that's it." Fathers, many of whom were immigrant (over ¾), also wanted their child to have someone to look up to and to provide a good example for their child's future. They also wanted their child to think of them as having been a good role model once they are grown. A father born in El Salvador said:

> Sometimes I believe that when my daughter grows up she will have the image of her dad who woke up at 5 in the morning to fight for her… Because right now my daughter even if you do not believe it, but she is retaining information like a computer a lot of images and a lot of things that she sees me doing right now and she just observes… and she is taking in all these images.

Another Latino father born in Ecuador described his son's perceptive nature:

> I believe the fact that knowing that he is growing up and that you are being an example, then everything he sees me do or the things he hears me say he'll try to imitate them and if I do not do things well, he also won't because I am a mirror for him. So, I think that the fact of, uh, knowing how I do things so that he can follow the example and, little by little realize that we are transmitting good things to him.

Both of these men noted how their children were observing and learning from their actions, which motivated them to be a good influence and model positive behavior.

Intrinsic Motivations

Some fathers, especially immigrant fathers (almost ¾) described wanting to be good parents due to internally-driven reasons, such as it a) coming naturally, b) bringing them joy and satisfaction, c) contributing to their personal development and growth, and d) valuing their family. Some fathers said that being a good parent was just "natural" or came from within, arising from normal feelings that accompany being a father. Several men said being a good father was standard and expected, and indicated they had never even considered the question

before. This was most commonly described by U.S.-born men (2/3). For instance, a U.S.-born father of Mexican descent said "I mean, why wouldn't you want to be a good parent? I don't know, I feel like, she's just, you just want to make her happy, you know, your baby."

Many fathers, most commonly immigrant fathers (over ¾), reported that being a good parent brought them personal joy and satisfaction. These men felt a sense of great happiness and fulfillment from their role as a father. One man born in Venezuela said "I guess I can just enjoy it, I love to be a parent and really this is the most wonderful thing." Some fathers, all of whom were immigrant, also mentioned how being a good father contributed to their own personal growth and development. For instance, being a good father helped some men to become more responsible or just to be a better person. A father born in Mexico said "…you know, keeps me motivated for going to work and doing my job right and getting more, trying to get more..."

Some fathers (3/5 of whom were immigrant) reported that their personal value for their family, including their relationship with their partner, motivated them. They wanted to be good parents because they loved and strongly valued their family, and also because of their spouse's love for their child. One U.S.-born Mexican father reflected this internal value of *familismo*, "My wife considers me to be a good parent because, you know, our relationship has been pleasant to have, so I really want to reflect that to our son so…he may do the same in the future." Another father who was born in Mexico said:

> What makes me want to be a good father is to give a good example for my daughter, for my wife, to have a good communication with my family, want my child to have good values, teach my child to respect to my wife, wanting to be a good example for my daughter, and not wanting to be a bad example. Wanting to be the base of my family, so they respect me, that I respect them, and be good to them.

Sense of Duty and Responsibility

Some fathers described wanting to be a good parent because they felt external pressures and perceived expectations to do so. Specifically, several fathers (most of whom were U.S.-born, 2/3) said that they felt being a good father was their duty or responsibility. For example, Latino fathers reported statements such as: "I feel like it's my moral duty," and "…I need to help them out." Notably, while this extrinsically-oriented motivation emerged as a theme in the data, fewer fathers overall mentioned this influence compared to the other themes described above. We also note that there was great overlap in the themes within individual father's responses, and men often reported a combination of several different motivating factors, such as wanting to instill good values, having a happy child, and feeling obligated to do their best.

Discussion

Our thematic analysis revealed that the reasons for why first-time Latino fathers want to be good parents are multiple; among the most salient are their experiences with their own parents, their desire to rear a well-adjusted child, the value they place in their relationship with their child, an intrinsic desire and personal benefits, and a sense of duty and responsibility. These motivations, theoretically, underly fathers' actions in being a good parent. We also found that reasons to be a good parent varied by fathers' nativity status. We utilize our findings to provide additional context, meaning, and nuance to Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) model of father-child relationships.

In talking about their sources of meaning and what made them want to be good parents, Latino fathers made statements about reclaiming or remaking the past, making the most of their present, and building a strong future for their child. As a whole, fathers were not just focused on day-to-day factors, but rather viewed parenting as a life-long process shaped by experiences that

happened when they were young and outcomes could happen when their children are grown adults. Fathering motivations rooted in their past centered around fathers' personal rearing history and childhood experiences. Drawing upon past modeling experiences from one's own parents appeared to be particularly relevant for immigrant fathers, whereas the lack of positive early experiences was more salient for U.S.-born fathers. In terms of the present, Latino fathers were motivated by their desire to have a well-adjusted child and a positive father-child relationship, and by various internal (especially among immigrant men) and external (especially among U.S.-born men) influences. Finally, regarding the future, fathers noted their desire to rear a well-adjusted child and to maintain their father-child relationship long-term. A focus on the quality of the father-child relationship appeared more commonly for immigrant fathers, whereas U.S.-born fathers were more likely to report a focus on their child's future success.

Rearing History

Findings from our study support Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) heuristic model that fathers' own rearing history is a predictor of their involvement with their children. This showed in several different ways: fathers accepted good parenting, rejected poor parenting, and wanted to give their child what they never had, including a present and involved father. This is consistent with other studies that find that one's own parenting experiences (especially regarding their fathers) informs current parenting behaviors (Cooper et al., 2019; Taylor & Behnke, 2005). The attachment quality men have with their parents has been shown to be related to their attachment relationship with their own children, sometimes positively aligned, and other times in compensatory ways (Volling & Belsky, 1992). This also reflects Taylor and Behnke's (2005) qualitative findings on Latino fathers' transmission versus transformation of behaviors they

experienced from their own fathers. Further, low-income ethnic-minority men's relationships with their own father have been tied to the quality of interactions they have with their children, such that men who perceived their fathers as being highly accepting toward them were more responsive with their own infants (Shannon et al., 2005). Our findings add to this literature by showcasing the importance and complexity of intergenerational factors specifically among Latino fathers.

Desire to Rear a Well-Adjusted Child

Other theoretical influences of parenting motivation include children's characteristics and developmental outcomes (Cabrera et al., 2014) and these predictors were also supported by our findings. Fathers in this study were commonly driven to be good parents because of the type of child they wanted to rear – ones that would be happy, healthy, moral, successful, and good members of society, with sufficient resources and opportunities. These Latino fathers' wishes for their children's wellbeing echo the findings of ample research that has examined parents' (mostly mothers') developmental goals for their children (Suizzo, 2007; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2008). Similarly, past studies have underscored the importance of intergenerational transmission of cultural values to children in Latine families (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016; Taylor & Behnke, 2005). For instance, *educacíon*, *respeto*, *familismo*, and *caballerismo* (positive aspects of machismo) are known to be important values for parents to pass on (Arciniega et al., 2008; Cabrera & Bradley, 2012; Campos, 2008; Halgunseth, 2019). They include education and morality, placing others before oneself, showing respect, and treating others with dignity. Such current motivations for Latino fathers' involvement with children (e.g., wanting their children to have good morals and to value the family) align well with these traditional cultural parenting

goals, and support literature that demonstrates that most parents want their children to be well-adjusted people who embody a range of individualistic and collectivistic values (Aldoney & Cabrera, 2016; Campos, 2008; Suizzo, 2007).

Father-Child Relationship

Also consistent with Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) framework, the quality of the parent-child relationship was an influential factor for our participating Latino fathers. Although the bulk of research on parent-child relationship quality has focused on its unidirectional effects on children's wellbeing, transactional models of development and family dynamics argue that parent-child relationships are dynamic and bidirectional, and thus they mutually affect fathers as well (Cabrera et al., 2014; Schermerhorn & Cummings, 2008). The reciprocal nature of parent-child relationships was also evidenced by fathers in this study who said that being a good parent contributed to their own personal growth and development, and it brought them feelings of joy and satisfaction. While a few studies have tested reciprocal links between child adjustment and father involvement, no studies to our knowledge have examined the influence of the father-child relationship quality on fathers' parenting beliefs and cognitions. However, our findings suggests that Latino fathers highly value maintaining this close relationship over the long-term and they are motivated to serve as positive role models for their children as they grow up.

Social Networks

The fathers in this study did not discuss their social networks or community as influencing their parenting beliefs, contrary to existing theory (Cabrera et al., 2014). Researchers have identified the benefits of social support networks for promoting fathers' involvement with children (Castillo & Sarver, 2012), although this is primarily among non-resident fathers, which

our sample was not. Regardless, some literature has asserted that Latine adults are especially likely to rely on social support from family as compared to other racial-ethnic groups, and that social support is a particularly helpful resource for immigrant parents who have been separated from their extended family and face demographic risks (e.g., low-income and education; Taylor et al., 2015). Conversely, and in line with our findings, a study found that Mexican-origin mothers reported significantly higher levels of social support than did fathers, and mothers' but not fathers' social support was related to their own parenting behaviors (Taylor et al., 2015). This may have been due to the fact that women are more likely than men to seek out and rely on social support in the first place. Indeed, past research has documented the challenges men often face in developing close friendships with other men because of adherence to stereotypical masculine norms (e.g., unemotional, homophobic, tough; Vierra et al., 2023) which may also overlap with aspects of *machismo* (Planalp et al., 2021).

Mother-Father Relationship

Unlike past findings and theory, our participating fathers did not often mention their partner or co-parent as a motivating influence. Much work has identified the importance of mothers (e.g., mother-father romantic relationship, coparenting relationship, fathers' perceptions of his partner's support) in predicting fathers' parenting beliefs, attitudes, and involvement (Bouchard et al., 2007; Ross-Plourde et al., 2022). However, our current findings challenge this notion of a strong maternal influence – few Latino fathers mentioned their partner when describing what motivated them to be good parents. Rather, the fathers largely considered aspects of themselves, their children, or their family more generally as primary motivators. Other studies have similarly noted a lack of maternal influence on fathers. For instance, a study of low-

income, minority fathers (63% resident) found that men's relationship quality with their partners was unrelated to their father-infant interaction quality, which may have been because the vast majority of the fathers reported high-quality partner relationships (Shannon et al., 2005). It is possible that mothers' influences on fathers' parenting beliefs are less defining for co-habitating couples, and past work has identified mostly high-quality, cooperative co-parenting relationships among Latine couples in the U.S. (Cabrera et al., 2021).

Differences by Nativity Status

Many of the differences in motivation between U.S.- and foreign-born fathers in this study can be tied to differences in cultural socialization and internalization of beliefs and values of their countries of origin. For instance, most of the men who modeled after their own parents, and those who rejected the modeling of their parents, were immigrant fathers. This speaks to the nuances of social learning through vicarious experiences with role models. Our findings also mirror those of Taylor and Behnke (2005), whereby the majority of their Mexican-national sample of fathers, but not their U.S. Latino sample, said they simultaneously replicate *and* reform the early experiences they had with their own fathers. It is possible that immigrant fathers' beliefs and behaviors are especially influenced by their own parents because of their endorsement of cultural values such as *familismo* which emphasize family closeness, and the view that one's identity is rooted in their family (Planalp et al., 2021). Alternatively, U.S.-born fathers made up the majority of those who reported wanting their child to "have more" than what they had growing up. Perhaps for the immigrant fathers, this was not as relevant because their situation in the U.S. was an improvement over their sending context (i.e., the conditions in their country of origin and factors for why they left; Taylor & Behnke, 2005), and thus they

considered that their children were already getting more than what they had themselves. Most of the fathers who wanted to serve as good roles model for their children and who were motivated to have positive relationships with their children were immigrant fathers (reflecting *familismo)*. Relatedly, most of the fathers who described wanting their children to have good morals and values were immigrants (connected to traditional values of *respeto and educacíon)*, but over half of the fathers who reported wanting their child to have a successful future were U.S.-born. This difference may be due to U.S.-born fathers' socialization experiences that promote Western-oriented traits like individualism and personal achievement. Finally, the large majority of men who were intrinsically motivated (e.g., fathering brought joy and satisfaction, they value their family) were immigrant fathers, which again reflects a strong sense of *familismo*. Conversely, most of the men who said being a father was just "natural" were those born in the U.S., and this could be because in the U.S., it is now culturally and societally expected that fathers are equally involved in childrearing as are mothers.

Limitations and Future Directions

Though this study makes contributions to the Latine parenting and fathering literatures, it also contains a number of limitations. Since these data were collected for a larger parenting intervention (BB2), less home visit time could be spent on parent interviews. As such, a main limitation was the highly-structured nature of the interviews and inability to probe parents further about their responses. This was sometimes an issue particularly for Spanish-speaking participants, who occasionally misinterpreted the question but who were then not always redirected by research assistants. Another limitation was the translation of the Spanish transcripts, based on the vernacular of 10 different Spanish-speaking countries of the fathers, as

well as several different Spanish vernaculars of research assistants. We often found subtle differences in the Spanish to English translations based on the research assistants' form of Spanish and country of origin. Though our procedure involved three different native Spanish-speakers verifying each transcript, variations in interpretation and translation are possible. Relatedly, all coding was conducted with the English transcripts (we could not directly code from the Spanish transcriptions), given that not all of the authors are fluent in Spanish. As such, we may have missed nuances in fathers' meaning, though we aimed to mitigate this by discussing any questions with RAs who were fluent in Spanish. Finally, this sample of fathers was drawn from couples who were voluntarily participating in a parenting intervention, and thus the findings may not generalize to the larger population of Latino fathers in the U.S.

Future work should continue to explore the within-group variability (e.g., by nativity status or acculturation status) of Latino fathers' parenting beliefs, attitudes, and cognitions, given the potentially predictive influence of these cognitions on fathering behaviors. This work should also be conducted longitudinally to better understand how fathers' motivations change over time as children get older, and as new siblings are born into the family. Such work could be used to understand the dynamic nature of parenting motivations, the connection between fathers' motivations and their paternal involvement, and the relation from motivations to children's developmental outcomes (as well as reciprocal influences). In addition, our participating fathers rarely mentioned their partner or anyone else in their social network as a primary motivating factor for their involvement. It may be worth further exploring these exclusions with other samples of current-day fathers, as the sociocultural definition of masculinity and the role of the father in families continuously evolves over time. Intergenerational influences on Latino

fathering should also be examined in future work; although much past research on this topic has been directed at African American men, the Latino fathers in this study reported nuanced and impactful relationships with their own parents, especially their fathers.

Implications

Parenting motivations shape parenting behaviors, and parenting behaviors are known to shape children's developmental outcomes (Cabrera et al., 2014). Accordingly, understanding parenting motivations is important from an intervention stand-point, particularly for fathers who are at higher risk of negative or uninvolved parenting. This is particularly relevant for low-income and immigrant fathers who face social and structural barriers, and who may endorse non-egalitarian gender roles, that can jeopardize their positive, continued involvement in direct caretaking and child rearing activities (Cabrera et al., 2008; Cabrera & Bradley, 2012; Coltrane et al., 2004). Focusing on parenting motivations offers a theoretically-grounded path of influence to fathers' parenting behaviors; if service providers only focus on behaviors alone without also observing the meaning alongside those behaviors, interventions may be unsuccessful in creating lasting change in parenting. But, understanding a father's motivations and his sources of meaning can help researchers and service providers to more effectively promote (or discourage) certain parenting behaviors, if they can draw from what truly drives fathers to be good parents in the first place.

Conclusion

This study is unique in its exploration of variability among an understudied yet heterogeneous population in the parenting literature: U.S. Latino fathers. We employed a strengths-based approach in exploring a relatively large sample of Latino fathers' motivations to

be good parents. Further, we contribute to the burgeoning literature on differences between the experiences of immigrant and non-immigrant Latino parents living in the U.S. Men with greater motivation to parent well are likely to be more involved, remain involved, and provide higher quality parenting behaviors (Cabrera et al., 2014) – which ultimately benefits their wellbeing, their child's wellbeing, and overall family functioning. We found that Latino fathers' reasons for wanting to be a "good parent" align with findings from fathers (and mothers) across various backgrounds. Personal experiences with parents, love of children, and desire for the best for their children were common reasons, and these motivations were linked to various time points from their past, present and ideal future. If researchers can better understand Latino fathers' motivations to be good parents, as explained in their own words, we may be able to identify ways to best support Latine families' positive paternal involvement and children's wellbeing.

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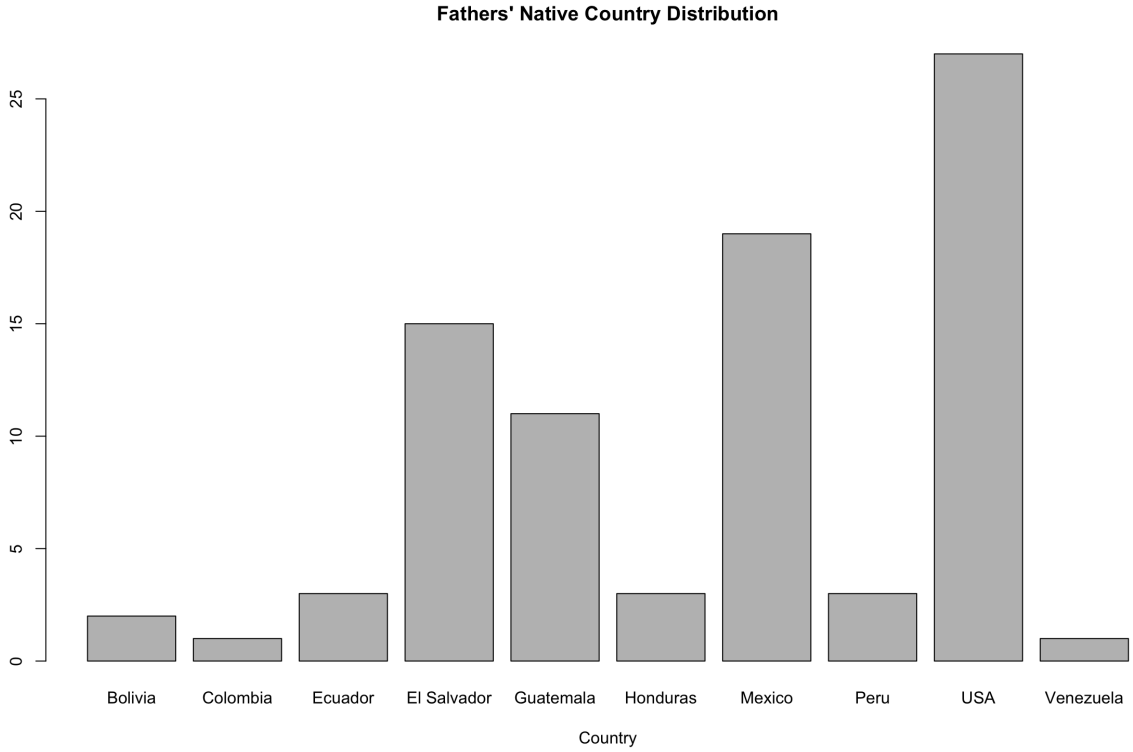
Table 1

Sample Characteristics of 85 Latino Fathers

	N (%)	*M (SD)*	Range
Age		28.5 (5.8)	18-41
Yearly Income		$39,140 ($23,400)	$0-100,000
Education			
Less than High School	24 (28%)		
HS or Equivalent	21 (25%)		
At Least Some College	40 (47%)		
Born in the US	27 (32%)		
Born Outside the US	58 (68%)		
Years in the US		12.4 (7.9)	1-37
Language			
Bilingual English/Spanish	62 (73%)		
Monolingual Spanish	15 (18%)		
Multilingual	6 (7%)		
Marial Status			
Married	38 (45%)		
Living as Married/Engaged	36 (42%)		
Single/Never Married	11 (13%)		
Pregnancy was Planned	53 (62%)		
Site			
Southern California	45 (53%)		
Washington DC area	40 (47%)		
Child Sex: Girl	49 (58%)		

Figure 1

Bar Graph of Fathers' Countries of Origin



Empirical Paper 2

Ethnically-Diverse Mothers' and Fathers' Play and Toddlers' Social Competence: Moderation by Child Temperament

Ethnically-Diverse Mothers' and Fathers' Play and Toddlers' Social Competence:

Moderation by Child Temperament

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Abstract

Parent-child play interactions are some of the most enjoyable activities that parents share with their children, and they are linked to the development of children' early social skills. The present study examined two types of mothers' and fathers' observed play, challenging parenting behaviors [CPB] and playfulness, with their 18-month-old toddlers in an ethnically-racially and economically diverse sample of U.S. families (N = 210, 68% Hispanic, 13% African American). Using structural equation modeling, we tested the relative associations between mothers' and fathers' quality of play behaviors and children's maternal-reported social competence at 24 months, controlling for a set of demographic variables and observed parental sensitivity. We also examined whether children's negative emotional temperament moderated these associations. Results showed that parents displayed low average levels of CPB and playfulness, and there were no significant differences between mothers and fathers in their qualities of play. Consistent with past findings from this sample at earlier ages, there were no significant associations between parents' CPB or playfulness and children's social competence at 24 months. Child emotionality did not emerge as an important moderator of these relations. Further investigation of these parental play constructs among ethnically and economically diverse families is needed to clarify their role in children's social developmental.

Keywords: challenging parenting behaviors, play, fathers, social competence, temperament.

Ethnically-Diverse Mothers' and Fathers' Play and Toddlers' Social Competence: Moderation by Child Temperament

Children's early experiences during the first years of life (e.g., ages zero to five) are foundational because they set the groundwork for later wellbeing and development (Rodriguez & Tamis-LeMonda, 2011; Sameroff, 2010). In particular, the quality of early parent-child interactions during various activities, including engaging in play, is robustly linked to children's social development (Milteer et al., 2012; Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015). Children's social competence, or their ability to effectively engage, communicate, and navigate social interactions, is strongly related to enhanced social, emotional, academic, and cognitive skills as they progress through childhood and beyond (Junge et al., 2020; Semrud-Clikeman, 2007). Play, structured or unstructured, the "universal language" of childhood, is an important part of children's social development, and one the most enjoyable activities that parents share with their children. Play is complex, dynamic, and involves imagination, creativity, and reciprocal engagement between parents and children (Cabrera et al., 2017a). It provides children opportunities to develop social and cognitive skills, and is important for multiple developmental domains, including academic success (Cabrera et al., 2017a; Milteer et al., 2012). As young as infancy, mothers and fathers engage in spontaneous physical play, pretend play, and manipulative object play with their children, and they adapt their play behaviors in response to children's responses and behaviors (Crawley & Sherrod, 1984).

In this study, we investigated the quality of play that mothers and fathers engaged in with their toddlers, and explored the longitudinal relations to children's socioemotional development. Most of the existent research on play in childhood focuses on play with peers (Coplan & Arbeau, 2009), and the research examining parental play focuses mostly on mothers' play behaviors.

There is even less research available with ethnically and economically diverse families (Cabrera et al., 2017a; Deneault et al., 2022). Few (if any) studies have compared the relative effects of multiple types of play for mothers and fathers on children's later outcomes. This is an important area of study because play is one of the most frequent forms of interaction between children and parents (Amodia-Bidakowska et al., 2020; Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015). In the current study, we address these gaps by focusing on the quality of parents' play (i.e., the degree to which play is fun and imaginative [playfulness] and challenging [challenging parenting behaviors, CPB]). In particular, we draw from a sample of ethnically and economically diverse families participating in a parenting intervention (Authors masked for review, 2017b) to examine how the qualities of two types of parental play, playfulness and CPB, are longitudinally related to children's social competence. Because parent-child play is reciprocal and dynamic, we also test whether children's negative emotional temperament moderates these associations.

Parent-Child Play

The literature on play in early childhood has often focused on children's play with their similar-age peers (Coplan & Arbeau, 2009), or on mother-child play, and to a lesser extent, on father-child play (Amodia-Bidakowska et al., 2020). However, when researchers have examined parent-child play, they have tended to examine distinct and specific types of play based on the parent's gender. That is, examining pretend play with mothers (Rao et al., 2021), and physical play with fathers (Feldman & Shaw, 2021; StGeorge & Freeman, 2017), rather than examining the same behaviors across both parents.

More recently, and inspired by calls to examine the same parenting behaviors in both mothers and fathers (e.g., Cabrera et al., 2014, 2018), researchers have looked at CPB, the extent to which parents verbally and physically encourage their child in a playful manner to take risks

and go beyond their comfort zone (Majdandžić et al., 2016). Additionally, some researchers have measured parental playfulness, or the manner in which parents play with their children, including the degree of fun, creativity, and imagination (Cabrera et al., 2017a; Menashe-Grinberg & Atzaba-Poria, 2017). Taken together, the findings of these studies have generally indicated that mothers' and fathers' different types of play promote children's positive socioemotional development, though with several exceptions (Amodia-Bidakowska et al., 2020; Deneault et al., 2022; StGeorge & Freeman, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The current study examines several aspects of Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) expanded model of the ecology of father-child relationships, which is also applicable to mother-child relationships. This heuristic model conceptualizes many of the dynamic and reciprocal processes through which fathers (and mothers) directly and indirectly influence their children's development. Grounded in a number of foundational developmental theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1995), Cabrera and colleagues (2014) posit that parenting behaviors directly influence children's development, and that the path linking parenting and child outcomes can be moderated by other variables in the model (e.g., child characteristics). Accordingly, in this study, we contribute to the empirical evidence base regarding these proposed links by testing the direct associations of parents' two types of play behaviors on children's developmental outcomes, as well as the moderation effects of children's negative emotionality.

Challenging Parenting Behaviors and Children's Socioemotional Development

Challenging parenting behaviors (CPB) involve encouraging children in a playful manner to push their limits, go outside their comfort zone, and exhibit risky behaviors (Majdandžić et al., 2016). CPB is thought to excite and promote assertiveness in children through not only physical

(e.g., tickling, chasing, wrestling games), but also verbal or socio-emotional (e.g., teasing noises, social daring, cognitively-challenging questions) challenging play behaviors (Majdandžić et al., 2016, 2018). Most observational studies on CPB that include both parents have found that fathers' use of CPB, in particular, during infancy and toddlerhood buffers against early anxiety symptoms in young children (Majdandžić et al., 2014, 2018). Fathers' CPB has also been found to be especially influential for children with fearful, shy, or behaviorally-inhibited temperaments, which are consistent precursors of later anxiety disorders (Majdandžić et al., 2018).

For instance, Majdandžić and colleagues (2014) found in a sample of Dutch families that fathers were equally challenging toward their 4-year-old child as mothers, though paternal CPB was related to decreases in children's social anxiety half a year later, whereas mothers' CPB was associated with increased social anxiety. In another longitudinal study, Majdandžić and colleagues (2018) explored the relative effects of mothers' and fathers' CPB on anxiety from infancy to early preschool, and found that only fathers' higher CPB predicted less child anxiety. Such findings suggest that parents (especially fathers) who push their child out of their comfort zone could foster children's social interaction skills with others through reduced anxiety. It is also theorized that CPB helps to socialize children through fostering their abilities to take initiative, explore their environments, and overcome obstacles in the face of destabilization, all of which can promote their self-confidence (Feldman & Shaw, 2022; Paquette, 2004).

In studies of parent-reported CPB, some researchers have found beneficial effects of both parents' CPB for child anxiety. Lazarus and colleagues (2016) and Majdandžić and colleagues (2017) examined associations between Dutch and Australian parent-reported levels of CPB and preschool-aged children's anxiety symptoms. Lazarus and colleagues (2016) found that Australian fathers reported more CPB than mothers, and both parents' CPB were negatively

related to anxiety symptoms, with no moderation by child sex. Majdandžić and colleagues (2017) found that Australian mothers reported less CPB than fathers, but Dutch mothers and fathers reported similar levels of CPB. Additionally, Dutch and Australian mothers' and fathers' reported-CPB were all negatively associated with childhood anxiety, at the symptom and disorder level.

As evidenced in this literature, the majority of studies examining CPB primarily involve middle-class, moderately to highly educated, White families (i.e., Australian, Dutch). To our knowledge, only one study thus far has examined whether CPB in U.S. families is associated with improved social behaviors. In a sample of ethnically and economically diverse mothers and fathers in the U.S., Authors Blinded (2022) found no significant associations between mothers' or fathers' CPB at nine months with children's social competence or behavior problems at 12 months. The authors speculated that this may be due to the young age of infants when CPB was measured. Thus, we follow up on this earlier study to examine the associations between CPB at 18 months and toddlers' social competence at 24 months.

Parental Playfulness and Children's Socioemotional Development

Play that is fun and imaginative is associated with positive skills for children (Cabrera et al., 2017a). To date, there is no consensus in how to assess the degree of playfulness in parent-child play interactions. Atzaba-Poria and colleagues (2014) define parental playfulness as the creative and curious manner by which parents play with their children. Further, playfulness is a special combination of creativity, fun, and positive affect (i.e., enjoyment, amusement), with a cognitive component (e.g., curiosity and imagination; Menashe-Grinberg & Atzaba-Poria, 2017). This type of pretend play provides opportunities for children to practice playing different roles and negotiate about what they want, helping them to understand others' perspectives and mental

states (Lillard et al., 2013). Further, engaging in pretend play requires temporarily inhibiting reality, which helps children develop self-regulatory skills (e.g., controlling emotions and behaviors) necessary for achieving desired goals (Cabrera et al., 2017a).

Studies assessing mothers' and fathers' playfulness have found that parental playfulness can be beneficial for children's socioemotional functioning. Menashe-Grinberg and Atzaba-Poria (2017) examined playfulness in a sample of primarily middle-class, married Israeli couples, with children aged 1-3 years. Using the Parental Playfulness Scale (PPS; Atzaba-Poria et al., 2014), they coded the extent to which mothers and fathers showed creativity, imagination, curiosity, pretend play, and humor with their child in an observed structured and unstructured play session. They also assessed the parenting behaviors of parental sensitivity, nonintrusiveness, and structuring, as well as child negativity (i.e., oppositional behavior and negative affect). The results showed that mothers and fathers who were more playful had children with concurrently lower levels of negativity, over and above the effect of other parenting behaviors. Though mothers and fathers showed similar mean levels of playfulness, moderation analyses with other parenting behaviors revealed that their playfulness was associated with child outcomes in different ways. However, due to the cross-sectional design, it is unclear whether parental playfulness can indeed reduce children's negative behaviors.

A study by Cabrera and colleagues (2017a) also used the PPS to investigate mothers' and fathers' playfulness in a low-income, racially diverse (primarily African American and Latine) sample of U.S. families. They examined the longitudinal effects of parental playfulness when children were 24 months on children's receptive vocabulary and emotion regulation skills at prekindergarten (M_{age} = 62 months), and the moderating role of child affect during play. The results again showed comparable levels of playfulness between mothers and fathers, but only

fathers' playfulness was related to children's later receptive vocabulary, controlling for parental supportiveness. Conversely, only mothers' playfulness was promotive of children's later emotion-regulation skills. The authors also found that when children responded positively to playfulness from their mothers (i.e., high positive affect), they had better regulatory skills, though this was not replicated with fathers.

Shorer and colleagues' (2019, 2020) cross-sectional studies investigated the role of Israeli parental self-reported playfulness in everyday interactions (defined as a state of mind or predisposition to frame situations in a way that emphasizes amusement and entertainment, and the ability to act in a spontaneous, flexible, and creative manner) in promoting social adaptation among children aged 2-8 years. Shorer and colleagues (2019) found that parental playfulness was positively related to children's parent-reported emotion regulation (though not with their anxiety), and that this association was mediated by parents' emotional awareness, parent-child closeness, and level of parent-child conflict. Shorer and Leibovich (2020) found that parental playfulness of mothers and fathers together was not associated with children's stress reactions, but *fathers'* independent higher playfulness was associated with children's lower stress reactions – reinforcing the notion that mothers' and fathers' playfulness may have different pathways of influence on children's socioemotional functioning (Shorer & Leibovich, 2020). In this study, we use the PPS to examine the associations between mothers' and fathers' observed quality of playfulness with children's later social competence.

Child Temperament as a Moderator of Parenting Behaviors

An important aspect of the way parents interact with their children during play is child temperament, or the child's biologically-based behavioral tendencies and individual differences in reactivity and self-regulation (Rothbart & Bates, 2006). Child temperament is uniquely and

interactively related to children's socioemotional wellbeing (e.g., Slagt et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2012; Van Zeijl et al., 2007). Research has shown that negative emotionality, a dimension of temperament that assesses children's irritability, negative affect and mood, and intensity of negative reactions (Paulussen-Hoogeboom et al., 2007), is associated with children's internalizing and externalizing difficulties, as well as their reduced social competence (Eisenberg et al., 2001; Rothbart & Bates, 2006; Sallquist et al., 2009). According to the differential susceptibility hypothesis (Belsky & Pluess, 2009), children with a highly reactive, often considered difficult, temperament are more susceptible to and influenced by their environments (e.g., parenting behaviors) than other children. Consequently, optimal parenting is thought to be more beneficial for temperamentally difficult children, whereas negative parenting puts difficult children at a higher risk for adverse developmental outcomes (Van Zeijl et al., 2007).

Although few studies have tested whether temperament moderates the association between parental play and children's social competence, many have documented that temperament moderates the association between maternal and paternal parenting styles and behaviors (e.g., control, warmth, sensitivity, discipline) and socioemotional development (e.g., Kochanska & Kim, 2013; Slagt et al., 2016; Van Zeijl et al., 2007). We found only one study that tested whether temperament was a moderator of mothers' and fathers' play behaviors. In a sample of Dutch families, Majdandžić and colleagues (2018) found that fathers' CPB was associated with lower levels of child anxiety. This association was strongest for temperamentally-fearful children, compared to less fearful children, but this interaction was significant only at a trend level and did not hold for mothers.

Bocknek and colleagues (2017) found a curvilinear relation between U.S. fathers' frequency of active physical play (e.g., playing outside, playing games with a ball) with their

three-year-old children, and children's emotion-regulation skills at kindergarten entry. While very-low and very-high levels of paternal physical play were associated with worse outcomes, a moderate amount of fathers' play during toddlerhood was associated with children's improved self-regulation, and this was particularly the case for children with emotionally-reactive temperaments. However, this study did not consider mothers' play behaviors. In a cross-sectional study, Torres and colleagues (2012) found a significant interaction between children's difficult temperament and Portuguese fathers' reported involvement in play (relative to the amount of mother involvement; e.g., 'Who plays physical games with the child?') with preschool-aged children. When temperamental difficulty was rated as low, more father involvement in play was associated with children's fewer peer play disruptions, while at ratings of medium and high difficult temperament, father play was not significantly related to peer play competence.

The lack of consistent findings suggests that more longitudinal research is needed with both parents, particularly in diverse families. From the perspectives of reciprocal and transactional theoretical models of development (e.g., Cabrera et al., 2014; Sameroff, 2010), parents do not unidirectionally influence children. Rather, children drive parenting and play a role in their own development, especially at young ages. There is a need for studies to test not only the main effects, but also the moderators that can explain *for whom* mothers' and fathers' play behaviors influence children's social competence, such as the role of children's temperament (Feldman & Shaw, 2021). Based on this review of previous research, we explore whether the associations between parental play and children's social competence are moderated by children's negative emotionality.

The Current Study

Given the paucity of research on how the quality of parents' play with children in ethnically-diverse families is related to children's social development, we examined the following research questions: 1) How are mothers' and fathers' CPB and playfulness at 18 months related to children's social competence at 24 months?; and 2) Are the relations between mothers' and fathers' play behaviors and children's social competence moderated by children's negative emotionality? We expect that mothers' and fathers' CPB and playfulness at 18 months will be independently and positively related to children's social competence at 24 months (main effects). Based on the differential susceptibility theory, we also expect that the associations between parents' play and children's social competence will be stronger for children with higher levels of negative emotionality (interaction effects).

Methods

Participants

The sample for the current study is drawn from an ongoing NIH-funded longitudinal parenting and literacy intervention (study name blinded for review), which includes $N = 210$ primarily low-income families ($N = 420$ parents; authors masked for review, 2017b). The intervention project is a randomized controlled trial in which families received baby books embedded with educational information about typical development, parenting, and injury prevention. After their participation in the first timepoint when infants were 9-months old, families were randomly assigned to one of four study conditions, receiving: 1) books that were designed from the perspective of a mother ($n = 52$), 2) books designed from the perspective of a father ($n = 52$), 3) both types of books ($n = 54$), and 4) a commercially produced book ($n = 52$). Data were collected between 2016 and 2022 at two sites: Orange County, California ($n = 109$ families, 52%) and the Greater Washington, D.C. area ($n = 101$ families, 48%). Participants were

recruited at various community locations, including local daycares, farmers' markets, and healthcare centers. Parents were eligible for the project if they were: over 17 years of age, first-time parents of a 6- to 9-month-old infant, made $70,000 or less annually, in a co-resident relationship with their partner, and able to read at a first-grade level in English or Spanish. The current study uses observational and questionnaire data from four of the study waves, when children were 9, 12, 18, and 24 months old.

The intervention sample consists of $N = 210$ children (49% male) and their mothers and fathers, who ranged in age from 18 to 53 years when children were nine months old. Parents were ethnically-racially diverse: 68% of mothers and fathers were Hispanic or Latine, 13% of mothers and fathers were Black or African American, 7% of mothers and 8% of fathers were White, 6% of mothers and 4% of fathers were multiracial, and 4% of mothers and 6% of fathers were Asian or Asian American. Over half of parents (55% of mothers, 56% of fathers) reported being bilingual in English and Spanish, whereas 14% of mothers and 11% of fathers spoke only Spanish. Parents reported a wide range of education levels at the 9-month home visit: 10% of mothers and 24% of fathers had less than a high school degree, 20% of mothers and 25% of fathers had a high school degree or equivalent, 31% of mothers and 27% of fathers had some college, 12% of mothers and 9% of fathers had a two- to four-year degree, and 26% of mothers and 15% of fathers had a four-year degree or more. The sample was also economically diverse: parents' averaged household annual income reports ranged from $1,000 to $126,000, with a mean of $39,400 ($SD$ = $21,600).

In the current study, 38% of mothers and 44% fathers were missing data on the observed CPB variables at 18 months, and 30% mothers and 34% fathers were missing data on the observed playfulness variables. The observed data at 18 months were missing for three primary

reasons: (a) the parent or family did not participate in the 18-month home visit (e.g., dropped out of the study, were unresponsive, etc.); b) the infant was too fussy to participate in the play interaction or forced an early stop to the task (this was particularly relevant for the no-toy play interaction and thus the CPB variables); or c) the parent asked to end the play interaction early. At 24 months, 27% of mothers were missing data on the reported child social competence variable, primarily because these parents did not participate in that wave or had dropped out of the study. Importantly, half of the 24-month wave home visits were completed before the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas the other half were affected by the lockdowns. However, we used full information maximum likelihood (FIML) in our analyses to account for these missing data.

Procedure

Data for the intervention project were collected through observations of parent-child interactions and administered questionnaires during home visits (at 9, 18, and 24 months), as well as phone calls and online questionnaires (at 12, 15, and 21 months). When infants were nine months old, a team of trained research assistants visited families in their homes at a convenient time when both fathers and mothers were present and available. The home visits lasted on average 2.5 hours, during which time fathers and mothers completed independent interviews in English or Spanish with a series of questionnaires, including socio-demographic questions (e.g., education, household income), and observations of parent-child play (not used in the current study). At 12 months old, a research assistant scheduled a 30-minute phone interview with parents to administer questionnaires, including a measure of child temperament. At 18 months, research assistants conducted home visits, during which mothers and fathers separately completed a series of interaction paradigms with their infant, including a 5-minute no-toy play and a 10-minute toy play interaction. For the no-toy play interaction, parents were asked to play

with their child how they normally would, but without using any toys. For the toy-play interaction, the parent-child dyad was given two different bags of toys (including a shape sorter, ball, car, helicopter, and baby doll in bag 1, and a cash register, shopping basket, various grocery food items, a pizza, cutting board and a knife in bag 2) and were instructed to play with their child as they normally would using the toys in the bag. Parents and children had five minutes to play with each bag of toys, one bag at a time. Mothers and fathers were recorded while separately playing with their infant; parents were encouraged to sit facing toward the camera during the play tasks. At the 24-month home visit, research assistants interviewed mothers and fathers independently about their child's social competence. Each parent was paid $50 for each home visit and $20 for each phone call. They were also given baby books for their child at each wave. The procedures and methods of the study received approval by the review boards at both institutions affiliated with the intervention project.

Behavioral Coding

A team of trained English- and-Spanish bilingual coders assessed mothers' and fathers' CPB from the video-recorded 5-minute no-toy play interactions from the 18-month home visit. An independent team of coders assessed mothers' and fathers' playfulness from the 10-minute toy play interactions at 18 months, and another independent team of coders assessed parents' responsive/sensitive behaviors from both the toy and no-toy play interactions at 18 months. All coders were trained by an expert coder for their respective behavioral coding schemes and had to reach reliability on a set of 10-15 practice videos in order to begin coding independently (i.e., their codes had to be within one point of the expert coder's codes 90% of the time). Coders achieved reliability on CPB using videos from the 9-month visit, and they achieved reliability on playfulness using a different set of videos from a separate study. If coders did not reach this

threshold after the first round of reliability videos, they were given subsequent rounds of practice videos to code until they achieved this standard. In order to minimize coding drift and maintain reliability in coding across the research assistants, they met with the expert coder every two to four weeks in order to collectively review codes and discuss any discrepancies in coding. Furthermore, 20% of the videos (equally divided amongst study site, parent gender, and parent language) at 18 months were double-coded to assess inter-coder reliability (estimates provided below) for CPB and playfulness. Research assistants were instructed to only code the video interactions if the play tasks were at least half of the intended length of time (i.e., at least 2.5 minutes long for no-toy play, at least 5 minutes long for toy play).

Measures

Dependent Variable

Child Social Competence (24 months). Parents reported on their infant's social competence by completing the Brief Infant Social Emotional Assessment (BITSEA; Briggs-Gowan & Carter, 2006) during a home visit when their infant was 24 months of age. The BITSEA comprises 42 items that are rated on a 3-point scale ranging from 0 (Not true/rarely) to 2 (Very true/often) pertaining to infants' behaviors. The social competence subscale is comprised of 11 items asking parents to report on children's sustained attention (e.g., "Can pay attention for a long time [other than tv]"), compliance (e.g., "Follows rules"), and prosocial peer relations (e.g., "Plays well with other children [not including a sibling]"). Higher scores indicate higher levels of social competence. The current study used mothers' ($\alpha = 0.75$) raw score reports of children's social competence at 24 months. Fathers' reported scores were not used in this study due to a low internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.61$), and low correlation with mothers' scores, $r = .21$.

Independent Variables

Challenging Parenting Behaviors (18 Months). The CPB scales include two observational scales that rate how parents encourage their child to exhibit risky behavior in a playful manner through (a) physical and (b) verbal means (Majdandžić et al., 2016). The scale takes into account both the frequency and the intensity of the CPB in determining parents' scores. Examples of physical CPB include but are not limited to: rough-and-tumble play such as wrestling games, tickling, throwing the infant in the air, and chasing games. Verbal CPB includes verbal encouragements for the child to do something difficult, making challenging and supportive sounds during a game (e.g., loud grunting or growling, "woah"), and asking questions that the child would find cognitively challenging. Physical and verbal CPB frequently co-occur (e.g., playing a wrestling game while making loud grunting noises). Both physical and verbal CPB were separately coded at every one-minute interval during the 5-minute no-toy play interaction. For each minute, coders assigned a score from 1 to 5 for the physical and the verbal scales as follows: 1 = no CPB, 2 = slight CPB, 3 = somewhat CPB, 4 = clear CPB, and 5 = clear and intense CPB. After this micro-coding was complete, codes were averaged across each minute of the interaction to create a global average score of physical CPB and a global average score of verbal CPB for the task. In addition, coders double-coded 20% of the tapes (n = 50 videos). Inter-rater reliability was high for physical CPB (ICC = 0.81) and good for verbal CPB (ICC = 0.72; Cicchetti, 1994). Consistent with past studies (e.g., Deneault et al., 2022; Majdandžić et al., 2016), we averaged the physical and verbal CPB scales into a single CPB variable for each parent due to the high, significant correlation between the scales (mothers: r = .74, $p < .001$; fathers: r = .61, $p < .001$). Higher scores mean clear and intense CPB.

Parental Playfulness (18 Months). The quality of mothers' and fathers' playfulness was coded from the 10-minute toy play interaction using the Parental Playfulness Scale (PPS;

Atzaba-Poria et al., 2014). The PPS assesses the level or degree of creativity, imagination, humor, and curiosity parents use during play with their children (Cabrera et al., 2017a). Conventional or concrete play refers to parents' use of toys in a conventional way (e.g., putting the shapes into the sorter; Atzaba-Poria et al., 2014). Imaginary or pretend play refers to parents' imaginary use of a toy according to its function (e.g., pretending to eat a piece of toy-pizza) or role-playing with silly voices. Creative play refers to parents' unconventional use of toys outside their normal function (e.g., pretending the shape sorter bucket was a bed for the baby doll) or their extended role-play. The PPS scale is scored as follows: 1 = no play, 2 = low playfulness, 3 = primarily conventional or concrete play; 4 = imaginary and conventional play, 5 = primarily imaginary play, 6 = imaginary and creative play, and 7 = primarily creative play. A global score was assigned separately to fathers and to mothers for the whole toy-play interaction (Atzaba-Poria et al., 2014). Additionally, 20% of the videos were double-coded (n = 57 videos). Inter-rater reliability in this study was deemed excellent (ICC = 0.90). Higher scores mean higher levels of (creative) playfulness.

Moderator Variable

Child Negative Emotionality (12 Months). Mothers reported on their infant's temperament using the EAS Temperament Survey for Children: Parental Ratings (Buss & Plomin, 1984) during the phone interview at 12 months. The EAS Temperament Survey includes 20 items rated from 1 (not characteristic or typical of your child) to 5 (very characteristic or typical of your child). The instrument yields four scales (shyness, emotionality, sociability, and activity) and presents good psychometric properties (see Mathiesen & Tambs, 1999). For the current study, we used the negative emotionality subscale comprised of the averaged score of the following five items: "child cries easily," "child tends to be somewhat emotional," "child often

fusses and cries," "child gets upset easily," and "child reacts intensely when upset." Higher scores indicate a more difficult and emotional child temperament. The internal consistency in the current sample was acceptable, $\alpha = 0.69$. Fathers also filled out the temperament survey, but we did not use these reports due to the low correlation with mothers' reports ($r = .32$) and the lower internal consistency of the measure ($\alpha = 0.60$).

Control Variables

To isolate the effects of our play variables on children's social competence, we control for two sets of variables: demographic information, and observed parental sensitivity.

Demographic Variables (9 Months). We controlled for parental education, intervention site, intervention condition, and child sex because they may relate to our variables of interest (Ahnert et al., 2017; Davis-Kean et al., 2021; Duch et al., 2019; Fletcher et al., 2020; Lindsey & Mize, 2001; Padilla et al., 2020). We control for education because it is strongly related to parenting behaviors and children's outcomes (Davis-Kean et al., 2021). Mothers and fathers reported on their highest level of education completed: 1 = less than high school, 2 = high school or equivalent, 3 = some college, 4 = two-to-four-year degree or certificate, and 5 = four-year degree, certificate, or beyond. We control for site because past analyses of our data have revealed between-site differences in a variety of variables. Intervention site was coded as 0 = Washington D.C. area and 1 = southern California. Intervention condition was coded as: 1 = mom books, 2 = dad books, 3 = both books, 4 = control commercial books. Studies have also shown that fathers exhibit higher quality of play with sons, whereas mothers exhibit higher quality play with daughters (Ahnert et al., 2017). Child sex was coded as 0 = boy and 1 = girl.

Parental Sensitivity (18 Months). Parental responsiveness and sensitivity are consistent predictors of children's social competence (Forrer et al., 2024). In our study, parental sensitivity

(i.e., appropriate attention focusing, paying attention to the child's interest in toys, encouraging the child, and adapting to the child's mood) was coded during the five-minute no-toy play interaction and the 10-minute toy play interaction (Cox & Crnic, 2003). Parents received a single global score on this scale for each of the two play interactions. Sensitivity was rated from 1 (Not at all characteristic) to 5 (Highly characteristic). An independent team of six coders who were not involved in the coding of CPB or playfulness coded sensitive parenting behaviors. These coders were trained to 90% agreement by an expert coder on 10 "gold standard tapes" from a comparable, yet distinct sample. Coders were blind to all other study data. We averaged each parent's scores across the toy play and no-toy play interactions for this construct, considering they were significantly and moderately correlated (maternal sensitivity: $r = .48$, $p < .001$; paternal sensitivity: $r = .64$, $p < .001$).

Analytic Plan

To address our research questions regarding different types of parental play predictors of mother-reported child social competence at 24 months, we conducted a structural equation model with measured variables in R using the *lavaan* package (Rosseel, 2012). We used a conditional process model with a product approach (see Figure 1), in which the primary predictors were mothers' and fathers' CPB and playfulness, as well as child negative emotionality, and the product terms were the aforementioned four parenting play variables each multiplied by child negative emotional temperament (e.g., maternal CPB x child emotionality, paternal CPB x child emotionality, etc.). All variables used in the interactions were mean-centered before creating the interaction terms and then were entered into the model.

The model also included the set of control variables: mothers' and fathers' education level, intervention site, intervention condition, child sex, and mothers' and fathers' observed

sensitivity. Further, we used the MLR estimator, or maximum likelihood estimation with robust (Huber-White) standard errors, which is appropriate for incomplete data, due to the built-in corrections that account for regression assumption violations such as non-normality in the data. We also used the missing = "ML" command to estimate full information maximum likelihood, again to address missingness in our data. This analytical approach was also selected to account for the shared variance between mothers and fathers from the same families.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive statistics of the study variables are provided in Table 1. Mothers and fathers demonstrated "slight" to "moderate" levels of CPB, on average. Mothers' and fathers' mean playfulness scores correspond to "low playfulness" to "primarily conventional" levels. Paired sample t-tests revealed no significant differences between the level of CPB that mothers and fathers engaged in with their children, t (105) = -1.32, p = 0.19. There were also no significant differences between mothers' and fathers' mean levels of playfulness, t (134) = 1.86, p = 0.07.

Bivariate correlations among the study variables are presented in Table 2. Notably, we examined correlations between mothers' and fathers' CPB, playfulness, and our control variable parental sensitivity/responsiveness. Maternal sensitivity was positively and significantly correlated with maternal CPB (r = .25) and with maternal playfulness (r = .21) suggesting that these constructs overlap but are assessing different aspects of the parent-child interaction. Paternal sensitivity was positively correlated with paternal CPB (r = .31) but was not significantly correlated with paternal playfulness. Again, this correlation suggests some overlap but mostly distinctiveness.

Path Analyses of Play Behaviors Predicting Social Competence

The results of our saturated path model predicting mother-reported child social competence at 24 months are presented in Table 3. Considering the model was just-identified, the fit indices were perfect by default. We found no significant main effects of maternal or paternal 18-month CPB on children's mother-reported social competence at 24 months. There were also no significant associations between mothers' or fathers' 18-month playfulness and children's social competence. Further, child emotionality did not significantly moderate any of the associations between maternal or paternal CPB or playfulness and child social competence.

Discussion

Rooted in Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) heuristic model of father-child relationships, this study explored the longitudinal associations between the quality of two different types of parent-child play in mothers and fathers when their infant was 18 months old and mother-reported social competence at 24 months. It also considered the moderating role of child negative emotionality in the associations. Our sample of ethnically and economically diverse families is relatively highly-functioning, as indexed by parents' education levels and moderate income. Moreover, parents reported high levels of social competence skills for their toddlers, and parents were observed to be generally sensitive and responsive to their children's needs during interactions. Overall, we found that mothers and fathers in our sample were observed to engage in low levels of CPB (e.g., gentle tickling, soft challenging noises) and playfulness (e.g., providing instructions to the child, and physical manipulation or use of the toys in a conventional way). That is, on average, parents in our study were not pushing their children too much outside of their comfort zone, and very few parents engaged in play that was imaginative or creative (e.g., role playing with silly voices, using toys in a pretend way). In fact, none of the mothers or fathers in our study received a rating of the highest score on either the CPB scale (i.e., a score of

5) or the playfulness scale (i.e., a score of 7), indicating that no parents in our sample displayed repeated and clear instances of CPB, and no parents were observed to engage in primarily creative play throughout the interaction.

We did not find support for our first hypothesis that the quality of parents' playfulness and CPB would be related to better social competence scores for children. That is, neither maternal nor paternal playfulness or CPB at 18 months were significantly associated with mothers' reports of children's social competence at 24 months. Though this is contrary to our hypothesis, these results are consistent with past findings of CBP in our same study sample at earlier ages (i.e., at 9 and 12 months; Authors blinded, 2022). In other words, in our racially-ethnically diverse and primarily low-income sample, we do not find that mothers' or fathers' CPB is important for children's social skills across infancy and toddlerhood. Theoretically, parents who use imagination and creativity during play are hypothesized to foster social competence by providing children the opportunity to engage in role playing, perspective taking, and practicing self-regulation skills (Cabrera et al., 2017a; Lillard et al., 2013). Moreover, parents who verbally and physically encourage their children to take risks beyond their normal and comfortable limits are theorized to help children develop self-confidence in navigating their social worlds (Majdandžić et al., 2016; Paquette, 2004). Therefore, the lack of associations in our study between parents' quality of play and children's social competence do not support existing theory (Cabrera et al., 2014). However, the majority of past findings with these play constructs have been identified in samples of primarily White, middle-class families.

It is important to again consider the relatively low levels of creative and challenging play that parents in our study demonstrated and the likely influence this had on our findings (e.g., dosage effects). If we observed greater variability in these measures, with more parents

demonstrating higher scores on CPB and playfulness, it is possible we would have detected the hypothesized associations. It would be important for future studies to examine why some parents do not display higher levels of CPB and playfulness, perhaps through the use of qualitative methods. Values, beliefs, and expectations about these types of play and the associated benefits for children may not be universal for all parents (Lillard et al., 2013; Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015), and additional theoretical work may be necessary to better explain these parenting behaviors and developmental processes in racially-ethnically diverse families.

Notably, engaging in high quality CPB and playfulness requires a great deal of physical, emotional, and cognitive exertion from parents. It requires a lot of energy and emotional investment for parents to vigorously toss their child in the air, intensively tease their child, think "outside the box" to come up with novel ways to use toys, or perform complex and extended role playing to entertain their child. Our families are mostly from low-income, immigrant backgrounds, and many parents work several jobs or long hours during the week. Parenting young children is exhausting as the norm, and it is reasonable to expect that our parents may be even more tired or stressed than the average parent, due to the responsibilities of balancing their day-to-day demands and contextual stressors (Lee et al., 2023). This could therefore inhibit their engagement in high-energy activities such as highly creative and challenging types of play.

The findings of this study also challenge the universal applicability and importance of these two parental play constructs. More observational work is required, with longer durations of parent-child observations across different ages in early childhood, to gain a clearer understanding of what parental play normally looks like in families across different cultures. It is possible that the parents in our sample simply prefer using different types of play with their children at these young ages. Perhaps these play constructs emerge as being more relevant for older children who

have developed better language and gross motor skills. Alternatively, it is also possible that these particular types of play are not as important for children's developmental outcomes in lower-income contexts as compared to other parenting behaviors. Additional empirical work with ethno-culturally diverse samples is required to gain clarity on whether or not CPB and playfulness are necessarily beneficial for all children.

Also contrary to our hypothesis, we did not find that children's level of negative emotionality was a significant moderator of the associations between parents' quality of play and children's social competence. That is, the relations between mothers' and fathers' CPB and playfulness with children's social skills did not vary depending on children's level of negative emotional temperament. These findings are not in line with the hypothesis that children are differentially susceptible to parental input based on their temperament (Belsky & Pluess, 2009). However, this could also be due to the generally low levels and low variability in play quality that we observed among parents in our study. It is also possible that a different aspect of temperament, such as positive emotionality, or a different child characteristic (sex, age, health status), would be a more salient moderator of these play variables. Regardless, it would be necessary for future studies to examine under what conditions mothers' and fathers' playfulness is important for helping children develop social skills.

It is important to consider that the current study is not the only one to find null findings about the influences of CPB and playfulness on children's socioemotional development. For example, a past study with our same sample also found that neither mothers' nor fathers' CPB at nine months was associated with children's social competence at 12 months (Authors blinded, 2022). Majdandžić and colleagues (2018) also found that mothers' CPB was not related to children's anxiety symptoms over and above the effects of fathers' CPB. Similarly, Cabrera and

colleagues (2017a) used the PPS with a sample of ethnically diverse families and their 2-year-olds, and found that only fathers' playfulness was related to later vocabulary skills, and only mothers' playfulness was promotive of later emotion-regulation skills, but not vice-versa. Further, Shorer and colleagues (2019) did not find significant associations between parental playfulness and children's anxiety, and Shorer and Leibovich (2020) found that only fathers', but not mothers', playfulness was associated with children's stress reactions.

A key difference between the current study and the majority of other studies on CPB, beside the sample demographics, is that others have mainly looked at child anxiety-related variables as the outcome, whereas we looked at social competence. Given the scarcity in research examining how CPB and playful parenting are implicated in children's social competence skills, this study further highlights the need for future research with mothers and fathers to understand their (lack of) effects in diverse families. Different types of play may hold specific implications for children's development, and there may be differences based on parental gender, children's characteristics, the timing of behaviors, and the population studied. At the moment, it is difficult to speak to all of these potential effects given that this study is rare in its inclusion of a longitudinal investigation into multiple parental play behaviors in both mothers and fathers.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this study. First, the sample size was relatively small for the number of variables included in the model, which may have limited our statistical power to detect differences. Also, we scheduled home visits whenever was convenient for both parents to be present. As such, visits ranged from early morning to late at night and included weekdays and weekends. Accordingly, some 18-months-olds were tired, hungry, or fussy at the time of the visits, and may not have elicited the same high-quality interactions with their parent as normal.

The observed play interactions were also relatively short (~15 minutes) and cannot fully showcase the everyday nature of a parent-child relationship and parenting behaviors. Additionally, we did not have a measure of the frequencies of CPB and playful behaviors that parents typically engage in with their children, which could help in explaining the findings. For instance, it may the combination of the quality and the quantity of parents' engagement in play that matters most for supporting children's social skills.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates a variety of strengths and contributes to the parenting literature in several ways. We used observational data to capture the quality of two different types of parental play amongst mothers and fathers. We also included both micro- (i.e., CPB) and macro-coded (i.e., playfulness) observational data, from two different types of semi-structured parent-child interaction tasks (i.e., no-toy play and toy play). Additionally, the same measures were used with both mothers and fathers, consistent with suggestions to examine the same behaviors across parents instead of assuming that parents will only display one type of behavior based on their gender (Cabrera et al., 2018). Furthermore, this study contributes to a still small body of literature examining parental play and children's socioemotional developmental by using an ethnoculturally and economically diverse sample of families. The majority of our sample was Latine (2/3), followed by African American/Black, and over half of parents were immigrants, with a wide range of household SES and countries of origin. Given that the majority of Americans are expected to be non-White by 2045, it is imperative to develop a greater understanding of the experience of diverse families, which will no longer be a minority in the United States.

The findings contribute nuance to the body of literature on parent-child play by demonstrating that the theorized importance of parental play for children's early social skills may not be universal across cultures or consistent across all types of play and child ages. In spite of this, CPB and playfulness seem to be positive parenting behaviors, as evidenced by their modest positive correlations with parental sensitivity. Although more studies with ethnically-racially diverse families are needed to confirm our findings, this study suggests that engaging in more creative and challenging types of play should not necessarily be emphasized among all parents as a primary method to benefit children's social development. In other words, the findings suggest that interventions targeting parenting and early childhood outcomes among ethnically-diverse families should instead focus on promoting and strengthening other types of positive parenting behaviors.

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Appendices

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

	Mothers		Fathers		
Variable	*M (SD)*	*N*	*M (SD)*	*N*	Range
CPB	2.29 (0.77)	131	2.43 (0.83)	117	1-5
Playfulness	2.92 (0.74)	147	2.80 (0.79)	138	1-7
Sensitivity	3.53 (0.57)	148	3.42 (0.67)	135	1-5
Child Emotionality	2.21 (0.76)	191			1-5
Child Social Competence	17.37 (3.30)	153			0-22

Table 2

Table of Bivariate Correlations Among Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. M CPB							
2. F CPB	.20*						
3. M Playfulness	.24**	.11					
4. F Playfulness	.09	.32***	.26**				
5. C Emotionality	.003	-.14	-.07	-.18*			
6. C Social Comp	-.12	-.11	.16	.12	-.19*		
7. M Sensitivity	.25**	-.05	.21*	.07	-.06	.14	
8. F Sensitivity	.01	.31***	.12	.14	-.14	.01	.14

Note. M = mother, F = father, C = child.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 3

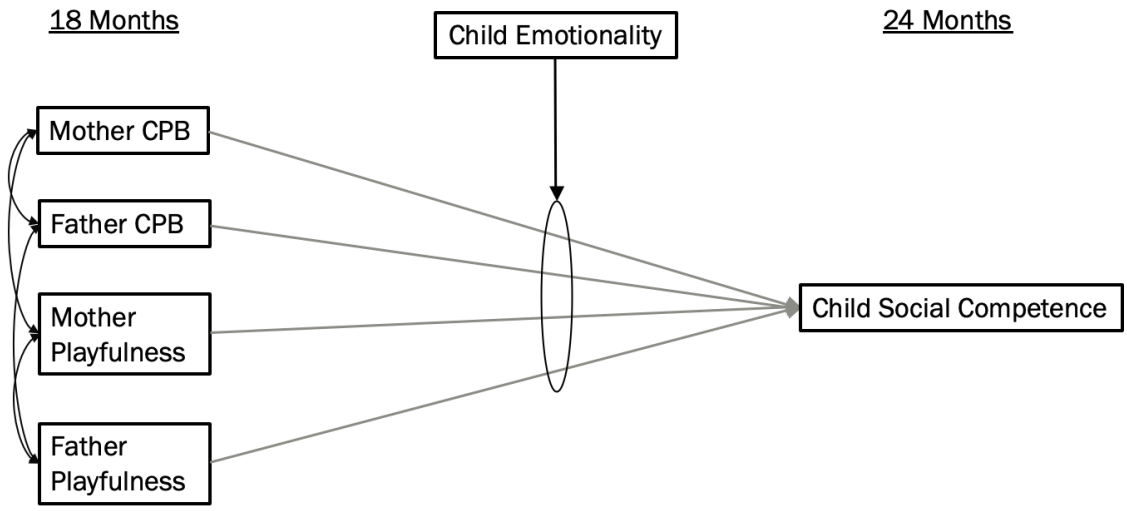
SEM Results for 24-Month Mother-Reported Child Social Competence

Predictors	B (SE)	β	*p*
M CPB	-.48 (.43)	-.11	.26
M CPB x C Emotionality	.06 (.48)	.01	.90
F CPB	-.34 (.40)	-.09	.39
F CPB x C Emotionality	.33 (.57)	.07	.55
M Playfulness	.49 (.38)	.11	.19
M Playfulness x C Emotionality	-.29 (.49)	-.05	.55
F Playfulness	.23 (.54)	.06	.68
F Playfulness x C Emotionality	.67 (.59)	.14	.26
C Emotionality	-.42 (.36)	-.10	.24
Control Variables	**B (SE)**	**β**	***p***
M Sensitivity	.75 (.51)	.13	.14
F Sensitivity	-.23 (.46)	-.05	.62
M Education	.12 (.27)	.05	.65
F Education	.04 (.23)	.01	.88
Study Site	.87 (.59)	.13	.14
Study Condition	-.12 (.25)	-.04	.62
Child Sex	.39 (.53)	.06	.46

Note. M = mother, F = father, C = child. Model R^2 = .14

Figure 1

Study Conceptual Model



Controls: child emotionality 12m, mother & father education, intervention condition, intervention site, mother & father sensitivity 18m, child sex

Empirical Paper 3

Moderators of the Associations between Parent-Child Relationship Support and Adolescent Psychological Adjustment During the Transition to High School

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Moderators of the Associations between Parent-Child Relationship Support and Adolescent Psychological Adjustment During the Transition to High School

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Abstract

The interactive influences of mother-child, father-child, and best friend relationship support on adolescent psychological and behavioral functioning across the high school transition were examined. Participants (M_{age} = 13.60, 47% male, 58% White; N = 368) reported on their perceived support from mothers, fathers, and best friends (at Time 1; Grade 8) as well as their levels of depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and externalizing behaviors (at Times 1 and 2 [Grade 9]). No interaction effects involving support from mothers, fathers, and best friends when predicting anxiety and externalizing symptoms were found. Structural equation modeling analyses indicated several interaction effects of the different relationships on later depressive symptoms. Father supportiveness moderated the association between maternal supportiveness and later depressive symptoms, and maternal supportiveness similarly moderated the relation between father supportiveness and depressive symptoms. In both instances, more support from one parent was related to fewer depressive symptoms when youth experienced an unsupportive relationship with the other parent. Best friend support also moderated the associations between both maternal support and paternal support and later depressive symptoms, such that maternal and paternal support were related to fewer subsequent depressive symptoms when youth experienced low and average (but not high) levels of friend support. Taken together, the findings highlight the importance of considering networks of close relationships in the study of depressive symptoms during adolescence.

Keywords: mothers, fathers, friendship, internalizing, externalizing, adolescence.

Moderators of the Associations between Parent-Child Relationship Support and Adolescent Psychological Adjustment During the Transition to High School

Given the substantial changes that occur during adolescence (e.g. physical, cognitive, socioemotional, environmental), it is unsurprising that psychological and behavioral problems proliferate during this developmental period and the co-occurring transition from middle school to high school (Wit et al., 2011). For example, beginning in early adolescence (10-14 years), there is increased risk for the development and manifestation of such internalizing problems as depression and anxiety (e.g., Smith et al., 2019). In addition, such externalizing problems as aggression and delinquency are another concern (Murray et al., 2014). Both internalizing and externalizing problems are likely exacerbated during the transition from middle to high school for several reasons (e.g., peer stressors, less close relationships with teachers, declining school attachments; Benner, 2011).

Factors influencing the development of internalizing and externalizing problems during early adolescence include the degree to which adolescents' relationships with their mothers, fathers, and close friends are supportive. These relationships, however, are not often studied simultaneously. Consequently, many questions remain, including the extent to which supportive relationships with fathers can protect adolescents from the internalizing and externalizing consequences commonly associated with having less supportive relationships with mothers. In this study, we examined the interactive influences of mother-adolescent, father-adolescent, and best friend relationship support on adolescent psychological and behavioral functioning across the transition from middle to high school.

Parent-Adolescent Relationships

Supportive parent-adolescent relationships are known to be related positively with adolescent well-being (Laursen & Collins, 2009). For example, having a supportive parent-adolescent relationship is associated positively with perceived social competence and positive self-regard (Booth-LaForce & Groh, 2018). Parental supportiveness is also related to positive mental health (e.g., feeling happy and calm) and fewer problems with delinquency (Hair et al., 2008). Parents can provide adolescents with emotional and instrumental support, and they positively shape the ways that adolescents view and interact with their social environments.

When adolescents experience unsupportive parent-adolescent relationships, however, they are at risk for a host of adverse developmental difficulties. For example, adolescents who feel a lack of support from their parents have been shown to experience high levels of depressive symptoms, anxiety, delinquent behavior, and aggression, and low self-esteem (e.g., Murray et al., 2014). Low support from parents likely undermines adolescents' feelings of self-worth. Such relationships likely also fail to meet adolescents' social and emotional needs.

In support of the basic principles of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1982), it is well documented that mother-child relationship quality influences children's and adolescents' development (Garriga et al., 2019). Indeed, the majority of the aforementioned research has focused on relationships with mothers. However, as empirical attention to the independent influences of *fathers* on child and adolescent socioemotional development has grown (Cabrera et al., 2018), it is clear that the quality of the father-child relationship also matters (Coley, 2003; Murray et al., 2014). For example, Coley (2003) found that the quality of the father-adolescent relationship was associated not only with adolescents' emotional health, but also with their behavioral problems, over and above the contribution of the quality of the mother-adolescent relationship. Furthermore, O'Gara and colleagues (2019) reported that feeling close to one's

father was associated positively with adolescents' self-rated general health after controlling for mother-adolescent closeness. Father-adolescent closeness has been associated with health promoting behaviors as well, including decreased adolescent alcohol use (Habib et al., 2010).

It may be that the nature and function of the father-adolescent relationship is distinct from the mother-adolescent relationship (e.g., father-child activation relationship theory, Dumont & Paquette, 2013). For instance, it has been found that the father-adolescent relationship is (1) less intense and conflictual than the mother-adolescent relationship (e.g., Wierson et al., 1990), and (2) more encouraging of independence than from mothers (McCormick & Kennedy, 1994). However, it may also be that neither parent displays truly "unique" behaviors, and mothers and fathers can and do display similar, complementary parenting behaviors (Cabrera et al., 2018; Keizer et al., 2019). Regardless, taken together, supportive parent-adolescent relationship quality with both mothers and fathers promotes adolescent well-being in numerous domains, and evidence-based interventions have emphasized the enhancement of parent-adolescent emotional closeness to both parents to promote adolescent behavioral and mental health (e.g., Dishion & Stormshak, 2007; O'Gara et al., 2019).

Friendship in Adolescence

Though mother- and father-child relationships remain important throughout adolescence, peers take on an increasingly influential role during this period as social needs for intimacy and peer support develop. Most adolescents have at least one mutual (or reciprocal) friend, and friends emerge as significant developmental assets for adolescents (Rubin et al., 2015). A friendship is a reciprocally affectionate, voluntary relationship between co-equals. During adolescence, friendship can serve many positive functions; for instance, friends provide a sense of validation, fun, security, trust, and instrumental aid to each other. Such positive friendship

features, in turn, have been shown to protect adolescents from developing loneliness, depression, negative self-regard, and behavioral-conduct problems (Rubin et al., 2015). Furthermore, there exists considerable evidence showing that supportive friendships can attenuate the negative effects of peer rejection and victimization on adolescent internalizing and externalizing problems (Hodges et al., 1999). Researchers have also demonstrated that friend support can protect adolescents from adverse outcomes arising from difficulties in the family context and with parents (e.g., Rubin et al., 2004; Sentse & Laird, 2010). However, there is limited research that includes the moderation effects of friends regarding both mothers and fathers.

The Interactive Nature of Relationships

Ample research supports the notion that parents and friends independently or additively influence adolescents' psychological adjustment, and some theory and research points to the interactive nature of these relationships (Sentse & Laird, 2010). For example, family systems theorists have argued that family members cannot be understood independently from one another (Cox & Paley, 1997; Minuchin, 1988). Rather, the family should be considered as a collective unit, given that subsystems (e.g., mother-child, father-child, mother-father) are interdependent and have continuous, reciprocal influences on one another. Thus, to gain an accurate representation of family influences on child development, it has been argued that researchers should include various within-family subsystems (Minuchin, 1988). Accordingly, by extending this model to include a best friend as part of the adolescent's "relationship system," we argue that relationships with mothers, fathers, and best friends make both independent and interactive contributions to adolescents' development.

As previously noted, peer and friendship influences become particularly important during adolescence. This occurs as youth gain more autonomy and independence from parents and

increasingly rely on their close friends for support and intimacy. Consequently, it has been suggested that adolescents can form attachment relationships with close friends (Keizer et al., 2019; Miljkovitch et al., 2021). For example, Freeman & Brown (2001) found that, on average, high schoolers were equally as likely to identify their parents and peers as being their primary attachment figure. This finding supports Weiss' (1974) social provision theory, in which it is argued that individuals seek different types of social support within their different relationships, and that one significant relationship (e.g., a friendship) can compensate for the lack of provisions in another relationship (e.g., a parent-child relationship; Gaertner et al., 2010).

Given the putative underpinnings of the significance of parents *and* close friends, we propose that the adolescent-best friend subsystem interacts with the adolescent-father and adolescent-mother subsystems in affecting adolescents' psychological well-being. Specifically, we speculated that a supportive friendship may function as a moderator, such that the influence of parent-adolescent relationship support on adolescent adjustment may vary according to the level of support in the best friendship.

In line with this notion, Rubin and colleagues (2004) found that a high-quality friendship buffered against perceived low maternal support, with reference to fifth-grade girls' internalizing problems; whereas higher maternal support buffered against the effects of a low-quality friendship on boys' social competence. Furthermore, Sentse and Laird (2010) found interactions between mother-child and friendship support, as related to adolescents' antisocial behavior and depressed mood. Results showed that positive experiences in one relationship sometimes buffered against negative experiences in the other relationship, although not always (e.g., depressed mood was only low if adolescents had highly supportive relationships with both mothers and friends). The findings did not differ by adolescent sex.

Moreover, Schacter and Margolin (2019) tested three competing models of joint contributions of parents and friends to adolescent happiness and social connectedness. They examined an *additive* effects model (i.e., perceived support from friends and parents are independently related to wellbeing); a *reinforcement* or accumulated advantages model (i.e., high levels of friend and parent support are required for optimal well-being, and parent support augments the benefits of friend support); and a *compensation* model (i.e., high levels of parent support can make up for low levels of friend support). The authors found evidence in support of both the additive and compensatory models. Perceived parental support moderated the relation between friend support and well-being; those who reported low levels of friend support also reported poorer well-being (i.e., daily happiness and social connectedness) when they felt unsupported by their parents, but not when they perceived high levels of parental support. Results also indicated that high levels of friend support could compensate for low levels of parent support. Significantly, however, their measure of parental support did not distinguish between maternal and paternal support.

Researchers have less often examined whether one parent-adolescent relationship can reinforce or compensate for the other parent-adolescent relationship (Murray et al., 2014). Similarly, despite the recognition that both parents and friends may influence adolescents' well-being, research that simultaneously examines relationships with mothers, fathers, and friends remains sparse. As a result, there remains much to be understood about the contributions of fathers, and specifically whether their contributions are distinct from those of mothers. This also extends to the question of whether friendship support can work interactively with father support to influence adolescents' well-being, which to date, has not been extensively evaluated.

Moderation by Adolescent Sex

There are several reasons to suspect that the significance of parent-adolescent and friend relationships for adolescent psychological well-being may differ for boys and girls. For instance, it is well-documented that girls' friendships are more intimate and supportive, and they tend to be more influential and protective in nature than those of boys (Rubin et al., 2015). There is also indication that girls report greater support in their parent-adolescent relationships and are more impacted by these relationships relative to boys (e.g., Fanti et al., 2008). These sex differences may be explained by gender socialization, schema, and intensification theories, which argue that girls and boys are socialized differently starting early in life (Delgado et al., 2022) and that this socialization becomes intensified during adolescence (Rudolph & Dodson, 2022). Accordingly, children develop differentiated gender schemas, which include the notion that girls should warmly attend to their interpersonal and dyadic relationships, while boys should be unemotional, independent, and tough (Delgado et al., 2022; Priess et al., 2009). There are also differences in the extent to which males and females develop internalizing and externalizing difficulties, whereby females are particularly susceptible to suffering from depression and anxiety (Branje et al., 2010). This latter difference is thought to be related to gendered socialization experiences and the pressure to conform to gender roles (Priess et al., 2009).

There is mixed evidence regarding how the associations between parent-adolescent and friend relationships and adolescents' psychological well-being differ by sex. On the one hand, in a longitudinal study of Dutch adolescents and their parents, the quality of the father-adolescent attachment relationship was associated with daughters' self-esteem, but not with that of their sons (Keizer et al., 2019). In another study of Dutch youth, adolescent relationship quality with mothers was related to both boys' and girls' depressive symptoms, but relationship quality with fathers predicted only boys' depressive symptoms (Branje et al., 2010). Yet, Fanti and colleagues

(2008) found that adolescent-reported mother-child, but not father-child, relationship quality (i.e., trust, communication) was associated with adolescents' later internalizing and externalizing problems, in the expected directions, with no differences observed for boys and girls.

Regarding sex differences in the impact of friendship quality, Rubin and colleagues (2004) found that young male and female adolescents with high-quality best friendships reported higher global self-worth and social competence and had fewer internalizing problems, but that high friendship quality predicted lower rejection and peer victimization only for females. Furthermore, Rueger and colleagues (2008) found that close friend support was not related to any adjustment difficulties for boys, but was positively associated with higher conduct problems and lower social skills among girls. Relatedly, Demir and Urberg (2004) found that positive friendship quality was only predictive of emotional adjustment for boys. Taken together, there have been mixed findings regarding sex differences in this research area.

The Current Study

Guided by family systems theory, the goal of the present study was to investigate if support from parents and friends would independently and interactively predict adolescent psychological (i.e., anxiety, depressive symptoms) and behavioral (i.e., externalizing problems) adjustment. We examined these associations in a longitudinal sample of young adolescents that was transitioning from middle to high school, an understudied but stressful transition period (Benner, 2011). Of particular interest was whether having a supportive relationship with one parent was associated with subsequent positive psychological adjustment, and whether or how this association varied across levels of support from significant others (i.e., moderation by the other parent or a best friend). Based on the extant theory and research (e.g., Booth-LaForce & Groh, 2018), we hypothesized that higher levels of support from mothers, fathers, and friends

would be associated with decreased levels of subsequent psychological maladaptation (i.e., depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, and externalizing behavioral problems). Given evidence supporting the reinforcement or accumulated advantages hypothesis (e.g., Schacter & Margolin, 2019), we also expected that having higher levels of support from one parent would be strengthened by a highly supportive relationship with the other parent or a best friend, leading to more positive outcomes. In the context of having an unsupportive relationship with one parent or with a best friend, we further hypothesized that perceiving higher levels of support from the other parent would be protective and related to more positive adjustment (i.e., the compensation hypothesis; Rubin et al., 2004). In addition, we explored adolescent sex differences with no specific hypotheses offered, due to the inconsistent findings of previous studies.

Method

Participants

Participants were 368 young adolescents (M_{age} = 13.60 years, *SD* = 0.56; 53% female) from the Greater Washington, DC area. The sample was racially-ethnically diverse, with participants self-identifying as European American (58%), Asian (16%), African American (14%), Latino/Hispanic (9%), or another ethnicity (2%). While families did not report household income, they provided data pertaining to their highest levels of educational attainment. Specifically, 8% of biological mothers (M_{age} = 45 years, *SD* = 4.57) completed high school or less; 21% finished some college; 26% held a 4-year degree; and 31% held a graduate degree. Further, 13% of biological fathers (M_{age} = 47.5, *SD* = 5.60) completed high school or less; 12% finished some college; 24% held a 4-year degree; and 40% held a graduate degree. In terms of family structure, biological mothers were married to the children's biological fathers in 81% of the families.

Procedure

Adolescent participants completed measures at two time points: once when they were in Grade 8 (Time 1; T1) and one year later when they were in Grade 9 (Time 2; T2). Both time points occurred between April and June. All participants were recruited from three public schools in which Grade 8 was the final year of middle school and Grade 9 was the first year of high school. Parents were contacted by telephone; if both the parents and their adolescents expressed interest, an informational letter, parental consent form, and adolescent assent form were mailed to the home. Depending on participant preference, packets of questionnaires were mailed home (87% of the sample) or a link to a secure website was sent via e-mail (13% of the sample). Statistical comparisons revealed nonsignificant differences on the study variables between participants who completed the questionnaires in these different contexts (*p*s > .05).

Measures

Relationship Support (Time 1). The *Network of Relationships Inventory* (NRI; Furman & Buhrmester, 1985) assessed adolescents' perceptions of support in their relationships with their mothers, fathers, and best friends. The 30-item questionnaire comprises 10 subscales that load onto two factors: support and negativity. Of interest in the present study was the support scale (which includes companionship, instrumental help, intimacy, nurturance, affection, admiration, and reliable alliance subscales). Example items include: "How much do you tell this person everything?" and "How much does this person like or love you?" Adolescents rated items on a 5-point scale, and response options varied depending on the item (although all responses were keyed such that higher scores were reflective of greater support). Mean support scores for each relationship partner were calculated (α = .72-.91).

Depression (Time 1). To evaluate depressive symptoms at T1, adolescent participants completed the *Youth Self-Report* (YSR; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001). For the current study, we used the affective problems subscale which assesses dysthymia and major depression (Achenbach et al., 2003). Participants rated the items on a three-point scale from 0 = *Not true* to 2 = *Very true*. Items included phrases such as "I cry a lot" and "I feel worthless or inferior." A total score was calculated (α = .73).

Depression (Time 2). At T2, depressive symptoms were assessed with the 27-item *Children's Depression Inventory* (CDI; Kovacs, 1992). The CDI items represent five dimensions of depressive symptomology: negative self-esteem, negative mood, interpersonal problems, anhedonia, and ineffectiveness. Participants selected one of three statements for each item that best reflected the severity of their symptoms during the past two weeks. The first statement indicated absence of the symptom, while the third statement indicated high prevalence of the symptom (coded as 0, 1, or 2). The suicidal ideation item was excluded prior to the administration of the measure. The mean depressive symptoms score was calculated (α = .90).

Anxiety (Time 1). To evaluate anxiety at T1, we used the six-item anxiety problems subscale reported by Achenbach and colleagues (2003), which assesses generalized anxiety disorder, separation anxiety disorder, and specific phobias. Participants rated the items on a three-point scale from 0 = *Not true* to 2 = *Very true*. Items included phrases such as "I am nervous or tense" and "I am too fearful or anxious." A mean score was calculated (α = .63).

Anxiety (Time 2). T2 anxiety was assessed with the 39-item *Multidimensional Anxiety Scale for Children* (MASC; March et al., 1997). Of interest was the total subscale score, which comprised three anxiety dimensions: Physical symptoms (e.g., "I get shaky or jittery"); harm avoidance (e.g., "I keep my eyes open for danger"); and social anxiety (e.g., "I worry about other

people laughing at me"). Participants reported how well each item described them, from *Never true* to *Often true*, on a four-point scale. A mean score was calculated with higher scores reflecting greater anxiety (α = .90).

Externalizing Problems (Times 1 and 2). At T1 and T2, externalizing problems were assessed with the 31-item externalizing problems subscale from the YSR, which comprises the delinquent behavior and aggressive behavior subscales. Items included "I get into many fights" and "I steal from places other than home." Youth rated the items on a 3-point scale (0 = *Not true*, 1 = *Somewhat true*, 2 = *Very true*), and total scores were calculated (T1: α =.80; T2: α = .84).

Analytic Strategy

Initial descriptive analyses were conducted using SPSS version 26 and R Studio (R Core Team, 2020). These analyses examined the correlations among the study variables, and explored for differences in support between mothers, fathers, and friends, as well as adolescent sex differences in mother, father, and friend support. Attrition analyses were also conducted.

Study hypotheses were evaluated with saturated path models in an SEM framework using the *lavaan* package within *R* (Rosseel, 2012). We used full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation to account for missing data in the Grade 9 variables (i.e., anxiety, depression, externalizing problems). We also used the MLR estimator (i.e., maximum likelihood with robust standard errors) due to the built-in corrections that account for regression assumption violations such as non-normality in the data. All predictor and moderator variables were mean-centered, and interaction terms were created with the mean-centered variables. Because the models were just-identified, the model fit indices were perfect by default.

For each Grade 9 outcome, we evaluated three specific models that included the following sets of predictors: (1) Grade 8 mother-child relationship support, Grade 8 father-child

relationship support, and the interaction between Grade 8 mother-child x father-child support; (2) Grade 8 mother-child relationship support, Grade 8 best friend relationship support, and the interaction between Grade 8 mother-child x best friend support; and (3) Grade 8 father-child relationship support, Grade 8 best friend relationship support, and the interaction between Grade 8 father-child x best friend support. We were underpowered to run a model that included *all* three types of relationships and the interactions among them. Thus, to maximize power, separate models were used for each of the three sets of predictors, and also for each of the Grade 9 outcomes (depressive symptoms, anxiety, and externalizing problems; a total of nine models were evaluated).

Corresponding Grade 8 control variables were included in each model to account for baseline psychological adjustment. We also examined a set of theoretically- and empirically-relevant potential demographic covariates of parent-child relationship quality, friendship quality, and adolescent psychological adjustment (i.e., parental education, race/ethnicity, biological parents' marital status, and child sex; Hair et al., 2008; Way & Greene, 2006). However, covariates were only included if they were correlated with the independent and dependent variables in the model, as specified below. Post-hoc testing and interpretations of significant interactions were performed with simple slope analyses. A low value of relationship support was defined as one standard deviation below the support variable mean, and a high value was defined as one standard deviation above the mean. Finally, when a model had no significant interaction effect, the interaction term was removed and the model was re-run to allow for the interpretation and reporting of the main effects.

All path models were first evaluated for the entire sample of adolescents (see supplemental materials). Afterwards, we conducted multigroup analyses to evaluate potential

differences in associations by adolescent sex. These multigroup analyses involved comparing constrained and unconstrained versions of the path models, one parameter at a time, and comparing the two models using a likelihood ratio test to assess differences in model fit.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Attrition Analyses

In general, adolescents reported high levels of support from their mothers, fathers, and best friends (Table 1). However, paired samples *t*-tests revealed that youth reported greater support from their mothers than their fathers, t (356) = 7.73, $p < .001$, $d = 0.41$. There were non-significant differences in perceived support from mothers compared to best friends; however, youth reported more support from best friends than their fathers, t (342) = -6.18, $p < .001$, $d = 0.33$. Furthermore, girls, $M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.63$, reported higher levels of maternal support compared to boys, $M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.56$; t (365) = -1.93, $p = 0.05$, $d = 0.20$. There were no differences in boys' and girls' perceptions of support from their fathers, but girls, $M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.53$, reported higher levels of best friendship support than did boys, $M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.57$; t (350) = -5.71, $p < .001$, $d = 0.61$. In the correlational analyses (Table 1), perceptions of support across mothers, fathers, and best friends were related significantly, but only moderately. Moderate stability for depressive symptoms, and strong stability for anxiety and externalizing problems, were found.

There were no missing data at T1. There were, however, missing data at T2 ($N = 130$: 35% of T1 participants), due to attrition. Chi-square analyses showed that participants with complete data in Grade 9 did not differ significantly from participants with missing data on demographic variables, including sex, X^2 (1) = 0.18, $p = 0.67$, maternal education, X^2 (8) = 4.65, $p = 0.79$, paternal education, X^2 (8) = 5.90, $p = 0.66$, parents' marital status, X^2 (5) = 3.13, $p =$

0.68, and ethnicity, X^2 (5) = 4.31, p = 0.51. Further, these two groups did not differ in Grade 8 indices of maternal support, t (227.35) = 1.34, p = 0.18; paternal support, t (214.07) = 1.53, p = 0 .13; friend support, t (263.91) = 0.10, p = 0.92; depression, t (243.47) = -1.15, p = 0.25; anxiety, t (238.65) = 0.15, p = 0.88; and externalizing problems, t (240.67) = -1.61, p = 0.11.

Saturated Path Models

We first report main effects for the models predicting G9 externalizing problems and G9 anxiety, as there were no significant interaction effects when predicting these outcomes. As described above, the interaction terms were removed from these models and they were re-run with the three independent predictor variables (i.e., mother, father, and best friend support) plus the corresponding Grade 8 covariate. Thereafter, we discuss the main and moderation effects for the models that examined G9 depression as the dependent variable. Statistics for all models are presented in Table 2.

Predicting T2 Externalizing Problems

When T2 externalizing problems were evaluated as the dependent variable and T1 externalizing problems were controlled, T1 (or G8) maternal support emerged as a negative predictor, whereas T1 best friend support was a positive predictor.

Multigroup analyses revealed that two of the main effects in this model differed for boys and girls (Table 3). First, there was a significant sex difference in the path from T1 maternal support to T2 externalizing problems, X^2 (1) = 7.46, p = 0.006. For girls, maternal support was unrelated to later externalizing problems; for boys, maternal support was associated negatively with subsequent externalizing behaviors. Conversely, paternal support was related negatively to girls' later externalizing problems, but was non-significantly associated with boys' later externalizing behaviors, X^2 (1) = 43.22, p < .001.

Predicting T2 Anxiety

When T2 anxiety served as the dependent variable and T1 anxiety and adolescent sex were controlled, T1 paternal support was *positively* related to later anxiety. The main effects for maternal and friend support were non-significant, and there were no significant differences by adolescent sex in the multi-group analyses.

Predicting T2 Depressive Symptoms

When predicting T2 depressive symptoms, several significant main and interaction effects were found. In the first model (which examined maternal and paternal support), there was a significant interaction between T1 maternal and paternal support, controlling for the effects of T1 depressive symptoms. Probing of this interaction (Figure 1) revealed that there was a significant, negative association between maternal support and depressive symptoms at low levels of paternal support. However, at average and high levels of paternal support, this relation was non-significant. When maternal support was probed as the moderator, a similar pattern was revealed, such that at low levels of maternal support, there was a significant, negative association between paternal support and later depressive symptoms. Yet, at average and high levels of mother support, father support was non-significantly associated with adolescents' subsequent depressive symptoms (Figure 2).

In the second model predicting T2 depressive symptoms (which considered maternal and best friend support), a negative main effect for T1 maternal support was found. Further, T1 best friend support was a significant moderator of the relation between T1 maternal support and T2 depressive symptoms, controlling for the effects of T1 depressive symptoms. Simple slope analyses revealed that at low and average levels of friend support, there was a significant,

negative association between maternal support and later depression, but at high levels of friend support, this association was non-significant (Figure 3).

In the third model predicting T2 depressive symptoms (which included paternal and best friend support), T1 paternal support was associated negatively with T2 depression. Additionally, T1 best friend support was found to be a moderator of the association between T1 paternal support and T2 depressive symptoms, above and beyond the effects of T1 depressive symptoms. At low and mean levels of friend support, there was a significant, negative relation between paternal support and depression, but at high friend support, this association was non-significant (Figure 4). Multigroup analyses did not reveal any adolescent sex differences in the three models predicting G9 depressive symptoms.

Discussion

This study contributes to the literature on the interplay of adolescents' perceived support from their mothers, fathers, and best friends as related to their psychobehavioral adjustment across the transition to high school. We evaluated whether support from one parent would be strengthened (i.e., accumulated advantages hypothesis) by having another highly supportive parent or best friend in adolescence, insofar as the attenuation of psychopathological symptoms during the transition to high school was concerned. In addition, we tested whether high levels of support from one parent would promote positive adjustment even when relationships with the other parent or with a best friend were less supportive (i.e., compensation hypothesis). We also explored whether these relations would differ by the sex of the adolescent. In general, the findings showed that having a supportive relationship with a mother *or* father was related to fewer subsequent depressive symptoms for girls and boys, when their perceived support from the other parent or a best friend was average or low. These findings suggest that having at least one

supportive parent can protect against psychological difficulties during the high school transition and can compensate for having unsupportive relationships with other key relationship figures. Findings, however, only pertained to *depressive symptoms*, which we describe next. We then speculate why moderation effects may not have been found for anxiety and externalizing problems.

Symptoms of Depression

Depressive symptoms at T1 predicted increases in depressive symptoms at T2. However, not all youth in our study became increasingly depressed across the transition to high school. Consistent with family systems theory and our extension of it, the influence of a supportive parent-child relationship on later depressive symptoms was moderated by the level of perceived support from the adolescent's other parent-adolescent or best friend relationship. Specifically, and in support of a compensation hypothesis, we found that supportive parent-adolescent relationships – with mothers *or* fathers – were associated with decreasing depressive symptoms, but only for youth who reported that their *other* parent-adolescent relationship or their best friendship were low (or average, for best friendships) in support. These findings are in line with social provisional theory and the findings of Gaertner and colleagues (2010), who found that at high levels of friendship quality, positive parenting was unrelated to adolescents' internalizing symptoms, whereas at low levels of friendship quality there was a negative relation between positive parenting and internalizing symptoms. Regardless, these results were unexpected and will require replication before strong conclusions can be made, especially since they suggest that low support from parents or friends may not be as problematic for those youth with a highly supportive relationship with their other parent.

We speculate that a highly supportive relationship with a mother or father when other relationships are low in support may represent a compensatory relationship with a "VIP" or Very Important Person. This VIP may satisfy interpersonal needs and bolster feelings of self-worth, perhaps with increased influence due to the other less supportive relationships (Kiesner et al., 2004). The similar findings for mothers and fathers are noteworthy as they suggest that it may not matter whether it is mothers or fathers who serve in the VIP role, at least when understanding depressive symptoms. We could not test these post-hoc interpretations in the current study, and therefore, encourage future researchers to do so, perhaps with assessments of the amount of time spent with each parent and their perceived importance.

We also speculate that these findings could be related to the quality of the parents' marital or romantic relationship. In line with family systems theory, it is well documented that the marital relationship can influence child adjustment (including adolescent depressive symptoms; Chiang & Bai, 2022), through spillover effects, or the transfer of conflict in the marital dyad onto the parent-child dyad (Kouros et al., 2014). Some researchers have also posited that a parent may try to compensate for their marital dissatisfaction by cultivating a strong, positive parent-child relationship (Kouros et al., 2014). While we were not able to test either of these hypotheses, it is possible that spillover effects could be playing a role in this study, insofar as the need or ability for one parent to compensate for the other parent's lack of support. Future research would do well to examine the effect of the marital relationship on other parts of the family system in relation to aspects of adolescent adjustment.

Contrary to an accumulated advantages hypothesis, we also found that parent support was not related significantly to later depressive symptoms when the other parent or friendship relationship was highly supportive. These findings were unexpected, and were contrary to the

findings of Sentse and Laird (2010), who demonstrated that adjustment was optimal when adolescents had highly supportive parent *and* peer relationships. Our findings suggest that having two highly supportive parents, or a supportive parent and best friend relationship, do not together influence later depressive symptoms. Most of our participants reported high levels of support in all three of the relationships considered herein; the sample was also a community sample in which most youth reported low levels of difficulties, including depressive symptoms. Thus, there may have been ceiling effects in the extent to which more than one highly supportive relationship could bolster well-being. We did find that T1 support from mothers, fathers, and friends were all correlated negatively with T2 depressive symptoms. In addition, depressive symptoms were stable from T1 to T2. Thus, although the T1 support variables were related to T2 depressive symptoms, it is plausible that the strong stability of depressive symptoms made it difficult to detect the specific contributions of the T1 relationships to T2 depressive symptoms.

Although additional research is required, the findings support an expanded social relationship systems model by illustrating the interdependent and interactive nature of dyadic subsystems (i.e., father-adolescent, mother-adolescent, best friend-adolescent) when predicting adolescent depressive symptoms. We demonstrated that in studies of adolescents, it is important to not only consider immediate family member subsystems (i.e., the parent-adolescent dyad), but also to incorporate a best friend into an expanded social relationships system model. Equally important is the consideration of relationship support with both mothers and fathers, rather than with only one parent.

Youth Anxiety

Consistent with past research, anxiety symptoms at T1 predicted anxiety symptoms at T2. However, beyond this stability, we also found that greater perceived support from fathers was

related to *increases* in anxiety symptoms for boys and girls. This effect was found when controlling for mother and friend support. This finding is contrary to our hypothesis and to existing theories pertaining to both anxiety disorders (e.g., Negreiros & Miller, 2014) and father-child activation relationship theory (Dumont & Paquette, 2013), which argue that greater father-child support should promote children's emotional and psychological well-being.

Other fathering behaviors, styles, and characteristics not accounted for in this study, such as fathers' own psychopathology, as well as earlier father-child relationship quality, could have exerted unseen effects on adolescent anxiety (Negreiros & Miller, 2014). However, the majority of existing theoretical models of child anxiety have not fully accounted for the potentially distinct and interactive ways that mothers and fathers may influence the development of children's anxiety (Bögels & Phares, 2008). Moreover, fathers are a "neglected group in the study of child anxiety" (Bögels & Phares, 2008, p. 540). Therefore, there remains much to be understood about the potentially distinctive role of fathers in this developmental domain.

Youth Externalizing Problems

When externalizing problems were evaluated as the dependent variable, best friend support was found to be a risk factor for subsequent increased externalizing problems for girls and boys. This seemingly counterintuitive finding is actually consistent with the findings from several past studies, including Rueger and colleagues (2008), in which close friend support was related positively to girls' conduct problems and aggression. One possible explanation for this is that friends who are supportive might encourage, rather than discourage, externalizing problems, especially if they are engaging in externalizing problems themselves. Indeed, it has been reported, consistently, that the friends of aggressive youth are often aggressive themselves, and

that they encourage each other's negative behaviors thorough a process known as deviancy training (Dishion & Tipsord, 2011).

We also found that maternal support was negatively related to externalizing problems, but only for boys. Supportive mothers may engage in more parental monitoring of their sons. Parental monitoring has been shown to be a protective factor against delinquency and externalizing problems in past research, especially for boys and particularly by mothers (e.g., Webb et al., 2002). While maternal support was not related to the development of externalizing problems for girls, father support was related negatively to girls' later externalizing behaviors. These opposite-sex, parent-adolescent findings are consistent with findings of Sarracino and colleagues (2011), who reported that Italian adolescents' perceived attachment security to mothers (but not fathers) was negatively related to boys' reported delinquency, while attachment security to fathers (but not mothers) was negatively associated with girls' aggressive behavior. These findings support the idea that there may be sex-specific parental socialization practices that differentially contribute to adolescents' externalizing problems, perhaps through the opposite-sexed parent serving as a key referent for adolescents' social values orientation (Sarracino et al., 2011).

Strengths and Limitations

The current study and its findings make contributions to the literature in multiple ways, particularly through the inclusion of both father- and mother-adolescent relationships. This study expands our knowledge on young adolescent development by parsing out how relationships with both parents independently and jointly interact to influence psychological adjustment. The study is also strengthened by our inclusion of a third significant relationship during adolescence: a best friendship. This provides a more comprehensive understanding of the relations between

adolescents' interpersonal worlds and their psychological adjustment. Further, the use of a moderately large, racially/ethnically diverse sample and longitudinal data increases the generalizability of study findings and allows for an investigation of the prospective effects of relationship support on adolescent well-being. Finally, this study focused on the transition into high school, which is understudied compared to the transition to elementary and middle school.

There were, however, several significant study limitations. First, all data derived from reliance on adolescent self-reports. Although not uncommon in research on perceptions of relationship quality and support (e.g., Schacter & Margolin, 2019), the single-informant design raises concerns about shared method variance. Future work would do well to incorporate parent-, teacher-, or peer-report measures. Parents may have different perceptions about the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship than their child, and a best friend may serve as a more accurate reporter of externalizing behaviors given an adolescent's potential bias for underreporting delinquent behaviors. Incorporating different perspectives on relationship support may help to illuminate some of the unexpected findings in this study. For example, researchers would do well to examine fathers' perspectives of their offerings of support to their children (and whether there is a mismatch with their children's perspectives) as it may provide greater insight into why father support was related *positively* to anxiety.

Another limitation is that we only examined friendship support in the 8th grade (i.e., the middle school context), which may not be as relevant to the prediction of high school adjustment as is the level of 9th grade friendship support. Of the many changes that occur during adolescence and the transition to high school, friendships can, and do, evolve. Regardless, in future studies, researchers may choose to investigate the concurrent effects of best friendship support in high school. In addition, we were underpowered in this study to run a model that included all three

relationships and the interactions among them. Accordingly some models did not account for mothers and fathers simultaneously. However, it is important to note that when we re-ran all models controlling for the quality of the other relationship partner, the findings did not significantly differ.

We did not find evidence of moderation effects in the prediction of adolescent anxiety or externalizing problems. It is possible this is due to the strong stability of these outcomes. The grade 8 baseline adjustments explained a larger portion of the variance in the anxiety and externalizing outcomes, as compared to the depression symptoms outcome, which may explain the different pattern of results and the non-significant findings. Thus, additional research is required to better understand the interactive influences of different relationships on anxiety and externalizing problems during adolescence. Research in this area should also address another limitation of our study – different assessments of anxiety and depressive symptoms at our two time points.

Future studies should also aim to replicate this research within other sociodemographically-diverse samples, especially so as to understand these processes in lower-income families (who may be at higher risk for difficulties) and in more diverse family structures. Our study was limited by its focus on more advantaged youth from primarily biological, two-parent, married families, and it is unclear if these associations would be replicated in other family structures. For instance, among adolescents living with stepfathers, we may expect to see different compensatory processes and adjustment outcomes due to high variability in stepfather-stepchild relationship quality (King et al., 2014).

Further, we suggest that future studies should consider other aspects of relationship quality beyond support (e.g., conflict and negativity), and should test other mechanisms of influence

(i.e., mediation from parent-adolescent relationship quality through friendship quality) to gain a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which relationships work together to help and harm adolescent well-being. For instance, even if a relationship with a parent or friend is high in support, it may simultaneously be high in conflict. Moreover, researchers have found that the quality of the parent-adolescent relationship can predict the quality of adolescents' friendships (e.g., Delgado et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Despite these limitations, findings from the present study are significant as they support an expanded relationship systems model suggesting that support from mothers, fathers, and best friends works synergistically in reducing depressive symptoms during the transition to high school. This was shown regardless of adolescent sex, and especially when adolescents experienced potential risk from an unsupportive relationship with their other parent or their best friend. Further research is needed to clarify the interactive processes relating mother-,father-, and best friend support to adolescents' subsequent anxiety and externalizing problems. After replication, such findings may be relevant for clinical and intervention efforts aimed at promoting optimal adolescent psychological and behavioral adjustment through fostering healthy interpersonal relationships within and beyond the family system.

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Appendices

Table 1

Correlations and Descriptive Statistics Among Study Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. G8 Mother Support									
2. G8 Father Support	.54***								
3. G8 Friend Support	.31***	.20***							
4. G8 Depression	-.17**	-.26***	-.09						
5. G8 Anxiety	-.05	-.09	-.13*	.67***					
6. G8 Externalizing	-.32***	-.33***	-.13*	.62***	.43***				
7. G9 Depression	-.27***	-.27***	-.21**	.31***	.22***	.31***			
8. G9 Anxiety	-.07	.001	-.12	.39***	.49***	.08	.35***		
9. G9 Externalizing	-.39***	-.39***	-.07	.35***	.27***	.61***	.48**	.21**	
Mean (*SD*)	3.97 (.60)	3.71 (.75)	4.00 (.57)	3.27 (2.94)	2.18 (1.96)	9.28 (7.04)	7.16 (7.37)	29.1 (13.0)	9.02 (6.91)

Note. G8 refers to Grade 8 or Time 1, and G9 refers to Grade 9 or Time 2.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 2

Structural Equation Model Coefficients for Full Sample

G9 Depression				
Predictor	B (SE)	*B*	*p*	R^2
G8 Mother Support	-0.89 (1.15)	-0.07	0.44	
G8 Father Support	-1.69 (0.93)	-0.16	0.07	
G8 Mother x Father Support	3.54 (1.62)	0.32	0.03	
G8 Depression	0.61 (0.16)	0.23	0.000	
				0.29
G8 Mother Support	-2.22 (0.80)	-0.18	0.01	
G8 Friend Support	-0.64 (0.93)	-0.05	0.49	
G8 Mother x Friend Support	2.83 (1.35)	0.18	0.04	
G8 Depression	0.70 (0.14)	0.28	0.000	
				0.18
G8 Father Support	-2.21 (0.79)	-0.22	0.01	
G8 Friend Support	-1.14 (0.85)	-0.09	0.18	
G8 Father x Friend Support	4.37 (1.52)	0.27	0.004	
G8 Depression	0.68 (0.15)	0.27	0.000	
				0.24
G9 Anxiety				
Predictor	B (SE)	*B*	*p*	R^2
G8 Mother Support	-2.07 (1.53)	-0.06	0.18	
G8 Father Support	2.45 (1.15)	0.14	0.03	
G8 Friend Support	-2.11 (1.46)	-0.09	0.15	
G8 Anxiety	3.21 (0.41)	0.48	0.000	
Child Sex	4.40 (1.52)	0.17	0.004	
				0.29
G9 Externalizing Behaviors				
Predictor	B (SE)	*B*	*p*	R^2
G8 Mother Support	-2.18 (0.85)	-0.18	0.01	
G8 Father Support	-1.60 (0.89)	-0.17	0.07	
G8 Friend Support	2.24 (0.80)	0.18	0.01	
G8 Externalizing	0.54 (0.08)	0.53	0.000	
				0.47

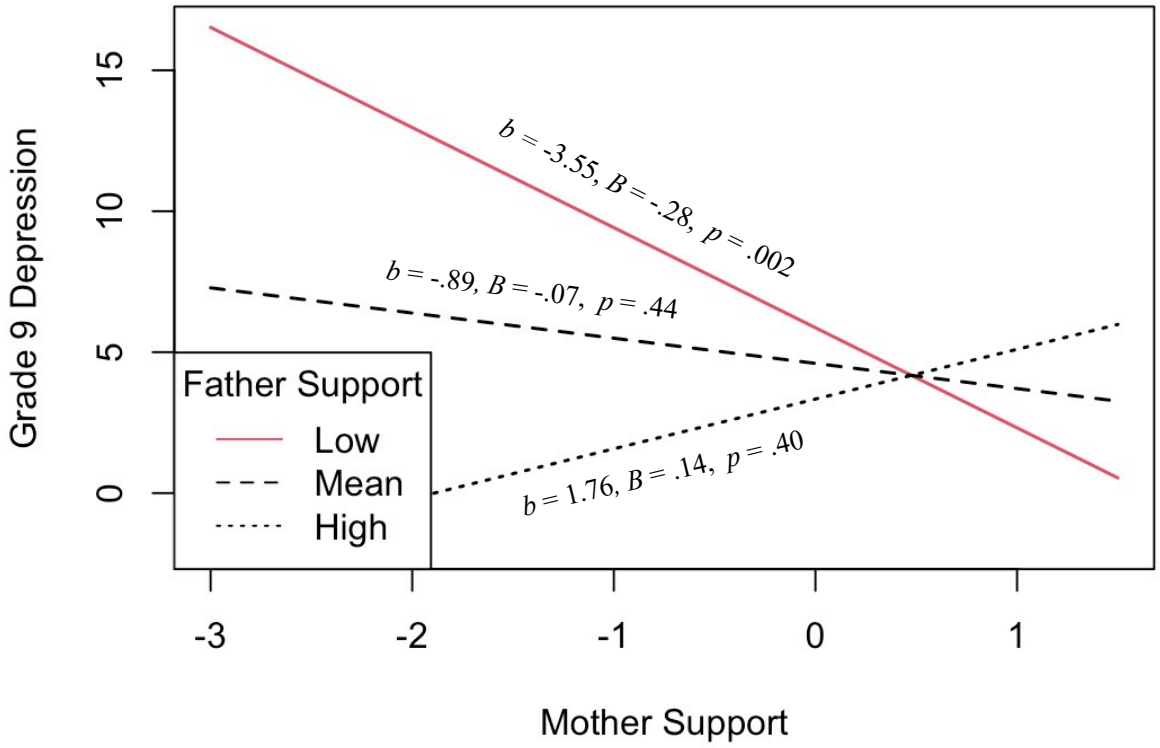
Table 3

Externalizing Behaviors Multigroup Analyses by Adolescent Sex

	Boys			Girls		
Predictor	B (SE)	*B*	*p*	B (SE)	*B*	*p*
G8 Mother Support	-3.59 (1.39)	-0.32	0.01	-0.57 (0.78)	-0.05	0.46
G8 Father Support	0.23 (0.86)	0.02	0.79	-4.07 (1.27)	-0.43	0.001
G8 Friend Support	2.62 (0.74)	0.24	0.000	2.62 (0.74)	0.18	0.000
G8 Externalizing	0.54 (0.08)	0.55	0.000	0.54 (0.08)	0.51	0.000

Figure 1

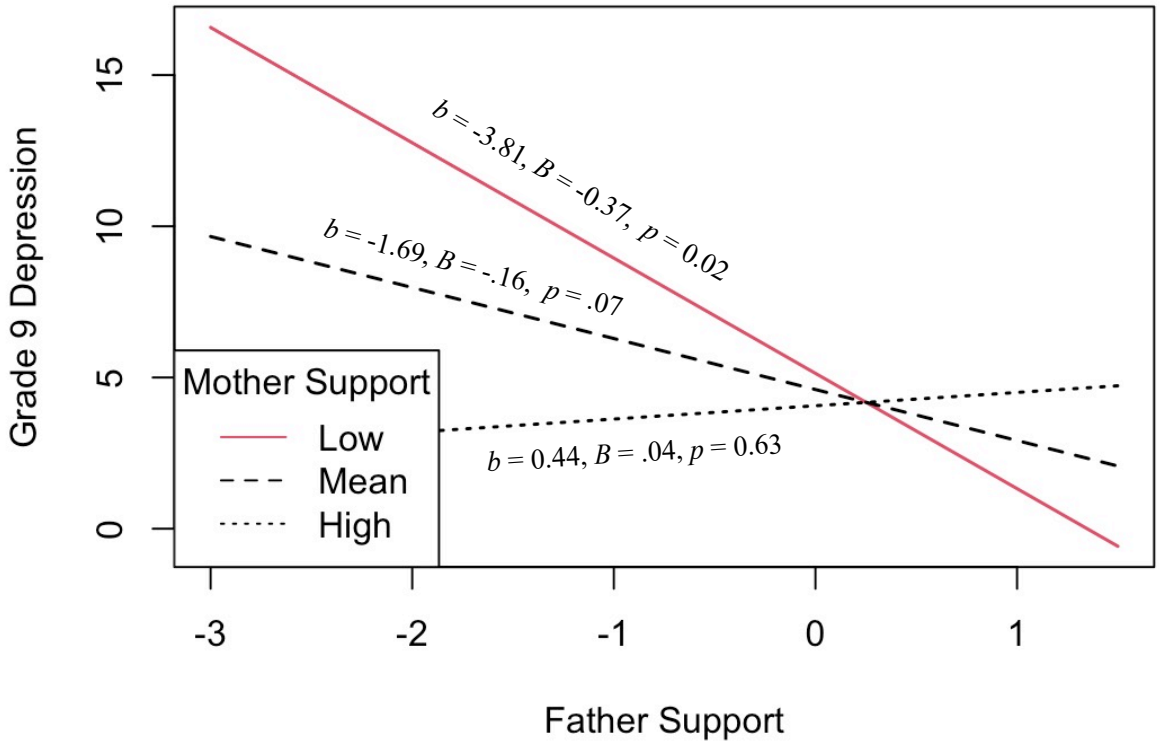
Graph of Mother Support x Father Support Interaction



Note. Father support moderates the association between mother support and subsequent depressive symptoms.

Figure 2

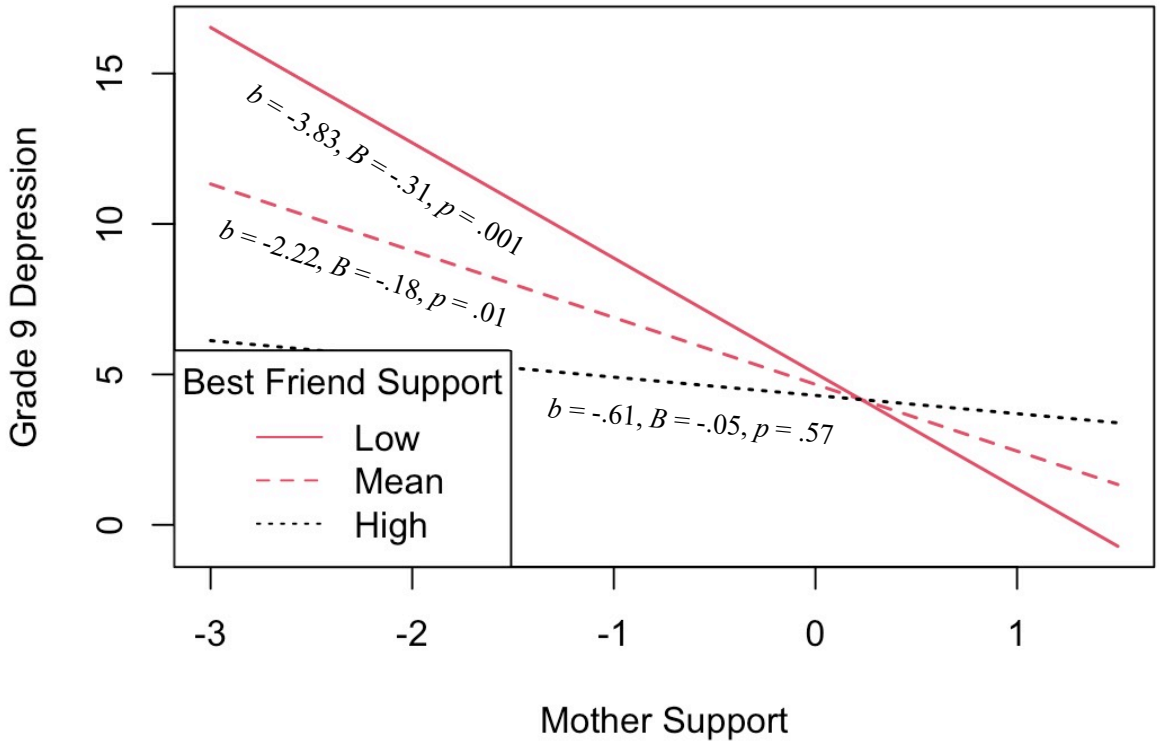
Graph of Father Support x Mother Support Interaction



Note. Mother support moderates the association between father support and subsequent depressive symptoms.

Figure 3

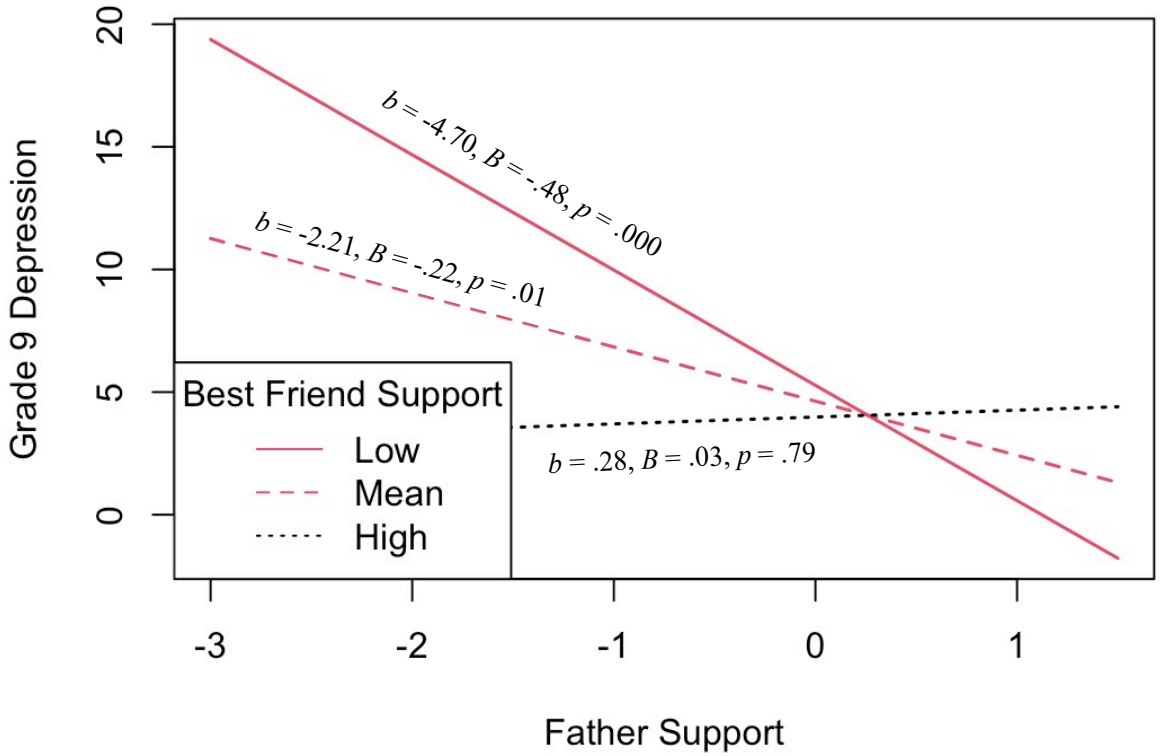
Graph of Mother Support x Best Friend Support Interaction



Note. Friend support moderates the association between mother support and subsequent depressive symptoms.

Figure 4

Graph of Father Support x Best Friend Support Interaction



Note. Friend support moderates the association between father support and subsequent depressive symptoms.

Supplementary Materials

Figure 1

Depression Conceptual Path Models

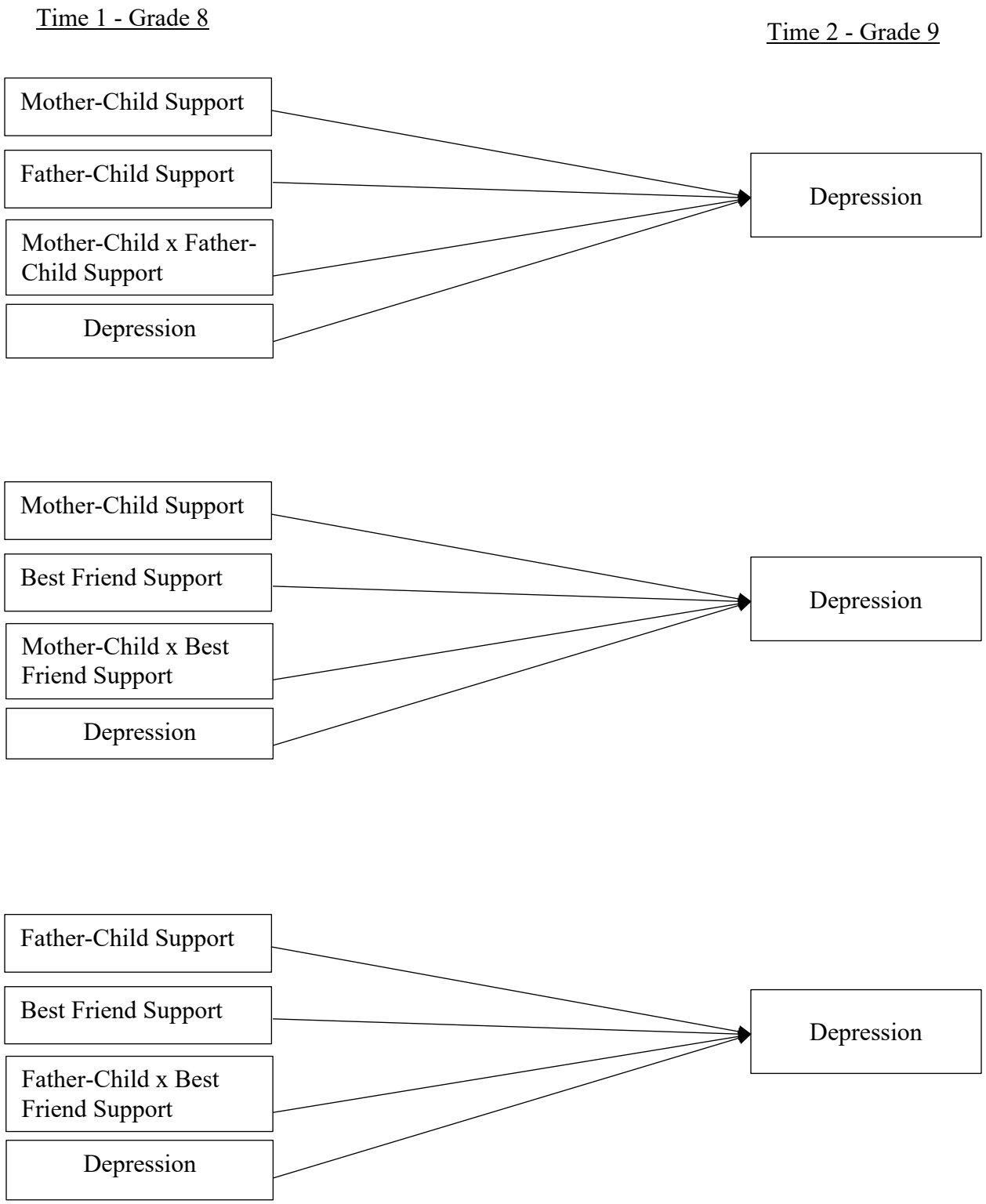


Figure 2

Anxiety Conceptual Path Models

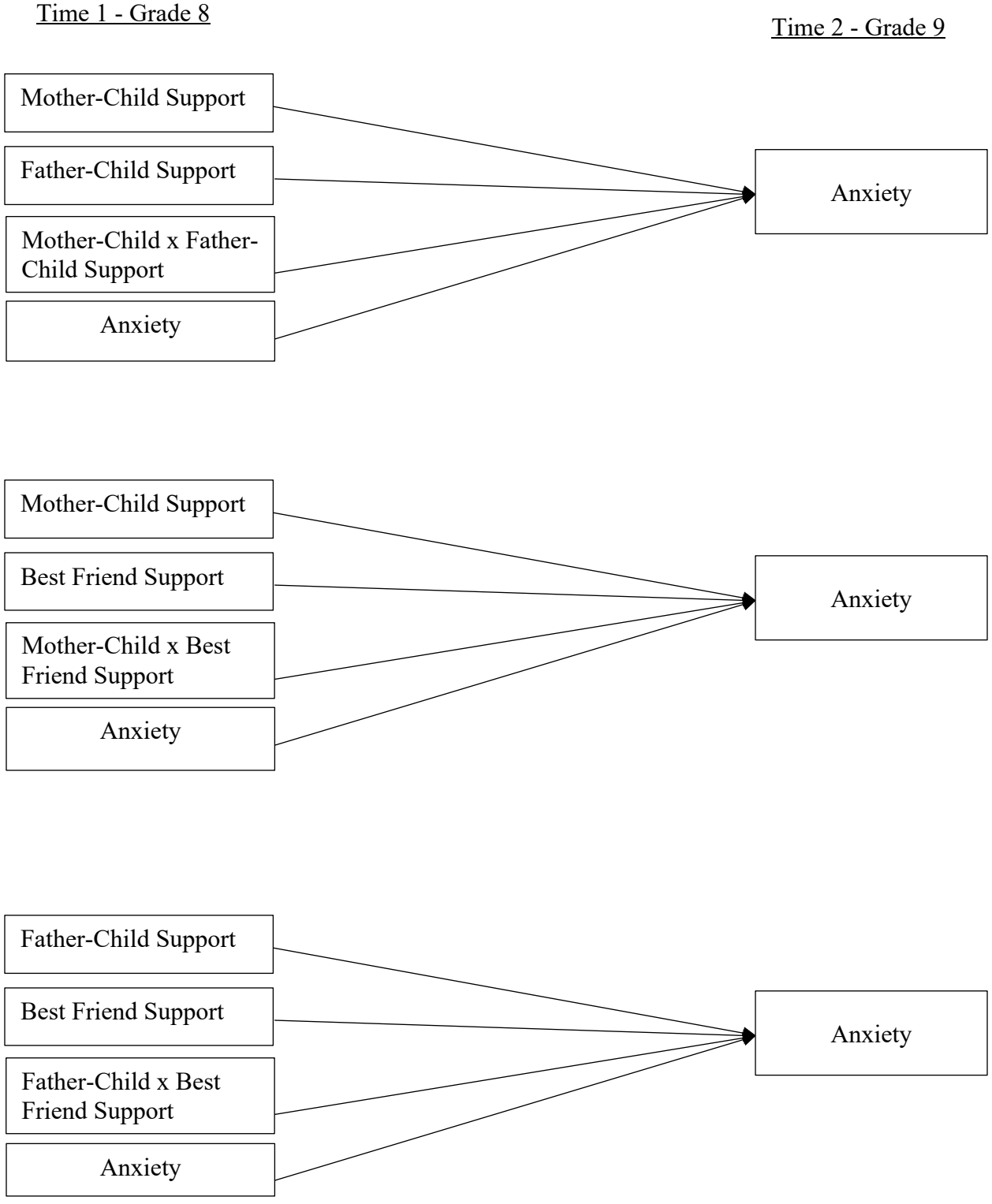
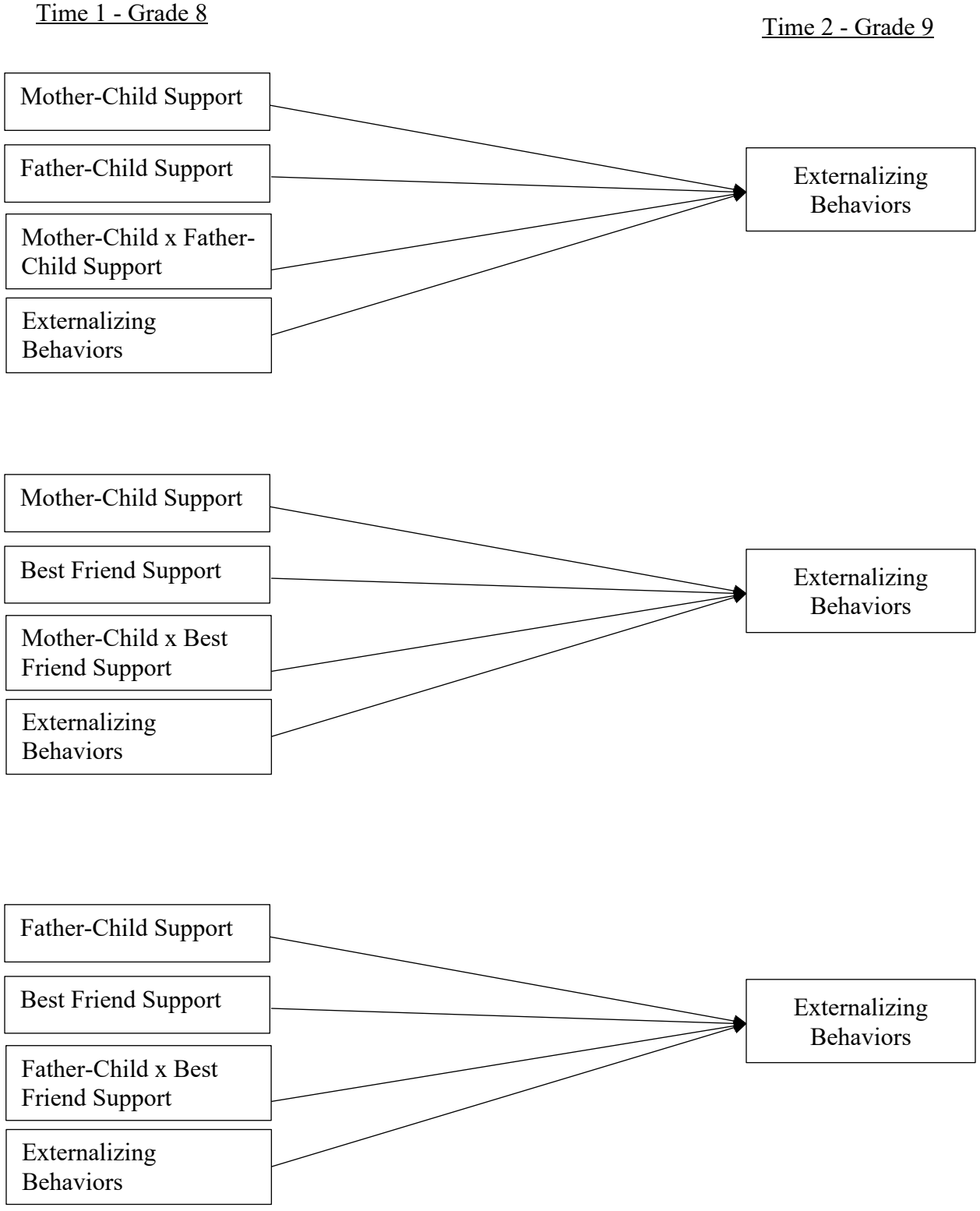


Figure 3

Externalizing Behaviors Conceptual Path Models



General Discussion

The present dissertation contributes to the extant parenting literature and builds upon the heuristic model of the ecology of father-child relationships (Cabrera et al., 2014) by elucidating the processes of mothering, fathering, and child and adolescent socioemotional development among sociodemographically diverse families. Specifically, the three empirical papers comprising this dissertation examined parenting motivations, parental play behaviors, parent-child and friendship relationship support, and psychosocial and behavioral outcomes during infancy, toddlerhood, and adolescence. The findings document novel insights regarding sources of Latino fathers' parenting motivations and within-group variation by their nativity status, the influences of mothers' and fathers' CPB and playfulness quality for children's social competence, and the independent and interactive effects of relationship support from mothers, fathers, and best friends when examining adolescent internalizing and externalizing symptoms during the transition to high school. They also add detail to our understanding of contextual moderators of these developmental processes (e.g., child temperament, child sex).

Though much of the existent parenting literature base has been developed from studies of White, middle-class mothers, numerous researchers have made substantial contributions to the field and expanded our knowledge through conducting work with diverse families and fathers (Cabrera & Leyendecker, 2017; Cabrera & Tamis-LeMonda, 2013; Lamb, 2010). Decades of this work have shown that there are shared commonalities in parenting and child development across different families and cultures (see Lansford, 2022 for a review). However, this work also shows that some aspects of parenting are not always generalizable across different racial-ethnic and socioeconomic groups, due to variation in cultural and contextual influences (Bornstein & Cheah, 2006). Relatedly, though mothers and fathers can and do show similar or complementary

parenting behaviors to each other (Fagan et al., 2014), they also engage in distinct behaviors and have independent influences on children's development (Cabrera et al., 2014).

Overall, the findings of these dissertation studies echo these sentiments about the parenting literature and support existing developmental theories in several ways. On the one hand, some aspects of parenting in these studies reflect past findings and show similarities in parents across groups (Lansford, 2022). For example, Study 1 found Latino fathers' parenting motivations were rooted in sources like their rearing history and culturally-valued goals for their child, and Study 3 found higher levels of parental supportiveness were related to improved adolescent adjustment outcomes. These findings indicate a sense of universality in some aspects of parenting and offer support for several of the proposed links in Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) heuristic model. Furthermore, some aspects of parenting (i.e., the prevalence and influence of parenting behaviors and relationship quality) in these studies were equivalent across mothers and fathers, indicating similarity in parenting regardless of parents' gender (Fagan et al., 2014). For example, Study 2 found equal levels of CPB and playfulness for both parents, and Study 3 found that supportive parent-adolescent relationships with mothers and fathers alike were associated with fewer adolescent depressive symptoms. Together, the findings demonstrate that in some ways, mothering and fathering looks the same in childhood and adolescence: ethnically-diverse mothers and fathers both showed low average levels of CPB and playfulness, and their play was unrelated to toddlers' social competence; support from both mothers and fathers in adolescence was similarly important in reducing adolescents' internalizing symptoms.

On the other hand, the current findings deviated in several ways from previous study findings with primarily White, middle-class families, and they provided novel and nuanced theoretical insights. For example, Study 1 identified notable variations in fathers' parenting

motivations based on their nativity status, and found little mention of their partner or social networks, despite these proposed influences in the Cabrera et al. (2014) model. Further, Study 2 did not find that parents' quality of CPB or playfulness were beneficial for children's socioemotional development, or that children's temperament was an important moderator of these relations, therefore again not offering support for links in Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) model. Additionally, we documented some significant differences between mothers' and fathers' parenting and their influences on children's outcomes, but only during the early adolescent developmental period. Study 3 found that adolescents reported greater support from mothers than from fathers, and maternal supportiveness was associated only with boys' externalizing problems, whereas paternal supportiveness was associated with girls' externalizing problems and with boys' and girls' anxiety symptoms. From these findings, differences in mothering and fathering appear to be more notable in adolescence than in early childhood, and somewhat dependent on the sex of the child and the particular psychobehavioral outcome being examined.

Together, the findings of these empirical studies support but also refine existing developmental theories (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Cabrera et al., 2014; Cox & Paley, 1997). Regarding Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) model of father-child relationships, the studies clarify the conceptualization of factors shaping Latino fathers' beliefs and cognitions, and they demonstrate the context-specific and -independent ways that mothers and fathers similarly or differentially influence their children's outcomes through parenting behaviors and parent-child relationship quality. Moreover, the findings provide support for family systems theory (FST; e.g., Cox & Paley, 1997) in showcasing the interdependent and interactive nature of mothers and fathers as related to youth outcomes, and suggest an extension of FST that incorporates close friends during adolescence. This notion can be easily integrated into Cabrera and colleagues'

(2014) model, which already emphasizes family system dynamics through modeling the bidirectional effects of various family dyadic subsystems (e.g., mother-father, mother-child) and family member characteristics on different parts of the ecological context.

Accordingly, I present a revised and expanded version of Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) theoretical heuristic model to showcase and integrate the findings of the three current dissertation papers (Figure 1). This model includes and centers both mothers and fathers (under a general label of "parents"), adds specific mention of motivations as part of parents' personal characteristics, includes nativity status as an aspect of parents' history, specifies the effects of quality and quantity of parenting behaviors, and adds in the best friend-child subsystem. It also more clearly demonstrates the process of developmental change across time (i.e., from infancy to adolescence), considering early experiences are predictive of later outcomes (Sameroff, 2010). Finally, it changes, adds, or removes certain pre-existing arrows (e.g., adds an arrow from family-relationships to child development; removes the bidirectional arrow between motivations and social networks) to reflect the current study findings.

Ultimately, these dissertation papers provide program-relevant insights into the nuances of parenting and development, and they represent the value of conducting multimethod research with both mothers and fathers in diverse contexts. In the following sections, I summarize the findings of the three dissertation papers, and then I discuss limitations of this work and suggest future directions for research.

Fathers' Parenting Motivations

Targeting parenting motivations offers a theoretically-grounded way to influence parenting behaviors and practices, which are known to shape children's developmental trajectories (Cabrera et al., 2014). Accordingly, understanding Latino fathers' early parenting

motivations, given their numerous barriers and challenges which can make parenting difficult, may have important implications for interventions aimed at bolstering the quality of Latine children's early home environments. Empirical Paper 1 contributed to this literature by thematically analyzing the parenting motivations of U.S.-born and immigrant Latino fathers, since little is known about these beliefs. We uncovered five main reasons, with variation by nativity status, regarding what made fathers want to be "good parents" for their infants: their 1) personal rearing history, 2) desire to rear a well-adjusted child, 3) relationship with their child, 4) intrinsic motivations, and 5) sense of duty and responsibility. Although this topic has rarely been studied with Latino fathers, many of the motivations fathers described showed overlap with theoretical and empirical concepts and cultural beliefs previously documented in the fathering and Latine parenting literatures (e.g., role modeling, alignment with *familismo* and *bien educado* values). Ultimately, Empirical Paper 1 shed light on the importance of considering motivating factors rooted in fathers' past, present, and future. The findings hold implications for service providers working with Latine families, including attention to cultural sensitivity, appreciation of within-group variability based on country of origin, and awareness of Latino fathers' lived experiences.

The Roles of Mothers and Fathers in Children's Socioemotional Development

Understanding the role of mothers *and* fathers in child development is key for discerning the potentially "unique" contributions of each parent, and for identifying the behaviors and contexts that are optimal for adjustment. Empirical Papers 2 and 3 added to this literature by using observational and survey data to investigate the longitudinal associations between maternal and paternal involvement and child and adolescent socioemotional and psychological adjustment. Both papers also examined moderators of these relations to advance our

understanding of the conditional processes of parenting on child wellbeing. In testing several aspects of the model of father-child relationships (Cabrera et al., 2014), the findings provide some evidence to support the theoretical link from parenting to child outcomes, though also a lack of evidence, and they expand our understanding of the moderating roles of child characteristics (temperament and sex) and other important members of the child's microsystem (a close friend) in shaping development.

Empirical Paper 2 investigated two types of parental play behaviors – CPB and playfulness – to understand mothers' and fathers' relative associations with toddlers' later social competence, and whether these associations varied by children's level of negative emotional temperament. We found that, on average, both mothers and fathers displayed low levels of creative and challenging play. Further, contrary to our hypotheses, neither parent's quality of play was associated with children's social skills, and emotional temperament did not emerge as a significant moderator of these relations. Though unexpected, this is one of the first studies to examine these play constructs in ethnically diverse and moderately low-income families. Thus, the findings necessitate additional theoretical work and empirical research to elucidate why these behaviors may not be developmentally promotive in diverse samples at these ages.

Empirical Paper 3 tested the main and interactive effects of supportive relationship quality with mothers, fathers, and best friends in predicting adolescents' psychobehavioral outcomes during the transition from middle to high school, as well as differences by adolescent sex. In particular, we examined how support from a mother or father in the 8th grade was related to youth depression, anxiety, and externalizing problems in the 9th grade, and whether this varied by the level of support from their other parent or a best friend. While no moderation effects were found in relation to youth anxiety or externalizing problems, we did find several interaction

effects pertaining to the development of depressive symptoms. The findings supported a compensation hypothesis, such that when youth perceived low levels of support from a parent or a best friend, higher support their other parent was linked to fewer depressive symptoms. These findings suggest that having at least one supportive parent can protect against psychological difficulties during the high school transition and can compensate for unsupportive relationships with other key figures. They also support an expanded social relationship systems model (which includes a close friend) when predicting adolescent depressive symptoms.

Together, the findings of these studies help to clarify the complex paths through which mothers and fathers are related to their children's and adolescent's socioemotional wellbeing during two notable developmental periods - early childhood and early adolescence. They aid in parsing out the developmental effects of multiple primary members of a child's microsystem, including the child themself, as well as interactions happening in the child's mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). The studies also expand the field of parenting research through observing parenting behaviors outside the typical realm of the "maternal template" (e.g., sensitivity, Cabrera et al., 2018, p. 154) and showcasing when mothering and fathering is similar versus different. These findings offer insights into the wide variety of ways that mothers and fathers interact with their children, and hold implications for family-based interventions looking to capitalize on the strengths of the whole family system.

Limitations and Future Directions

The three empirical papers in this dissertation contribute to the literatures on parenting and child development in numerous ways. There are also limitations of this research, and fruitful directions for future research to explore. One limitation of this work is the lack of generalizability of the findings. The samples for all three papers were moderately small (ranging

from $N = 85$ to 368 participants) and limited to the Washington D.C. area and southern California in the United States. Two of the samples were also primarily Latine and were drawn from a parenting intervention, and thus future work could examine experimental effects and identify causal relations. However, to improve the external validity of the current findings, these studies would need to be replicated in larger, population-based samples.

Additionally, the current studies did not investigate potential mediation mechanisms between parenting and child outcomes, though these indirect effects are theorized to play a significant role in developmental processes (Cabrera et al., 2014). Future research should expand on these studies by testing contextually- and culturally-relevant mediational paths, such as the indirect effect of parents' romantic or co-parenting relationship, parents' nativity status or acculturation, and parents' parenting and child development beliefs, through parent-child interactions and relationship quality.

Relatedly, Empirical Paper 1 identified Latino fathers' parenting motivations during infancy, and though parenting beliefs have been theoretically and empirically linked to later involvement, future work should test whether early fathering motivations are indeed linked to later consistency and quality of involvement, and in turn to children's outcomes. We have little empirical knowledge surrounding how fathers' different sources of motivations (e.g., their rearing history, their relationship with their child) may have differential impacts on their own involvement and their child's development. For instance, if fathers describe being motivated primarily by their child's future wellbeing, it is unclear whether that might be more strongly predictive of their long-term involvement than a different source of motivation. Moreover, this study captured first-time fathers' motivation at only one time point early in their child's life. We do not know how fathers' motivations may change over time as their child develops, or as more

siblings are born and family dynamics are shifted. Notably, Empirical Paper 1 is one of the first studies to offer insights into the meanings of Latino fathers' motivations, but additional research is needed to understand how to best apply this knowledge from an intervention standpoint.

In connection to the prior point about capturing a snapshot of a phenomenon, Empirical Papers 2 and 3 are limited in their relatively brief longitudinal natures (i.e., Paper 2 examined ages 18 to 24 months; Paper 3 examined the 8th to 9th grades). Future studies should incorporate several measurement points over a longer span of time to evaluate change and stability in parenting, and how that trajectory is associated with change or stability in children's outcomes. This is also helpful from policy and practice perspectives in terms of being able to more accurately pinpoint the optimal developmental timing of certain environmental inputs (e.g., at what age does a particular parenting behavior matter the most for children?). Future studies may also want to consider a wider scope of contextual factors and processes influencing parenting and the family system (e.g., aspects of parents' social networks and their jobs; immigration-related experiences, Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Cabrera et al., 2014). Additionally, it could be beneficial to include the effects of siblings or grandparents, especially for ethnic-minority families who are more likely to live in intergenerational households and have primary caregivers other than mothers and fathers.

Regarding Empirical Paper 2, further work is needed to understand why certain types of play (i.e., quality of CPB and playfulness) at 18 months were unhelpful in our sample for social competence at 24 months. Past work on CPB has been primarily limited to White, middle-class families, and almost solely focused on the link to early childhood anxiety. Future studies should continue to examine these fairly new parenting constructs (as well as other play-based behaviors) in diverse families across different ages, to better understand the prevalence and impact.

Researchers would also do well to evaluate several different types of child outcomes in order to distinguish which particular aspects of development (e.g., cognitive, social, language) these parental play behaviors may promote, in combination with different moderators (e.g., other aspects of child temperament such as activity level). Further, considering parental physical play tends to peak at slightly older ages during the preschool years (MacDonald & Parke, 1986), future work should re-examine these parenting behaviors at that time.

Altogether, the findings of these studies support the continued exploration of within-group variability with sociodemographically diverse families. As opposed to a deficit-perspective of between-group comparisons (e.g., White vs. Latine parenting behaviors), the field of developmental science is enriched and families are better supported through research that understands the nuanced and distinctive processes of parenting across different groups. In pursuing the investigation of within-group variability, researchers can highlight and build upon the strengths of diverse families, and can appropriately identify relevant sources for intervention. This is also especially pertinent to low-income, ethnic minority fathers, who are often excluded, overlooked, and undervalued when it comes to their role in their children's development. Yet, as evidenced in this dissertation, fathers value their children and make important contributions to their wellbeing. Additional work is needed on the best practices and strategies to successfully recruit, involve, and retain fathers in research and programs with children and adolescents.

Conclusion

As researchers, our understanding of children's developmental trajectories requires careful consideration of the vast array of contextual factors and processes they encounter - across a wide diversity of family backgrounds. This especially includes experiences within children's proximal environments, such as with their mothers and fathers. Accordingly, the current

dissertation presented three interrelated empirical studies on parenting motivations, parental play behaviors, parent-child relationship support, and children's socioemotional development. Using qualitative and quantitative methods with ethnically-racially and economically diverse samples, the findings showcased the nuanced processes of parenting and development, as modeled by Cabrera and colleagues' (2014) theoretical framework. Fathers were motivated to be "good parents" by a wealth of sources, and mothers' and fathers' involvement was related to their children's social development in some similar but also in some distinct ways, across childhood and adolescence. Additionally, though temperament did not emerge as an important moderator during toddlerhood, some parenting processes during adolescence significantly differed by child sex. The findings demonstrate the importance of considering and involving both mothers and fathers in research, policy, and intervention programs, in order to better understand and benefit from their shared and unique effects on child development. They also demonstrate the importance of examining variation in parenting across cultures and contexts, because development is not "one-size-fits-all." All children deserve the chance to thrive and flourish throughout their lifespan, which can be promoted, in part, by helping parents to cultivate a strong and solid early foundation for development.

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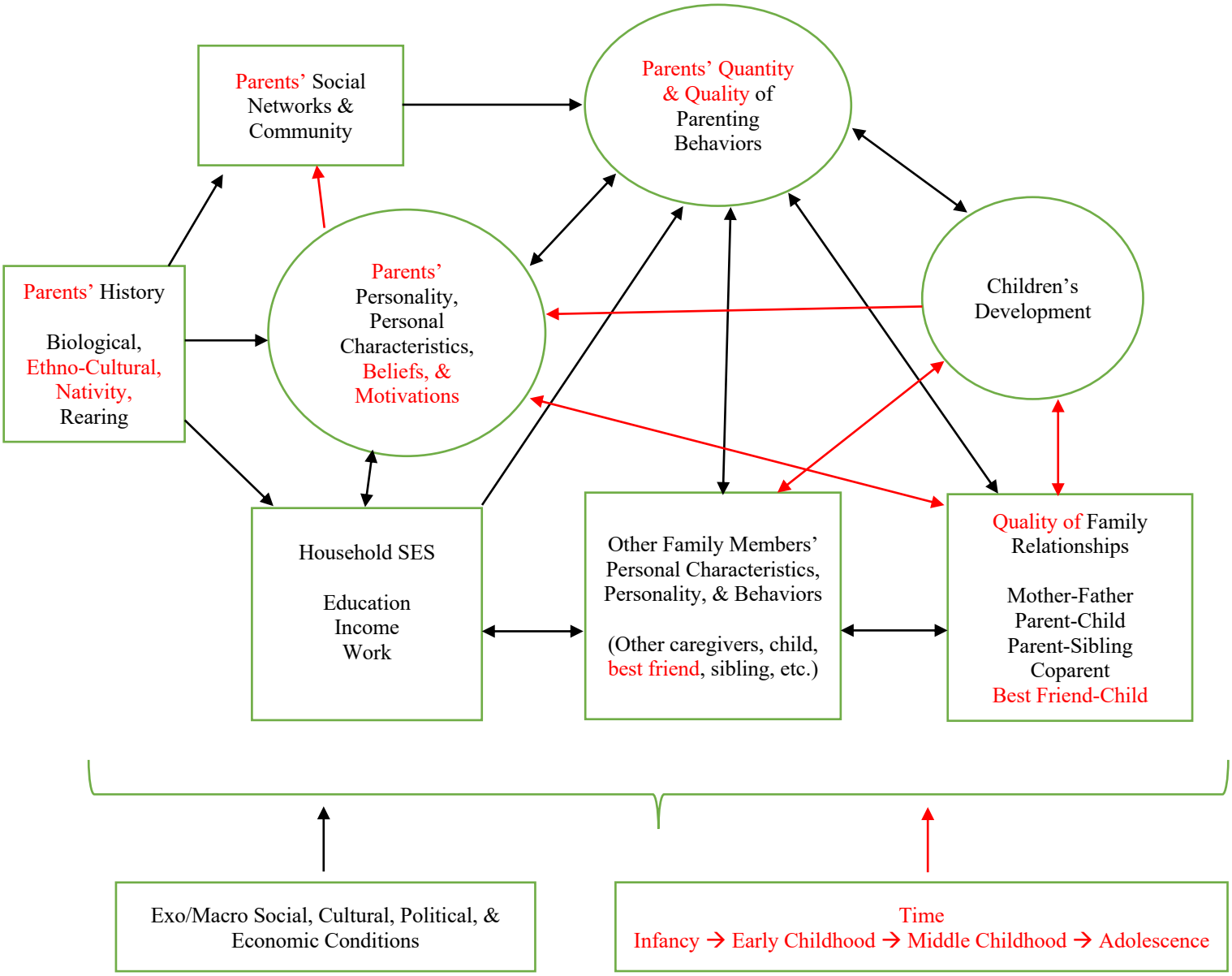
Figure 1

Revised Model of the Ecology of Parenting and Child Development



Note. The main changes to Cabrera et al.'s (2014) model are in labeled in red.