Amor de Cerca: Positive Involvement in Latino Families

Michelle L. Varón
Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd
Part of the Psychology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/5055
AMOR DE CERCA: POSITIVE INVOLVEMENT IN LATINO FAMILIES

by

Michelle L. Varón

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Psychology

Approved:

Melanie M. Domenech Rodríguez Ph.D.  Gretchen Gimpel Peacock, Ph.D.
Major Professor  Committee Member

Donna Gilbertson, Ph.D.  Renee V. Galliher, Ph.D.
Committee Member  Committee Member

Eduardo Ortiz, Ph.D.  Mark R. McLellan, Ph.D.
Committee Member  Vice President for Research and
  Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

2016
ABSTRACT

Amor de Cerca: Positive Involvement in Latino Families

by

Michelle L. Varón, Doctor of Philosophy
Utah State University, 2016

Major Professor: Melanie Domenech Rodríguez, Ph.D.
Department: Psychology

There is an abundance of literature examining parent-child relationships, and subsequently, parenting interventions that address these. The purpose of this study was to examine if positive and negative parental behaviors predicted externalizing behaviors in children. The following questions were addressed: (a) What are the types of positive interactions that Latinos parents engage in with their children? (b) Does a ratio of intervals of positive to intervals of negative parent behaviors predict externalizing behaviors in children among Latinos? (c) Do proportions of intervals of positive and/or negative behaviors predict a greater percentage of variance in child outcomes than does a ratio of intervals of behaviors in Latino families? Participants included 49 two-parent families with at least one child between the ages of 6 and 11. All participants were living in Puerto Rico at the time of the study and primarily spoke Spanish. Video recordings of parents interacting with their children in a variety of structured and unstructured tasks were reviewed, and 10 s intervals were coded as either negative (-), negative (+), positive
or neutral. Results revealed (a) Latino parents engage in a variety of behaviors with their children, (b) a ratio of intervals of behaviors did not statistically significantly predict externalizing behaviors in Latino children, and (c) proportion of intervals of behaviors also did not statistically significantly predict externalizing behaviors in Latino children.

In order to continue to inform culturally appropriate parenting interventions, it is imperative that more observational research be conducted with various cultures. It is important to look at the types of behaviors that parents from various cultures engage in with their children to inform adaptations of parenting interventions. The current study examined exclusively parents, however, future studied might also address extended family member, and teacher behaviors and interactions as well.

(89 pages)
Behavioral parenting interventions are widely implemented to address externalizing behaviors in children. The majority of these types of interventions address the relationship between the parents and their children in order provide a strong foundation, from which to implement discipline, and subsequently modify problem behaviors.

The objective of this study was to examine the ability of ratios and intervals of parental behaviors, to predict levels of externalizing behaviors in children. Due to the increasing number of Latinos in the U.S. as well as the need to have culturally informed interventions, the current study examined exclusively Latino families. This study provided further information regarding the types of behaviors that Latino parents engage in with their children. This information is beneficial to parenting interventions by helping to inform their further development and use with Latino populations.

The results of the study revealed nonsignificant results in the ability of intervals and or ratios of parental behaviors to predict externalizing behaviors in children. The nonsignificant results may be due to a need to account for other variables in order to accurately predict child externalizing behaviors. Other variables of interest might include: social skills, relationships with other adults, parent-child closeness, and child interpretations of parent behaviors.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family and friends for their continued support, love, and encouragement throughout this entire process.

I would like to thank Dr. Melanie Domenech Rodríguez, and my other committee members, Drs. Eduardo Ortiz, Gretchen Gimpel Peacock, Donna Gilbertson, and Renée Galliher for their help and support during the entire process of completing my dissertation. I would also like to express my appreciation to Donna Gilbertson for her contributions and assistance in the development in the codebook for this project.

Michelle L. Varón
# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PUBLIC ABSTRACT</td>
<td>..................................................................</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>....................................................................</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>.................................................................</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION .................................................................</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II.</td>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW ..................................................................</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latino Families ........................................................................</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive Involvement ..................................................................</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parenting Interventions .........................................................</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conclusions ...........................................................................</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III.</td>
<td>METHOD ..................................................................................</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants ...........................................................................</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sample Size ...........................................................................</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procedure ...............................................................................</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV.</td>
<td>RESULTS ..................................................................................</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V.</td>
<td>DISCUSSION ...............................................................................</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFERENCES</td>
<td>......................................................................................</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDICES</td>
<td>......................................................................................</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix A: Parental Warmth and Hostility Codebook ..................</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix B: IRB Approval Letter ...............................................</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix C: Informed Consent Form ............................................</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appendix D: Inclusion Criteria Interview Form ...........................</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CURRICULUM VITAE</td>
<td>......................................................................................</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Study Characteristics</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Summary Data of Literature Review</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Participant Characteristics</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Characteristics of Study Variables</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Pearson Correlations for Study Variables Calculated as Percentages</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ratios of Intervals and Mother CBCL Ratings</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Ratios of Intervals and Father CBCL Ratings</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Proportions of Intervals and Mother CBCL Ratings</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Proportions of Intervals and Father CBCL Ratings</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Behavioral parenting interventions routinely recommend that parents engage in frequent positive behaviors as a way of improving negative child outcomes. While not directly linked to parenting literature, Gottman’s work with couples has similar recommendations for outcomes within marriages. Gottman (1994) claimed that successful marriages were characterized by a ratio of five positive interactions for every negative interaction. These patterns of interactions have been found to be consistent over time and present in long-lasting, stable marriages (Gottman & Levenson, 2000). Building on this knowledge, Gottman proposed a balance theory of marriage, which states that stable marriages have more positivity than negativity. The theory does not prescribe an absence of negativity, but instead focuses on importance of the balance of positive and negative interactions that heavily favors positivity. While the research on relationships appears relevant in extending to parent-child relationships, there is no known research that has replicated the research in a parent-child interaction context.

Marital relationships are similar in meaningful ways to parent-child relationships; they are long-term, include daily interactions, and are often affectionate (Gottman, 1994). However, there are also meaningful ways in which they differ. For example, there is an inherent power differential in parent child relationships, the child must depend on the parent for basic needs, until a certain age, the child is unable to freely leave the relationship, and the parent is an authority figure. These differences in the nature of the relationships, may in fact affect the optimal ratio of positives to negatives in parent-child
interactions. In fact, the ratio may change as developmental demands shift for children and parents over time. Furthermore, there are no known applications of Gottman’s research across cultures. It may emerge from further analysis on relationships, that the 5 to 1 ratio only applies to European American families, and it may be, that a different ratio is optimal for other cultural groups.

The possible applicability of Gottman’s theory to parent-child relationships is implied in studies that show that positive interactions lead to a reduction in child behavior problems (e.g., Davidov & Grusec, 2006). However, positive parenting behaviors may be different across cultural groups. Research suggests that parenting practices of Latinos may operate differently than those of other ethnic groups (Domenech Rodríguez, Donovick, & Crowley, 2009). Indeed, practices and even parenting styles may differ. Despite efforts to measure parenting styles in Latino samples, studies have yielded mixed findings. Specifically, findings indicate high levels of parental warmth/positive involvement among Latino families with a restricted range of scores, which point out the possibility that the full range of behaviors that are used to express warmth with children are not being captured (e.g., Domenech Rodríguez et al., 2009). Given the professional and ethical mandates to attend to culture in assessment and treatment (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003, 2006), and documented health disparities across ethnic groups in mental health (Mitchell, 2015; Smedley, Stith, & Nelson, 2003), this knowledge gap is concerning.

The present study focuses solely on Latino families. Instead of widely applying the findings of research based on primarily European American populations to other
cultural groups as is often done, scholars recommend that an integrative approach be taken, in which constructs that are relevant only to minority populations are considered, together with the constructs that have been found to be relevant in other populations (Cauce, 2011; Garcia Coll et al., 1996).

The purpose of this study was to examine if positive and negative parental behaviors predict child outcomes. The following questions were addressed: (a) What are the types of positive interactions that Latinos parents engage in with their children? (b) Does a ratio of intervals of positive to intervals of negative parent behaviors predict externalizing behaviors in children among Latinos? (c) Do proportions of intervals of positive and/or negative behaviors predict a greater percentage of variance in child outcomes than does a ratio of intervals of behaviors in Latino families?
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Latino Families

There has been extensive research on culture and parenting which has found that culture plays a significant role in parenting (Harkness & Super, 1996). This research has been extended to examine not only how culture affects parenting practices, but also how acculturation affects parenting practices and styles (Rauh, Wasserman, & Brunelli, 1990). For example, Contreras, Narang, Ikhlas, and Teichman (2002), proposed a model of parenting in which Latina mother’s levels of acculturation affects multiple parenting practices such as levels of seeking family support, and the types of qualities that they value and encourage in their children. Given this research it is important to look at parenting practices within the cultural context. The current study looked at parenting within the Latino cultural context.

Latinos are the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group in the U.S. (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). There are currently 73.6 million children in the U.S. and 24.4% of those children are Latino (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2015). Given the current prevalence of Latino families in the U.S., research on Latino families is imperative. Latino families tend to be relatively large and have more children than other families. Latino families are also more likely to include extended family members (Livingston, 2015). Despite the large population of Latinos currently in the U.S., the numbers are continuously growing. It is projected that by the year 2050,
Hispanics will constitute 29% of the U.S. population, and 39% of children will be Latino (Passel & Cohn, 2008; Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2015). If this projection is accurate, by the year 2050, nearly half of all children in the U.S. will be Latino. This would mean that working with Latino children will become even more common for clinicians than it is at present. Given the significant and ever growing presence of Latinos in the U.S., it is vital that psychologists look at appropriate ways in which to provide mental health services to Latinos. Looking more specifically at Latino families and parenting practices is a logical step since there are numerous parenting interventions that are widely applied to help parents manage their children’s behavior and improve their relationships.

The Latino population in the U.S. is comprised of multiple subgroups. Latinos from different subgroups are often grouped together and thus seen as a homogenous group. According to Trimble (1991), this is problematic because the term “Latino” is an ethnic gloss, which is an overgeneralization that disregards the differences present within ethnic subgroups. Considering Latinos as a homogenous group overlooks important differences among Latinos. In addition to differences within the group of Latinos due to various influences including geographical differences (e.g., Cuban, Guatemalan, Argentinian), there are also substantial social and cultural differences within Latino groups. Given these problems, it is imperative to examine individual subgroups, while still considering that there will be variability within these subgroups as well.

The current study will focus on island Puerto Ricans. Puerto Rico is an archipelago located between the Caribbean Sea and the North Atlantic Ocean. It is
composed of multiple islands including the main island of Puerto Rico and several smaller islands. Puerto Rico has a long history of colonization, which has in turn influenced many aspects of the Puerto Rican culture. For example, in Puerto Rico, Puerto Rican Nationalism is very strong, and subsequently so is the importance and appreciation of the Spanish language (Martinez-Avilés, 2011).

While there is limited research specific to Puerto Rican parents, there are several studies that provide information regarding parenting practices among Puerto Rican families. For example, Puerto Rican children have been found to have lower rates of antisocial behaviors than non-island Latinos. Puerto Rican families also tend to have strong parent-child relationships and high levels of supervision and monitoring (Bird et al., 2001).

At the time of the 2010 U.S. census, there were approximately 3,725,789 individuals living in Puerto Rico, including 1,263,694 households. Of these households, approximately 71% (n = 884,985) had at least one child under the age of 18 living in the home. Puerto Rico’s population is primarily Spanish speaking with 89% speaking exclusively Spanish in the home. The majority of individuals living in Puerto Rico were born on the island. The average household in Puerto Rico had 2.68 individuals. In terms of family structure, Puerto Rico had the third highest percentage of multigenerational households, behind Hawaii and California. Given the large number of children living in Puerto Rico, providing appropriate services to Puerto Rican parents is especially relevant (U.S. Census, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c).
Positive Involvement

The concept of positive involvement has been widely studied. As early as 1969, John Bowlby published work that emphasized the importance of the relationship between a child and his/her caregiver, which he referred to as attachment. Interestingly, there is substantial variation in the manner in which researchers and clinicians label, describe and define positive involvement. In the parenting literature, positive involvement has been labeled as *warmth, acceptance, support, involvement and responsiveness*, to name a few. The broad label *positive involvement* is used in the present research to capture all of these labels.

Definitions of positive involvement are somewhat elusive. Current definitions include bonding, positive parenting ([Incredible Years [IY]]; Webster-Stratton, 2000; Brief Strategic Family Therapy [BSFT]; Szapocznik, Heervis, & Schwartz, 2003), nurturance ([Parent Child Interaction Therapy [PCIT]; McNeil et al., 2010]), love, interest ([Parent Management Training- Oregon Model [PMTO]; Forgatch & Patterson, 2010]), affection, approval, positive affect, admiration, fondness ([Davidov & Grusec, 2006]), positive regard, encouragement ([Raudino, Woodward, Fergusson, & Horwood, 2012]), and positive attention and praise ([Harvey & Metcalf, 2012]). It appears that there are various ways in which researchers and clinicians define the concept of positive involvement. Without exception, parenting interventions target positive involvement as a key factor for improvement in the parent-child relationship.

Evidence-based parenting interventions provide theories from which the interventions were developed (e.g., theory outlining that parenting practices predict...
changes in child behavior), but typically do not describe the theories from which the specific constructs originate (e.g., positive involvement as a critical parenting practice). For example, from within social interaction learning theory, five positive parenting practices are outlined—positive involvement, problem solving, skills building, effective discipline—as critical to parenting intervention (Patterson, Forgatch, & DeGarmo, 2010), but the theory behind each of those constructs is not specifically addressed. One theory describing the significance of positive involvement is the parental acceptance-rejection (PAR) theory (Rohner, 1986). This theory posits that there is a warmth dimension in all parenting styles, which can be expressed physically and/or verbally. According to PAR theory warmth is on a continuum on which one end is parental rejection, characterized by the absence of warmth, affection, and love, and on the other end is parental acceptance, characterized by the presence of warmth, affection, and love.

Parental acceptance and rejection, as defined by Rohner (1986), have been related to important child outcomes, including psychological adjustment. More specifically, parental acceptance and rejection have been found to predict behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and personality consequences (Khaleque & Rohner, 2012). These findings have emerged in studies assessing children’s current perceptions of parental acceptance/rejection, as well as in studies asking adults about the parental acceptance/rejection that they remember experiencing as children (e.g., Khaleque & Rohner, 2012). Similar results have been found in studies conducted with participants from 22 countries, including Bangladesh, Barbados, Colombia, Czechoslovakia, Egypt, Estonia, India, Iran, Jamaica, Korea, Kuwait, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, Puerto Rico, Romania, Spain, Sweden,
The literature shows that the links between parental acceptance/rejection and child outcomes, holds true across cultures (Khaleque & Rohner, 2012).

According to Rohner (1986), examining the perceptions of parental acceptance/rejection in children is preferred over looking at actual parental behaviors, because parental behavior is symbolic. The way that parents express acceptance/rejection to their children can vary dramatically, yet still have the same meaning to children. Examining the perceptions that children have of being accepted or rejected is preferred, since children’s interpretations of parental behavior is informed by their culture and worldviews (Rohner, & Khaleque, 2005).

While Rohner’s (1986) argument makes sense from a theoretical standpoint, parenting interventions seek to help parents engage in adaptive interactional patterns with their children. As such, specific behaviors need to be identified. It is important not to be dogmatic about which behaviors are characteristic of positive involvement (e.g., positive involvement necessitates physical affection) but rather to present a universe of possible behaviors that parents can select from (e.g., hugs, praise, and asking questions are all characteristics of positive involvement; which of these make sense for you?).

Furthermore, while the end result of children feeling accepted or rejected by their parents is significant, there is a body of literature that demonstrates that the ratio of positive to negative interactions has a significant effect on relationships as well. According to Gottman (1994, 1999), the optimal ratio to have a strong relationship is five positive interactions for every one negative interaction. It is reasonable to extend this
principle of a 5:1 ratio to parenting interactions. In order to do so, it would be necessary to understand and define what behaviors are positive. By providing a list of positive behaviors that parents can select from, we can simplify the task of having parents work toward the 5:1 ratio with their children. In an attempt to better understand the universe of definitions and find behavioral indicators of positive involvement, a systematic review of the literature was conducted.

The framework for the current study is based on Gottman’s (1994, 1999) research on marital relationships. Gottman proposed a balance theory of interactions in marital relationships. According to the balance theory of interactions, there should be an optimal combination of positive and negative interactions that leans heavily toward the positive side. This theory will be applied to parent child interactions along the same vein, that interactions between parents and children should be mostly positive with fewer negative interactions. As balance theory proposes that there should not be an absence of negative interactions in marital relationships, conceptually it is appropriate for parent child relationships, since healthy interactions between parents and children will include discipline.

**Child Outcomes and Positive Involvement**

Positive aspects of parenting including positive involvement, have been found to be associated with multiple child outcomes, including expression of negative affect (Fabes, Leonard, Kupanoff, & Martin, 2001), peer group acceptance (Davidoff & Grusec, 2006), and behavior regulation (Eisenberg et al., 1999). In addition to the literature that reflects the relationship between positive involvement and child outcomes, there is
substantial literature that examines the coercive process in parenting which leads to significant externalizing behaviors, as well as conduct behaviors in children, proposed by Patterson (1975). According to this line of research, coercive parenting strategies are directly related to conduct behaviors in children. Specifically, Patterson posits that coercive behaviors from parents in order to achieve compliance from their children often lead to children engaging in externalizing behaviors to avoid complying with their parents. When children are able to avoid complying with their parents by way of coercive behavior, they are negatively reinforced and externalizing behaviors increase.

Despite expanding research in the area of parenting practices, as well as Latino families, there is still much that remains uncertain regarding parenting practices in Latino families as related to child outcomes (Calzada, Huang, Anicama, Fernandez, & Brotman, 2012). Given the link between coercive parenting and externalizing behavior problems, it is imperative to further examine other parenting practices that may also be associated with externalizing behaviors, including positive involvement. Other parenting variables of interest that are related to externalizing behaviors include parent-child communication, and parent-child attachment. More specifically, increasing parent-child communication has been found to be associated with lower levers of child externalizing problems (Davidson & Cardemil, 2009), and higher levels of parent-child attachment have been found to be associated with lower levels of antisocial behaviors (Eamon & Mulder, 2005). Given the link between parenting behaviors and child behavior problems, for the current study, child externalizing behaviors will be examined as an outcome related to positive involvement.
Systematic Review of Positive Involvement Literature

A systematic literature review was conducted to: (a) describe the current definitions of positive involvement in the literature, (b) determine the various measures/scales that are used to measure positive involvement, (c) describe and discuss limitations, strengths and weaknesses in the current literature, and (d) draw conclusions about the type of positive interactions that parents are engaging in with their children. In order to meet these objectives, articles were identified that provided descriptions of, and methods used to assess positive involvement.

A search of PsychINFO, Psychological and Behavioral Sciences Collection PsychARTICLES and Web of Science was completed. The search was limited to books, book chapters, and articles published between 2003 - 2016. After an examination of these articles, a total of 29 primary research articles were selected for the current review (see Table 1). The following search terms were included: (a) parental warmth and Latino or Hispanic, (b) warmth and Latino or Hispanic, (c) positive involvement and Latino or Hispanic, (d) parental involvement and Latino or Hispanic, (e) love and Latino or Hispanic, and (f) positive parenting and Latino or Hispanic. Identified articles were only included in the review if they met the following criteria: at least one-third of the sample was Latino and the study directly assessed positive involvement in the parent-child relationship.

Study characteristics. Two major categories of characteristics of interest were identified from reading the sources and were thus used for the review. The characteristics were related to the main goals of the literature review: (a) methodological characteristics: