

Complexity of Father Involvement in Low-Income Mexican American Families*

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We identify multiple predictors of five types of father involvement in 167 low- to moderate-income two-parent Mexican American families with fifth-grade children. Analyses show that fathers' egalitarian gender attitudes and mothers' education are associated with higher levels of father involvement. Fathers are more involved in monitoring and interacting with children when families place more emphasis on family rituals, they are more involved in supervising children when mothers are employed more hours, and they perform more housework when mothers earn more and the family is under economic stress. Counter to "macho" stereotypes, Mexican-identified men are more likely than more acculturated men to supervise children and engage them in conventionally feminine activities. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

When the economy falters as it has in the past few years, American parents must struggle to make ends meet and maintain families. Even when the economy is doing well, as it was in the late 1990s, such struggles are common among low-income families. Among the groups most at risk for economic stress, adolescent problems, and school dropout are Latinos (Hispanics), who are projected to comprise nearly one-quarter of the U.S. population by the year 2050. Two-thirds of U.S. Latinos are Mexican Americans, a population disproportionately composed of two-parent, working-poor families with unique needs and cultural resources. Though previous research has tended to ignore this group, in this article, we draw on this population to investigate multiple components of father involvement and offer an analysis of predictor variables associated with higher levels of men's participation in family life.

When job markets do not support full employment, the family lives of marginalized ethnic groups are adversely affected. Although traditional cultural ideals call for men to be sole breadwinners and women to be stay-at-home mothers, contemporary labor markets increasingly require households to have two earners. The individualism and gender ideals commonly associated with women sharing breadwinning and men sharing child rearing are not prevalent among Latino families. Instead, such families are commonly described as having high levels of family cohesion and cooperation ("familism") but also being governed by traditional gender ideals (see Buriel, 1986; Cauce & Rodriguez, 2001; Gonzales, Knight, Morgan-Lopez, Saenz, & Sirolli, 2002; Segura, 1992; Vega, Kolody, Valle, & Weir, 1991). How, then, have recent economic and social changes affected parenting practices in working-class Latino families? We explore some of the tensions and changes facing Mexican American families and identify the cultural and labor market conditions associated with father involvement in low-income and working-poor communities. By focusing on different components of men's family involvement, we also inform methodological and conceptual debates about how to

study fatherhood in diverse settings. Finally, our research can be used to improve family practice and family policy intended to encourage the participation of fathers in children's lives.

Contradictory Cultural Expectations

National surveys report that the vast majority of American men rank marriage and children among their most precious goals, and most American fathers say they value their families over their jobs (Coltrane, 1996). Similarly, most Americans agree that women should have equal rights to men and that job discrimination on the basis of gender should be prohibited. Reflecting this dual agenda for gender equality, 3 of 4 Americans agree that wives' and husbands' jobs are equally important, and 9 of 10 say they should share all aspects of parenting (*Washington Post*, 1998). Ironically, surveys also show that American husbands and fathers perform relatively little housework or child care (compared to their wives) and that American husbands and wives continue to judge unbalanced divisions of family labor as "fair" (Coltrane, 2000). Thus, Americans embrace equal parental involvement at the same time that they accept minimal family work contributions from men. Elsewhere, we have argued that such contradictions reflect longstanding tensions in American culture dating back to the founding of the nation (Coltrane & Adams, 2001, 2003; Coltrane & Parke, 1998; Parke & Tinsley, 1984). Tensions between individual rights and family obligations have surfaced most often in debates about women's employment, but as we move into the 21st century, these tensions are increasingly played out in debates about men, marriage, and fatherhood (Coltrane, 2001).

Typically missing from these debates is explicit consideration of men who are not White and middle class. In this study, we move beyond the simple observation that poor men from minority communities are less likely to be married and to contribute money to their children, and document how Mexican American men in two-parent households contribute to their families in a multitude of ways. In particular, we investigate the frequency with which they interact with their school-aged children, document whether they participate in "feminine" gender-typed activities as well as "masculine" activities, assess whether they monitor their children's whereabouts and activities, and ascertain the extent to which they participate in direct child supervision and routine household labor. In addition, we specify the personal, family, social, economic, and cultural factors that predict father involvement in each of these activities and invoke theories that might help us understand differential levels of involvement.

*This research was supported by grants from NIH (MH-54154-01A2) and the University of California-Riverside.

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Key Words: families, fathers, housework, Latino (Hispanic), low-income, Mexican American, parenting.

A Focus on Mexican American Families

Because most previous studies of fathers and families have focused on White, middle-class fathers (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000), scholars have called for including other ethnicities and class levels in research designs (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). The Latino population of the United States is a heterogeneous group of over 30 million (Pinal & Singer, 1997; Zinn & Wells, 2000). Latinos now constitute the largest "minority" group in the United States, and approximately two-thirds of this group is of Mexican descent (referred to here as Mexican American). Compared to families who are of European descent, Mexican American families have low social mobility and experience relatively little change in family income across generations (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; Zinn & Wells). Latinos, especially Mexican Americans, tend to be employed in the service sector and occupy jobs with low pay, limited benefits, few opportunities for advancement, and periodic instability (Ortiz, 1996). Because of low wages received by their parents in the late 1990s, over a third of Latino children under the age of 18 were living in poverty, a rate that is over three times higher than that of non-Latinos in the United States (Proctor & Dalaker, 2002).

Latino families are of particular interest because of their increasing numbers, economic marginality, and disproportionate exposure to various risk factors, such as school dropout, crime victimization, and teenage pregnancy. Latino families are also of interest because of their traditional strengths, including an emphasis on child rearing and enduring primary and extended family bonds. Evidence of the value placed on cooperation in Latino families appears in studies in which Latino children exhibit higher rates of cooperation than European American children (Knight & Kagan, 1977; Rotherman-Borus & Phinney, 1990), and in observations of Mexican American households in which parents promote interdependence in their child socialization practices and emphasize family rituals (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Latino children are expected to show respect and deference toward parents and other elders, and family cohesion remains a central value, especially for Latinas. Nevertheless, independence is emphasized more in later generations, with second-generation Latino parents inviting more of their children's opinions than immigrant parents (Delgado-Gaitan), and later generations experiencing increased risks for divorce (Cauce & Rodriguez, 2001; Miranda & Quiroz, 1990).

Many scholars have noted that the increased presence of women in the workforce poses unique challenges to the traditional Latino family and rigid gender roles (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992; Zavella, 1987). Few studies include data on Latino fathers as well as mothers, so we know relatively little about how fathers respond to marital and parenting pressures, especially under conditions of economic stress. In one study (Romero, Castro, & Cervantes, 1988), Latinos who lost their jobs reported increased tension and hostility in relations with their children and experienced disruption in family values of harmony and respect. Previous studies on other populations report that parental monitoring is adversely affected by economic stress, with parents exhibiting less vigilance (e.g., Conger & Elder, 1994; Crouter, McDermid, McHale, & Perry-Jenkins, 1990). Further, despite fathers becoming more available and involved in routine child care when they are unemployed, some studies suggest that they exhibit fewer supportive behaviors than do employed fathers (Harold-Goldsmith, Radin, & Eccles, 1988). Here, we explore such issues by document-

ing how employment, income, and financial stress are associated with fathers' parental monitoring and other aspects of father involvement.

As noted above, generational status and acculturation are important considerations in studying Mexican American families. Acculturation is usually described as giving up traditional forms of behavior and adopting model behaviors of the host country (Garcia & Lega, 1979). It is considered to be a multidimensional process involving changes in attitudes, behavior, awareness, loyalty, and values (Gonzales et al., 2002; Keefe & Padilla, 1987). Recent perspectives view the process as transactional, involving change in both immigrant group and host culture (Gonzales et al.; Gutierrez & Sameroff, 1990). Individuals and families can be identified at various stages of the process, and the process itself may be unidirectional or bidirectional depending upon the type of cultural context involved (Buriel & DeMent, 1997; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1980). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) suggested that "segmented assimilation" captures the experience of many second-generation immigrants, because structural and human capital factors influence subpopulations differently. In general, less acculturated Latino groups maintain Spanish language usage, have lower educational and occupational status, and manifest high family solidarity and ethnic identity (Gonzales et al.). A key factor in the assimilation process is the degree to which the acculturation of parents versus children is consonant or dissonant. The former is associated with greater parental and family cohesion and better school performance, whereas the latter is associated with loss of parental authority and family cohesion and lower school performance (Hernández & Glenn, 2003; Portes & Rumbaut).

Because we have so few studies that focus on Latino men's performance of family work, straight-line acculturation models and stereotypes about Mexican men remaining aloof from family life may carry disproportionate influence over popular and academic understandings about Mexican American fatherhood (Mirandé, 1997). The study reported here attempts to redress this shortcoming by focusing on low- to moderate-income Mexican American men's participation in family life. We include a measure of acculturation/ethnic identity and also include a measure of family rituals to capture variation in familism as reported in research on Mexican Americans. In this analysis, we focus on various predictors of Mexican American fathering using cross-sectional data, but in future analyses, we will place father involvement in neighborhood and community contexts, consider marital processes and child development outcomes, make cross-ethnic comparisons, and employ longitudinal data to assess changes over time.

Conceptualizing and Measuring Father Involvement

The leading strategy for measuring fathers' involvement with children posits three components: engagement or interaction with the child; accessibility or availability to the child, and responsibility for the care of the child (as distinct from the direct performance of care; Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1985). Although some activities include aspects of more than one of these components, specifying father involvement in these terms allows for refinement in theories and research on family functioning and child development (Parke, 1995). Father involvement is most frequently measured in terms of the first component of engagement or interaction, exemplified by holding, talking to,

and especially playing with younger children (McBride, 1989; Parke, 2000). Studies show that fathers have increased the amount of time they spend interacting with their children, though they still spend less time interacting with children than do mothers (Coltrane, *in press*; Levine & Pittinsky, 1997; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2003).

Some recent attempts to quantify fathers' interaction or engagement with children include more careful consideration of the specific types of contact involved, especially distinguishing between childcare activities and involvement in play, leisure, or affiliative activities with the child (Parke, 1995). When compared to mothers, fathers are likely to spend a much greater proportion of their interaction time with children in play or leisure, and such activities make unique contributions to children's emotional self-regulation and social competence (Parke, 1996). Especially when considering older children, the types of activities associated with father-child interaction have implications for the potential effects of such interaction on the child's understanding of gender (see Adams & Coltrane, *in press*). For example, when a father plays sports with his sons (but not with his daughters), or when he directs his daughters to cook for him (but not his sons), his children learn different messages about the family obligations and entitlements of men and women. To capture differences in types of father-child interaction, we separated masculine-typed interaction (e.g., outdoor games) from feminine-typed interaction (e.g., cooking together).

Fathers' availability is measured less often than interaction, but it is a necessary precondition for more active forms of parenting—like monitoring and rule enforcement—that predict positive child outcomes. Availability is sometimes measured by hours of employment, although more accurate assessments include the actual time that a parent is with a child (but not necessarily interacting), in the vicinity of the child (e.g., in the house or yard with the child), or reachable via phone or other means (especially for older children). One recent study found that a father's availability now has a greater impact on his assumption of childrearing duties than it did in past decades (Brewster, 2000). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, fathers tended to use their discretionary nonworking hours for other activities, whereas in the late 1980s and 1990s, they were far more likely to use those hours for child care. In this study, we measure parent availability by asking how many hours per week each parent supervises the child, allowing for the computation of the father's percentage of child supervision. In addition, we measure mothers' and fathers' employment hours and use them as predictors of fathers' availability.

In addition, researchers have begun to stress the importance of the responsibility dimension of father involvement, which includes the more hidden managerial aspects of child care, as well as household maintenance activities such as housework. Managerial parenting functions include organizing and arranging the child's environment, thereby regulating the child's access to social contacts (Parke, 1995, 2000). In infancy, management includes setting boundaries for play, taking the child to the doctor, arranging day care, or setting up opportunities for interacting with others. In middle childhood, managerial responsibility includes regulating meals, baths, clean-up, and monitoring or arranging for play with other children. Parke (2000) suggested that the monitoring and managerial role that parents play may be just as important for child development as time spent in face-to-face interaction, because the amount of time

children spend in social environments far exceeds their time interacting directly with parents. As Pleck (1997) noted, mothers remain childcare managers in the vast majority of households, but evidence from some studies indicates that at least some fathers are taking a more active role in this domain (Coltrane, 1996). In this study, we measured one aspect of responsibility by ascertaining the extent to which each parent monitors the child's whereabouts and activities. Monitoring reflects knowledge about children's behaviors, as well as setting and enforcing behavioral rules.

Although often neglected in studies of parenting, another way that fathers (and mothers) take responsibility for children is by participating in routine household labor. National surveys and time-diary studies show that the average American woman performs about three times as much routine housework (i.e., cooking, meal clean-up, house cleaning, shopping, laundry) as the average man and that divisions of labor become more gender segregated after couples become parents (Coltrane, 2000; Robinson & Godbey, 1997; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Although most studies looked at either housework or parenting, the few studies that include both suggest that when men share more of the daily parenting, they also do more housework. One study using the National Survey of Families and Households (Coltrane & Adams, 2001) showed that when men participated in nurturing and supportive activities serving children, they also were more likely to share in the housework. In contrast, when fathers enacted fatherhood based on masculine recreation or family headship, they were less likely to share domestic work with their wives. Such findings suggest that it is important to disaggregate fathering behaviors into various categories (e.g., housework, transportation, play or sports, rule enforcement, supervision, monitoring, emotional support, shared activities of various types) and to evaluate whether the activities have similar or different predictors.

Predictors of Father Involvement

As Pleck's comprehensive reviews reveal (Pleck, 1997; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2003), father involvement is multiply determined. No single factor is responsible for all types of father involvement, and studies often report contradictory effects for factors like family size, birth timing, socioeconomic status, or gender attitudes. For example, some studies found that fathers are more involved if they believe in gender equality (Baruch & Barnett, 1981; Blair, Wenk, & Hardesty, 1994), whereas others find no significant association between involvement and gender equality ideals (Pleck). A few factors, like education level, are consistently associated with higher reports of father involvement, though questions remain about how to interpret such results, or how much they are influenced by self-reporting biases and social desirability. Mothers with more education tend to report higher levels of father participation in interaction and responsibility, in part because they are more likely to endorse the view that fathers should be involved in children's lives (Coltrane, 1996; Pleck, 1997). One of the most consistent findings in studies of fatherhood is that men are more involved with sons than with daughters (e.g., Harris & Morgan, 1991; McBride, Schoppe, & Rane, 2002), especially among older children (Pleck, 1997). These findings, like most in family studies and social science, are based primarily on studies of White middle-class families.

Most research also finds that fathers' work hours are a strong predictor of interaction with children or participation

in child supervision, especially when considered in conjunction with mothers' work hours. To illustrate, one study found that fathers spend about 2 hours interacting with children on weekdays, but over 6 hours on Sundays (McBride & Mills, 1993). When mothers of preschool children are employed, a father's employment hours predict his participation in routine child care (Casper & O'Connell, 1998), and nonoverlapping work shifts are one of the best predictors of fathers sharing routine child care (Presser, 1988). Fathers who work fewer hours and have more flexible work schedules tend to be more actively involved in child care than those who work long hours or who have inflexible schedules (Pleck, 1993). Fathers also tend to participate more to the extent that they view their wives' career prospects more positively, suggesting that mothers' human capital (e.g., education) and relative contributions to the household economy are predictive of greater father involvement (Pleck, 1997).

Predictors of men's participation in housework usually include relative resources, gender attitudes, and time availability (Coltrane, 2000). Relative resource predictions suggest that people with higher relative incomes or higher status jobs will do less housework than their spouses and that those with fewer resources will not be able to avoid doing the housework. Gender attitude predictions suggest that people socialized to believe in gender-segregated work will conform to those beliefs. Time availability predictions, as noted for child care above, suggest that when people spend more time in paid work, they spend less time in housework. Although methodological and conceptual issues abound, support for the first two explanations (resource and attitudes) often is mixed, whereas the third factor (time availability) usually is found to explain significant amounts of variance in the sharing of household labor (Coltrane, 2000). In general, wives who make more money do less housework, and those who earn more of the household income do proportionately less housework (though still more than their partners; see Blair & Lichter, 1991; Greenstein, 1996; Silver & Goldscheider, 1994). Of the time availability variables, women's employment hours have demonstrated the strongest and most consistent effects on women's absolute levels of family work and men's share of that work (e.g., Almeida, Maggs, & Galambos, 1993; Demo & Acock, 1993; Robinson & Godbey, 1997). Using national samples, researchers typically find that men who are employed fewer hours also do a greater share of the housework and child care (Brines, 1993; Greenstein; Waite & Goldscheider, 1992). In contrast, some studies find no relationship between men's employment hours and their housework (Almeida et al.; John & Shelton, 1997; Sullivan, 1997). Once again, data for these conclusions are drawn from samples composed primarily of White middle-class couples.

Studies evaluating the relative contributions of men and women to household labor usually control for such variables as education, family income, financial stress, and family size. Although interpretation of education effects is complicated by conceptual confusion about whether years of education should be considered a measure of human capital accumulation, a relative resource, a component of social class, an indicator of attitudes, or something else, studies suggest that women with more education do less housework (Orbuch & Eyster, 1997; Pittman & Blanchard, 1996; Presser, 1994). In contrast, men with more education generally do more housework (Haddad, 1994; Orbuch & Eyster; Pittman & Blanchard; Presser; South

& Spitze, 1994). Attitudes about women being suited to tend homes and raise children remain linked to the allocation of labor in most American homes. Women's egalitarian gender ideology is a consistent predictor of housework sharing, and some studies also show that more egalitarian men share more housework (or child care; e.g., Almeida et al., 1993; Perry-Jenkins, & Crouter, 1990). Findings from parenting and household labor studies rarely consider the issue of social class, except to use income as a general control variable (with few consistent findings). In contrast, the economic stress literature tends to consider the effects of job loss or poverty, as noted above, but generally focuses on parental engagement, monitoring, and responsibility rather than other forms of household labor (Elder & Conger, 2000).

Although studies find that women still perform most of the housework and parenting, when men are more involved, women report that their division of labor is more fair, they are less depressed, and they enjoy higher levels of marital satisfaction (Coltrane, 2000). These findings, like those identifying predictors of men's housework and parenting, are based on samples that rarely include significant numbers of ethnic minority men. Household labor studies that do include minorities tend to focus on African American men, who are found to do slightly more housework than White men, net of other predictors (Broman, 1991; John & Shelton, 1997; Orbuch & Eyster, 1997; Padgett, 1997). Some find that common predictor variables work somewhat differently for Blacks, in part because of more egalitarian attitudes and greater employment/earnings equality between spouses (Orbuch & Eyster). Findings are contradictory concerning the sharing of family work in Latino families, with some suggesting that there is slightly more sharing than among White families (Mirandé, 1997; Shelton & John, 1993) and some suggesting that there is less (Coltrane & Valdez, 1993; Golding, 1990). Most studies show similar patterns of association between predictor and outcome variables regardless of whether the couples are Latino or White (Coltrane & Valdez; Golding; Herrera & Del Campo, 1995), but findings remain tentative, primarily because of the small number of Latino men in most studies and the lack of differentiation among different subgroups (i.e., Mexican, Latin American, South American, Cuban, Puerto Rican). In the analysis that follows, we assume that predictor variables found to be associated with greater father involvement in White families are likely candidates to be associated with greater father involvement in Mexican American families as well (e.g., more education, more liberal gender attitudes, more equal husband-wife employment and earnings). In addition, we examined the extent to which acculturation and familism might influence Mexican American men's involvement in routine parenting and housework. Following earlier research, we expected that higher levels of acculturation would lead to more egalitarian housework arrangements.

Methods

Overview of Research Design

The sample and data for this paper are drawn from a larger longitudinal study of the impacts of economic stress on family functioning in southern California funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (Ross D. Parke, PI). The Riverside/

San Bernardino metropolitan area, the location of the current study, is a working-class region with a Latino population of over 1 million that ranked 250th out of the nation's 311 Metropolitan Statistical Areas in per-capita income during the 1990s. Data were first collected in 1998 from families with a child in the fifth grade, then again annually through 2002, from mothers, fathers, children, and teachers. Families were recruited from elementary schools and participated in face-to-face interviews and behavioral observations lasting 2–4 hours each.

Sample

The subsample for this analysis includes couples of Mexican descent ($n = 167$), over two-thirds of whom elected to be interviewed in Spanish. Reflecting area population characteristics, these families represent a lower socioeconomic stratum, having a median income of \$25,452. Nine of 10 fathers were employed (89%), compared to about half (49%) of mothers. About a third (31%) of families had incomes below the federal 1998 poverty level of \$16,600, and almost three-fourths (72%) are classified as working poor, having incomes below 200% of the poverty level.

Families averaged 3.4 children under age 18 living in the home. Most parents were born in Mexico, although all had been living in the United States for at least 5 years at the time of the interview (as dictated by sampling criteria designed to focus on children who had completed all of their schooling in the United States). Parental educational levels were low, with mothers reporting slightly more years of education than fathers (9.07 years versus 8.81 years, respectively). Although both mothers' and fathers' attitudes toward gender were generally in the traditional range, mothers tended to be more egalitarian than fathers. Table 1 describes some of the relevant sample characteristics.

Measures

Dependent variables. To assess household labor, we used items and response formats taken from the National Survey of Families and Households. Fathers and mothers rated themselves and their spouses on the number of hours devoted per week to

each of five household tasks: meal preparation or cooking, house cleaning, shopping for groceries and household goods, washing dishes or cleaning up after meals, and laundry. We used the mean of estimates by father and mother, and then computed father's percentage contribution to the total couple hours of housework.

For child supervision, as with household labor, fathers and mothers estimated the number of hours that they and their spouses spent per week supervising their children. Using mother's and father's mean estimates, we computed father's percentage contribution to the total couple hours of child supervision performed.

Parental monitoring was assessed using a 20-item measure adapted from Reid and Patterson's (1989) House Rules Questionnaire. Sample items include: "I know which friends my child spends time with after school," and "I limit the amount of time my child can spend watching TV." Responses range on a 5-point scale from *almost always false* to *almost always true* and were summed to form a single index, with alphas of .77 and .71 for mothers and fathers, respectively.

Parent-child interaction was assessed by asking parents how frequently they interacted in certain ways with the target child (e.g., work on a craft project together, play an outdoor game together). Responses ranged from *never* to *very often*, with higher scores indicating more frequent interaction. Applying factor analytic techniques, we captured two dimensions of parent-child interactions: One dimension reflected activities traditionally associated with mother-child interaction (activities with an indoor, more "passive" orientation), and the other reflected those activities generally associated with interactions between fathers and their children (outdoor-type, more vigorous activities). We examined fathers' behavior separately, using principle components analyses with oblique transformation and promax rotation. Criteria for retaining measures included loading on fathers' responses at .40 or above. After dropping eight items that loaded poorly, the subsequent screen plot and Eigenvalues confirmed our preconception of the existence of two distinct factors that corresponded to "traditionally feminine" and "traditionally masculine" interactions with children, with 7

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	N	Mean	SD
Father's income	150	\$19,272	\$13,486
Mother's income	150	\$ 6,259	\$10,843
Couple's income (median)	148	\$25,452	—
Mother's percent of couple income	150	18	.25
Father's daily employment hours (for those employed)	167	7.49	5.24
Mother's daily employment hours (for those employed)	167	3.34	4.40
Percent of men employed	—	89	—
Percent of women employed	—	49	—
Number of children in home	167	3.40	1.30
Family rituals (father, range: 12 to 36)	165	27.81	3.71
Family rituals (mother, range: 12 to 36)	166	27.77	4.00
Father's education (years)	150	8.81	4.16
Mother's education (years)	167	9.07	4.11
Father's gender traditionalism (range: 7 to 28)	165	16.92	4.09
Mother's gender traditionalism (range: 7 to 28)	166	15.80	4.14
Financial stress (father, range: 2 to 9)	147	5.35	1.74
Financial stress (mother, range: 2 to 9)	150	5.47	1.73
Percent of male respondents interviewed in Spanish	116	69.50	—
Percent of female respondents interviewed in Spanish	114	68.30	—
Percent of families below 1998 poverty level (\$16,600)	51	31	—
Percent of families below 200% of 1998 poverty level (\$33,200)	120	72	—

items loading on the former (e.g., shopping, cooking, reading, indoor activities) and five on the latter (e.g., hobbies, outdoor activities, going to entertainment events). After summing the relevant items, the resulting indices exhibited alpha reliabilities of .82 and .85, respectively.

Independent variables. To ascertain employment demands and general availability to their children, we asked mothers and fathers each to report the average number of hours they are employed during a typical workday. Couple income was calculated by summing mother's and father's earnings. Women's relative earnings (the percent of couple income that they earned) were determined by dividing their individual income by the total amount of couple earnings.

To determine respondents' perceptions of financial distress, we asked two survey questions from Conger, Conger, Elder, and Lorenz (1992), and responses were summed to form an index with higher values representing less financial stress. The questions asked about difficulty paying bills (mode = *some difficulty*) and whether they typically had money left over at the end of the month (mode = *just enough to make ends meet*). An alpha reliability of .70 was calculated for fathers' responses.

We used a measure for education that translates years of schooling completed in Mexico and years of schooling completed in the United States into equivalent measures. This measure derives the highest level of education achieved for each respondent. Gender of target child, dummy-coded with male as the reference group, was included as a control variable in multivariate analyses.

To assess the prevalence of gender traditionalism, we drew on the Hoffman and Kloska (1995) Gender Based Attitudes Toward Marriage scale. Representative items include, "A husband's job is more important than a wife's," "Men should make the really important decisions in the family," and "A man should help in the house, but housework and child care should mainly be a woman's job." Responses ranged from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*, with higher scores representing more traditional ideals and lower scores representing more egalitarian ideals. The 7-item index exhibited alpha reliabilities of .82 and .81 for fathers and mothers, respectively.

Using the Family Routines Questionnaire (Fiese, 1994), we assessed eight domains of participation (e.g., frequency, organization) of two family rituals: mealtimes and weekend activities. Sample items included, "Our family regularly eats the main meal together" and "In our family, we have set routines and regular events that we all participate in on the weekends," with responses of *not at all true*, *sort of true*, and *very true*. Higher scores represent more emphasis on family rituals. An alpha reliability on this index of .65 was calculated for fathers.

To evaluate a respondent's level of acculturation, we used the Mexican Orientation subscale of ARSMA II (Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans; Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). Items include preference for and use of Spanish rather than English (e.g., "I speak Spanish," "I enjoy speaking Spanish," "I enjoy Spanish language TV"), as well as questions about self-identification (e.g., "I like to identify myself as Mexican," "I like to identify myself as Mexican American") and social group affiliation (e.g., "I associate with Mexicans and/or Mexican Americans," "My friends, while I was growing up, were of Mexican origin"). Responses ranged from *not at all* to *extremely often* or *almost always*, with higher scores indicating stronger Mexican orientation. For fathers, this summed index generated an alpha reliability of .92.

Analytic Strategy and Hypotheses

Our primary analytic strategy involved the use of ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to investigate the impact of the foregoing independent variables (drawing roughly on theoretical perspectives advocating the importance of relative resources, time availability, ideology, and economic stress) on five measures of father involvement: father's participation in household labor, direct child supervision, feminine-typed interaction with target child, masculine-typed interaction with target child, and the monitoring of child's activities. As noted, we used the first wave of data collected in 1998, using survey responses from fathers and mothers to create five analytic models, one estimating each of the five father involvement outcomes.

Although this study was exploratory in nature and was not strictly intended to test specific theoretical perspectives, our analytic strategy was premised on several abstract hypotheses. We posited that the greater the resources available to mothers, the more they will be able to entice fathers into doing "practical" family work, such as household labor and direct child supervision. Likewise, mother's and father's time availability were both anticipated to affect father's participation in "practical" family work, her greater work hours leading to more father involvement and his greater work hours leading to less father involvement. In addition to these relative resource and time availability predictions, we expected gender ideology to play a significant role in predicting the amount and type of father involvement. In particular, we expected that more egalitarian gender attitudes would be associated with more participation by fathers in feminine-typed activities and in child monitoring and that more traditional gender attitudes would be associated with more father involvement in masculine-typed activities. We also predicted that greater levels of mothers' education would be associated with more sharing of routine family work. Finally, contrary to straight-line assimilation models, we expected that, after controlling for multiple independent variables, low levels of acculturation and high levels of familism might be associated with greater father involvement among these low- to moderate-income Mexican American families.

Findings

Components of father involvement generally were correlated with each other. For example, Table 2 shows that men who performed housework also were likely to supervise children ($r = .549, p < .001$) and that men who interacted with children in feminine-typed activities (e.g., shopping, cooking, reading, indoor games) also interacted with them in masculine-typed activities (e.g., hobbies, outdoor games, spectator entertainment; $r = .675, p < .001$). Child supervision and participation in feminine-typed activities were correlated with each other and with all other components of father involvement. Though positively related, monitoring children and interaction in masculine-typed activities were not correlated with participating in housework for fathers. This suggests that doing "guy stuff" like sports is not related to doing more service-oriented aspects of parenting like cooking for, cleaning up after, or doing laundry for children. Similarly, the monitoring scale, which includes items on rule setting (e.g., "I limit the amount of time my child can spend watching TV," "I expect my child to be in bed by a certain time"), was associated with being a parental authority figure and congruent with expectations for male

Table 2
Correlations Among Different Components of Father Involvement

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Proportion of household labor	—				
(2) Proportion of child supervision	.549*** (165)	—			
(3) Feminine-typed interaction with children	.313*** (151)	.305*** (151)	—		
(4) Masculine-typed interaction with children	.121 (151)	.212** (151)	.675*** (153)	—	
(5) Monitoring children	.152 (151)	.214** (151)	.466*** (153)	.443*** (153)	—

Note: *N* in parentheses.
p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001.

household heads. Both of these components may reflect a more traditional approach to fathering (play, discipline), whereas the other three components of father involvement entail more quiet verbal interaction and domestic support (e.g., read or enjoy a book together, bake or cook a meal together, clean up after child, supervise child). Although most forms of father involvement appear to be mutually reinforcing, this analysis provides some support for claims in the literature that there are distinct styles of fathering combining various components in different measure. In this case, one style focused on the components of outdoor play and child discipline, and the other style focused on indoor care and child service (Coltrane, 1996; Parke, 1996).

Although previous depictions of Latino fathers portrayed them as aloof and uninvolved in daily family life (Madsen, 1973), our results suggest a more complex portrait of father involvement. Although not included in this analysis, compared to White (non-Latino) fathers in the larger study, the Mexican American fathers in this sample were more involved in both masculine-typed and feminine-typed interactions with their children, although they were less involved in housework. In the multivariate models presented here, father's Mexican identifica-

tion was associated with higher levels of interaction in feminine-typed activities with children ($\beta = .183, p < .05$), and with more supervision of children ($\beta = .315, p < .001$), net of other independent variables (see Table 3). The Mexican identification variable reflects preference for speaking, reading, and watching TV and movies in Spanish, as well as having more contact with friends and relatives who identify as Mexican. Because all men in this analysis are of Mexican descent, the comparison group is one of more acculturated Mexican Americans (i.e., those who speak, read, and watch TV and movies in English and have more contact with English speakers and non-Latino Whites). This finding provides support for Mirandé's (1997) suggestion that Mexican men are labeled by the majority culture as macho and uninvolved in family life, when in fact they often exhibit high levels of commitment to family and spend considerable time interacting with their children in nurturing and emotional ways.

One of the factors pulling Mexican American men into more involved fathering is familism. In this study, the family rituals variable signifies family cohesion and commitment to family-level interaction. In our multivariate models, higher levels of family rituals predicted more monitoring of child by the father

Table 3
Standardized Regression Coefficients for Variables Predicting Different Components of Father Involvement (*n* = 139)

Independent Variable	Components of Father Involvement				
	Proportion of household labor hours	Proportion of child supervision hours	Feminine-typed interaction with children	Masculine-typed interaction with children	Monitoring children
Child sex (dummy-coded, female = 1)	.037	.008	.093	-.076	-.049
Mother's percent couple income	.415***	.080	-.141	-.162	-.131
Father's employment hours/day	.083	-.116	.081	.103	-.016
Mother's employment hours/day	.032	.189*	.100	.076	-.111
Number of children in home	-.090	-.197*	-.214**	-.164	-.152
Family rituals (father perception)	.074	.025	.286***	.195*	.212**
Mother's education	.272***	.223**	.268**	.248**	.174*
Father gender traditionalism	-.147*	-.165*	-.202**	-.156	-.192*
Father's level of Mexican identification	.016	.315***	.183*	.009	.093
Financial stress	.199**	.034	-.019	.007	-.038
Couple income	-.066	-.093	.081	.014	.154
<i>F</i> value	7.30***	3.87***	5.60***	3.40***	3.15***
<i>R</i> ²	.387	.251	.327	.227	.214
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.334	.186	.268	.161	.146

p* < .05. *p* < .01. ****p* < .001. (two-tailed tests).

($\beta = .212, p < .01$), and more interaction in both masculine-typed ($\beta = .195, p < .05$) and feminine-typed ($\beta = .286, p < .001$) activities (see Table 3). These families spent significant amounts of time and energy sustaining family-level group activities, and family cohesion appeared to spill over into more frequent father-child interactions.

With most families reporting incomes in the working-poor range, it is notable that the mean responses to the questions on economic stress reflect only *little* to *some* difficulty paying bills and having just enough money to make ends meet. These families are managing on limited resources, but their financial situations are not strongly influencing patterns of father involvement, except in the area of housework. Income was not related to any component of father-child interaction or parental monitoring. However, housework was more likely to be performed by fathers when the family was undergoing financial stress ($\beta = .199, p < .01$; see Table 3). Mother's percent of couple income also was significantly associated with father's share of housework ($\beta = .445, p < .001$), suggesting that performing domestic labor is something from which people symbolically "buy out." That is, even though women tend to do more housework than men, and even though men tend to earn more than women, when women's earnings increase, the burden of doing housework is more equally shared between them in these Mexican American families, just as it is in families of other ethnic groups. In contrast, other forms of father involvement are not associated with mother's relative earnings, with interaction and monitoring components negatively (but nonsignificantly) associated with relative earnings.

Employment variables also were infrequently associated with the different aspects of father involvement. Father's employment hours were not significant predictors in any of the models, and mother's employment hours reach significance only for father's proportion of child supervision hours ($\beta = .189, p < .05$). Number of children in the home was negatively correlated with all components of fatherhood, and coefficients reach significance for child supervision ($\beta = -.197, p < .05$) and feminine-typed interaction ($\beta = -.214, p < .01$). This finding can be interpreted as fathers doing more with each child when there are fewer of them (the interaction variables refer to contact with target child only), but it could reflect a tendency for mothers to become the childcare specialists in families with more children. The Mexican American families in this study had relatively large families, with an average of over three children ($M = 3.4, SD = 1.3$).

Mother's education was the most consistent predictor of father involvement, correlating with all measured components. This can be interpreted in multiple ways. Because the mean level of education among this group was *completing the ninth grade*, this does not necessarily signify advanced academic attainment. Rather, it captures literacy, sometimes high school graduation, and more rarely, some college attendance. Higher levels of education do signify more exposure to "expert" advice about child development, as opposed to sole reliance on one's own experiences and one's kin relations. Such exposure probably entails more acceptance of the idea that child development is enhanced by the participation of fathers in multiple aspects of parenting. Higher levels of education also can signify women's higher expectations for men's involvement in domestic activities and direct child supervision. In short, Mexican American women with more education may expect their husbands to do more parenting and housework.

As expected, gender traditionalism was negatively associated with all components of father involvement, although it did not reach statistical significance for father's participation in masculine-typed interactions with children. However, for the four other components of fathering, men with more egalitarian ideals tended to be more involved. In other words, if Mexican American men felt that mothers should be totally responsible for keeping house and raising the children, they were less likely to take responsibility for those tasks. Finally, gender of child did not significantly influence any of the fathering outcome variables, although when the gender traditionalism variables were removed from the equations, the fathers were found to engage in more masculine-typed interactions with boys and to monitor boys to a greater extent than girls (results not shown).

Discussion

The macho stereotypes applied to Mexican American men can be misleading (Mirandé, 1997). Not only did the Mexican American men in this study share in many aspects of family work, but controlling for a host of demographic, economic, and family variables, Mexican-identified men were more likely to supervise their children and engage in feminine-typed interactions with them than were the more acculturated Mexican American men. We interpret these findings as confirmation of the influence of familism in Mexican American families—that is, high levels of family cohesion, cooperation, and reciprocity may encourage these men to focus on the health and well-being of their children and to interact with them in intimate ways. Parenthetically, we suspect that the familistic orientation of Mexican American fathers (and mothers) buffers their families from various risk factors associated with living in a low-income neighborhood, but this association remains to be tested. The emphasis in these families on eating evening meals together and participating in collective activities on the weekends provides frequent opportunities for fathers to interact with their children and monitor their activities. Based on the research of others (e.g., Patterson & Stouthamer-Loeber, 1984), we know that monitoring is a key to healthy adolescent development in high-risk environments.

The ways that fathers participate in family life are many and varied. Higher levels of participation in one form often generalized to other forms. However, it is important to specify the type and quality of involvement, as well as frequency. There are also multiple pathways to father involvement in these families, with some common and some distinct predictors. In general, men are more involved when their wives are more educated and when they believe that parenting and housework should be shared. These findings support gender theories focusing on the constraints of cultural ideals that dictate a strict separation of gender spheres. If men and women believe that tasks should be shared, they do share more of them, even if women remain the primary caregivers and housekeepers, and men remain the primary breadwinners.

Among the different components of father involvement, routine household labor is most influenced by a combination of gender beliefs and economics. Our models consistently explained more variance in this dependent variable than other aspects of fathering. If women earn more of the money and have more education, men are more likely to share the work of shopping, cooking, meal clean-up, housecleaning, and laundry—all tasks that increase greatly when children are in

the home. When families experience financial hardship, men also are more likely to assume responsibility for household chores. The allocation of routine household labor in these working-poor Mexican-origin families, as in middle-class White families, responds to financial stress, relative resources, and ideology. These findings support a power-dependence model of household labor allocation (Coltrane, 2000) in which spouses with greater earnings can avoid onerous tasks. In particular, they suggest that when Mexican American families are dependent on wives' earnings for economic survival, wives may be more successful in recruiting husbands to share in the more mundane and routine household chores that typically fall to women.

Household labor was the only area strongly influenced by financial considerations in this analysis; the other forms of father involvement did not vary significantly as a function of family income, economic stress, or mother's share of earnings. Child supervision by the father was more likely when mothers were employed longer hours, but other forms of father involvement did not vary according to either fathers' or mothers' employment. These findings run counter to theories suggesting that time availability and work schedules are the primary determinants of men's involvement in family life. In these Mexican American families, time availability was much less important to father involvement than factors associated with familism, gender ideology, and education.

One conclusion is that fathering needs to be contextualized. By isolating similarities and differences between different forms of father involvement in this group of mostly low-income Latino families, we highlight the multidimensional nature of fatherhood and attempt to place fathering behaviors in their social contexts. We view simplistic attempts to reduce fathering to bread-winning, role modeling, or family headship as detrimental to scholarship on fatherhood and misleading for public debates about potential family policies. Fathers and mothers do many different things with and for families and children, and we need to pay attention to all of them—for both men and women. Further, fathering cannot be understood without paying serious attention to the social, economic, cultural, and family contexts in which it occurs. Our finding that family rituals were associated with more father-child monitoring and interaction suggests that low-income Latino men's parenting contributions should be studied in the context of the family system. Because these men shared more housework when their wives made more money and supervised children when their wives worked longer hours, we need to conceive of fathers' family work as sometimes directly substituting for mothers'. Because men did more housework when families were under economic stress, we also need to pay attention to the impact of larger economic forces. When families struggle to earn a livable wage, they also face numerous stressors associated with neighborhood safety, lack of access to health care, poor nutrition, and inadequate community services. The stressors associated with low income create pressures on men and women to share more family work, but such sharing does not alleviate the multiple adverse effects of living on the edge of poverty.

Mothers in these Mexican American families, like mothers in other families, did more parenting and housework than their husbands, but spouses with more egalitarian gender attitudes shared more of all but the most masculine-typed household and parenting duties. In other words, belief in the equality of men and women in marriage may be an important component of shared parenting in low-income Latino families, at least insofar

as sharing parenting and household labor requires the performance of similar activities. Adding support to this interpretation is the finding that father involvement was associated with higher levels of education for women. Although the men in this sample tended to hold more traditional gender ideals than men in the general population, those who espoused a belief in the equality of men and women were more likely to be involved fathers. Because gender ideology was a consistent predictor of sharing parental duties in these families, and because second- and third-generation Mexican Americans tend to hold more liberal gender attitudes than their parents (Zinn & Wells, 2000), we might expect even more sharing of family work in the future.

Our findings lend support to a pluralistic model of father involvement in Mexican American families that simultaneously acknowledges unique cultural influences, economic opportunities, human capital, and changing gender relations. As researchers and agenda setters for public policy debates, scholars and practitioners ought to examine the multitude of ways that men can share in the parenting and domestic labor needed to raise healthy children. To that end, we advocate further research into the many ways that fathers of all ethnicities and income levels contribute to their families and children.

Implications

It is important for practitioners to understand the multiply determined nature of fathering as a guide to programs and policies aimed at increasing father involvement in Latino families. As our findings related to family rituals show, programs that focus solely on fathers as the target audience are less likely to be successful than those that focus on both parenting partners and the family unit. Simply increasing the father's awareness of the importance of responsible fatherhood may be unsuccessful in getting him more involved unless his partner's attitudes and behaviors also are considered. Programs designed to promote father involvement also must consider the importance of social and economic context. Most fathers, including the Mexican American men in our study, feel more entitled to participate in family activities if they can earn a living wage (Coltrane & Valdez, 1993). This is especially so for Mexican Americans who, like African Americans and other people of color, tend to face job discrimination and limited opportunities for career advancement. Job promotion, education, and skill building for both men and women are important precursors to programs promoting parenting skills or marital communication with this target population.

Moreover, family life educators, counselors, and clinicians should acknowledge unique cultural practices and recognize the need to attend to the quality and the quantity of father involvement. Our focus has been on the determinants of involvement, but practitioners need to constantly be aware of the importance of providing guidance for fathers that can improve the quality of their involvement as well. The focus groups and depth interviews we conducted as a pilot for this study suggested a wide range of communication styles in Mexican American families (Parke et al., 2003). The middle-class Mexican American parents encouraged assertive verbal interaction with their children, whereas many of the lower-income Mexican American parents demanded that children remain quiet and display respect for paternal authority. It is unclear from this analysis whether such differences are driven primarily by economic or cultural factors, but we speculate that both are important. However, based on the findings

reported here, Mexican American men may be more receptive to messages about the benefits of fathers' participation in all aspects of parenting than previous stereotypes would imply. The cultural emphasis on familism among Mexican Americans is a resource that practitioners might use to promote a wide range of fathering activities, including some that have previously been presumed to be the sole province of mothers. Given the pervasive emphasis on familism, we assume that interventions including both spouses and children would be more effective than those targeted just to fathers.

Our results also have implications for debates about family policies. Paternity establishment and marriage promotion programs aimed at this population would have only minimal impact, because almost all of the fathers we studied were supporting their children, and the vast majority were married. For Mexican American families (and many other working-class households), marriage is not necessarily a pathway out of poverty. A more fruitful way to lift families out of poverty is to provide living wages and enhance career advancement for both men and women. Our findings suggest that providing occupational skill building and employment opportunities for Mexican American mothers could encourage their husbands to do more housework and child supervision. Thus, increasing women's wages is another important path to increasing father involvement in the more routine and mundane aspects of family work. Our findings also suggest that increasing access to adult education and family life education could encourage greater participation of Mexican American men in family life, especially if such programs are sensitive to cultural traditions and instill respect for paternal authority. Finally, we encourage practitioners to explore the implications of father involvement for the quality of various aspects of family life, including marital satisfaction and the optimal development of children across different ethnic and socio-economic groups. For example, are the patterns we found linking greater wages for mothers with larger household contributions by fathers evident for other Latino groups? Are Cuban, Puerto Rican, or Latin American fathers similarly likely to participate in father-child interactions if their wives are more educated? Does gender traditionalism play the same suppressing role for fathering that it plays in Mexican American families? Do results hold for various Latino families with higher incomes? These and other questions require more extensive research on different Latino families and on other ethnic groups. Only by understanding fathering in the context of couple, family, community, economy, and ethnic culture can we hope to promote the types of fathering that carry the most promise for future generations.

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