

## Chapter 2

# Coparenting in Latino Families

Natasha J. Cabrera, Jacqueline D. Shannon, and Stephanie Jolley-Mitchell

Coparenting, the way parent/parent-figures work together when raising their child(ren), is a relatively new family process construct that is related to but distinct from the quality of parents' relationship and parenting behaviors. Family systems theory and empirical research indicate that coparenting is linked to parenting and child adjustment (Feinberg, 2003); however, much of the coparenting research has focused on White, middle-class, two-parent, or post-divorce families. Less is known about coparenting in ethnically and culturally diverse families and whether this process has similar predictors and consequences. Given that family process may be different in ethnically and racially diverse families, we might also expect coparenting to differ.

Since Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the United States and given the importance of coparenting as a central family process, in this chapter, we highlight key predictors of coparenting in Latino families as well as how coparenting links to parenting and child development. First, we provide a sociodemographic profile of Latino families in the United States. Second, we review theoretical and empirical research of coparenting, which includes important predictors of coparenting and implications for parenting and children's development. Finally, new directions in coparenting research in Latino families are emphasized as well as the role of intervention and prevention programs.

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N.J. Cabrera (✉)

Department of Human Development and Quantitative Methodology,  
University of Maryland, College Park, MD, USA  
email: ncabrera@umd.edu

J.D. Shannon

Department of Early Childhood Education and Art Education, Brooklyn College, Cuny,  
New York, NY, USA

S. Jolley-Mitchell

Center for Translational Science Children's National Medical Center Washington, DC, USA

## Sociodemographic Profile of Latinos in the United States

Latinos are the largest growing minority group in the United States and make up about 14.2 % of the total population (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2007). It is estimated that because of both immigration and higher fertility rates (Bean & Tienda, 1987), by the year 2050, a quarter (about 100 million people) of the United States population will be of Latino origin (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Latinos are a heterogeneous group with diverse ethnic, immigration, and cultural traditions. Currently, two-thirds of Latinos are Mexican Americans, making it the largest ethnic group, followed by Central and South Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Although the majority of Latino Americans are legal immigrants or native-born citizens (Cauce & Rodriguez, 2002), they, particularly recent immigrants, are more likely to be economically disadvantaged than white, non-Latino Americans (Leventhal, Xue, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006). A national study found that Latino American parents whose infants were born in 2001 were poorer, had less education, had larger families, were younger, and were less likely to be married than non-Latino infants living in two-parent families (Cabrera, Shannon, West, & Brooks-Gunn, 2006). The Latino infants in this sample were also likely to have parents who were not proficient in English (49 %) and Mexican American children were less likely to have English-proficient parents than children from other Latino countries (45 % vs. 67 %; Cabrera et al. 2004).

Traditionally, Latino parents have relied extensively on their extended family for support when raising their children. Latino immigrants' familial relationships have also been crucial for them to adapt to their new life in the United States. During their initial years immigrating to the United States, Latino parents and their families frequently lived in extended households that included relatives (e.g., grandparents, aunts, and uncles) and other nonfamily members (e.g., friends from their original home town) (Gonzales, Knight, Morgan-Lopez, Saenx, & Sirolle, 2002). For instance, 10 % of Latino children vs. 5.4 % of non-Latino, White children coresided with their grandparents (Fields, 2003). Furthermore, the number of Latina adolescent mothers has grown, whereas the national average of adolescent mothers has gone down (8.3 % vs. 4.3 %; Suro et al., 2007). The Latino birth rate is greater than any other group in the United States (Hamilton, Martin, Ventura, 2011). Latina adolescent mothers receive a great deal of family support, with 80 % of them and their babies living with their families (<http://www.cdc.gov/TeenPregnancy/index.htm>). Latinos make up a large and fast-growing population in the United States and come from diverse ethnic, immigration, and cultural backgrounds; however, there continues to be limited information examining the Latino family system, particularly the coparenting relationship.

## Theoretical Perspectives on Coparenting

A coparenting relationship exists when two or more caregivers have joint responsibility for a particular child's well-being (Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). Coparenting is broadly defined as the "ways that parents and/or parental figures relate to each

other in the role of parent” (Feinberg, 2003, p. 96). Although there are various conceptualizations of coparenting (Cowan, Cowan, Pruett, & Pruett, 2005; Feinberg; McHale, Kuersten-Hogan, & Rao, 2004), most include agreement or disagreement on childrearing issues, division of child-related labor, support for the coparenting role, and joint management of family interactions (Feinberg, 2003).

The study of coparenting is relatively new; however, recent theoretical and empirical advances suggest that coparenting is linked to parenting behaviors and child adjustment (Feinberg, 2003; Margolin, Gordis, & John, 2001). Since the majority of the extant research on coparenting has focused on post-divorce and two-parent, White middle-income families (Dorsey, Forehand, & Brody, 2007; McHale et al., 2004; Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004), it is unclear whether links between coparenting and child well-being, and the mechanisms that link coparenting to child outcomes are the same for ethnic minority families. On the one hand, Latino families tend to have different family structures and family compositions, suggesting that coparenting processes may be different within these families. On the other hand, coparenting is a universal characteristic of families, with certain aspects being more evident at high levels of acculturation, suggesting that the coparenting processes might be the same in Latino families as it is in other families.

Most of the emerging research on coparenting is based on family systems theory (Cox & Paley, 2003). Family systems theory describes the family as an organized whole consisting of interdependent dyadic and triadic subsystems (e.g., mother–father, parent–child, sibling–sibling) that exert reciprocal influences on each other (Cox & Paley, 1997). The interparental relationship is referred to as the executive subsystem of the family (Minuchin, 1985). Any romantic aspect of the interparental executive subsystem (i.e., marital/partner relationship) has a more distal influence, as it began first, whereas the coparenting relationship is the more proximal predictor of parenting and child outcomes. The coparenting relationship is the extent to which parents (or cocaregivers) can effectively work together in rearing their common child, which is distinct from both couple relationship quality (e.g., marital conflict) and parenting behavior (e.g., responsiveness) (McHale, 1995; McHale, Rao, & Krasnow, 2000). Indeed, several studies reported links between marital conflict and negative child outcomes (Cummings & Davies, 2002); however, Cummings (1994) noted that marital conflict regarding parenting issues appears to be particularly distressing for children. The coparenting dimension of the interparental relationship is also unique in that it can endure and may become more important, even if the marital or romantic relationship ends (Carlson, McLanahan, & Brooks-Gunn, 2008; Maccoby, Depner, & Mnookin, 1990; Schoppe-Sullivan, Mangelsdorf, Frosch, & McHale, 2004).

Building on family systems theory, others have developed conceptual models of this executive-level coparenting relationship. Feinberg (2003) presents a multi-component model of the structure of the coparenting relationship and an ecological model of coparenting that explicates processes through which these components influence parenting and child adjustment. The first component, *agreement or disagreement on childrearing issues*, revolves around issues of discipline, education, and peer affiliations. Childrearing disagreement negatively affects family outcomes

when it disrupts parenting (e.g., “spilling over” into harshness and lack of warmth toward child) or other components of coparenting (e.g., difficulty forming coordinated childrearing strategies). The second component, *division of (child-related) labor*, refers to the sharing of daily routines and ongoing responsibilities (e.g., healthcare), and it is parents’ satisfaction in this domain that influences parenting stress and quality of parent–child interactions. The third component, *supporting vs. undermining the coparental role*, refers to parents’ support for each other in their role as parents and is hypothesized to enhance competent parenting through increased parenting self-efficacy; undermining (or competitiveness) of the coparental role may engender parenting stress or other negative emotions that impair parenting behavior. The last component, *joint management of family interactions*, is further separated into three aspects of the coparenting alliance (Feinberg, 2003). First is the regulation of interparental conflict in terms of the child’s direct exposure (i.e., receiving the parents’ “emotional spillover”). Second is the formation of coalitions, when the child is pulled into the middle of interparental conflict and relational boundaries are blurred. Finally, balance between each parent’s interactions with the child when all three are together. The four components of the coparenting model theoretically overlap (i.e., parents who have more childrearing disagreements may be less supportive of each other’s coparenting roles), but are also distinct.

Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) present a modified framework of four distinct qualitative dimensions of coparenting based on Van Egeren’s (2001) methodologically driven dimensions and those proposed by Feinberg (2003). The first dimension is *coparenting solidarity* which has also been referred to as supportive alliances between coparenting partners (McHale & Rotman, 2007). It is the affective feature that develops as parents form a unified executive subsystem; it is evidenced by parental/caregiver expressions of warmth, positive effect, feelings of closeness during interactions with or about the child, as well as talking to the child about the partner in a positive way. The second dimension is *coparenting support* which involves active strategies to facilitate and extend the partner’s parenting efforts and is assessed from the perspective of the recipient. The critical feature of coparenting support is that the partner reinforces the other partner’s parenting goal. The third dimension, *undermining coparenting*, conversely, consists of active strategies to thwart the partner’s parenting efforts, either overtly (e.g., criticism or name-calling) or in more subtle ways (e.g., interrupting another parent to say something to the child) in the presence of child. Lastly, the fourth dimension is *shared parenting* which is a broad dimension that encompasses sharing of responsibilities and each partner’s satisfaction with this division of labor, the balance of involvement of each parent with the child, and mutual or simultaneous engagement with the child.

In their study of married, White, middle-class parents of toddlers, Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) found significant correlations among coparenting solidarity, support, and shared parenting for mothers and fathers. Interestingly, undermining by the father was not associated with any aspect of mothers’ coparenting, but undermining by the mother was negatively associated with fathers’ perceived [and observed] solidarity, support, and shared parenting.

## Cultural Constructions of Coparenting in Latino Families

Although coparenting research to date has been primarily limited to White, middle-class families, Feinberg (2003) noted that the “form of the coparenting relationship is shaped to a large extent by parents’ beliefs, values, desires, and expectations, which in turn are shaped by the dominant culture as well as subcultural themes within socioeconomic, ethnic, religious, and racial groups” (p. 98). This suggests that the same components of coparenting exist in every culture, and indeed there is some psychometric evidence that the structure of coparenting is similar across cultures (McHale et al., 2000). However, the expression of these different components of coparenting may differ by culture. For example, if there is an expectation that mothers are more nurturing than fathers, then this may shift the balance between maternal and paternal engagement in triadic play interactions toward mothers. Hence, “it is important that any such work [cross-cultural studies of coparenting] proceed from cultural definitions of shared parenting, rather than importing constructs from the cultures in which coparenting theory and research originated” (McHale et al., 2004, p. 231).

Even if ideal mother and father roles are comparable across cultures, the environment surrounding families (e.g., involvement of extended family, need for both parents to work outside the home) may moderate the association between parental role enactment and child adjustment (Kurrien & Vo, 2004). A consideration in Latino families is the extent to which embeddedness in a larger kin or community network (i.e., integration in a broader network of relationships) mitigates the effect of coparenting on children’s adjustment (Feinberg, 2003). Moreover, coparenting relationships may have different meanings or constructions (i.e., who is a coparent) depending on immigration experiences. For instance, Vietnamese refugees who immigrated to the United States often had to leave behind their partners resulting in broken families; communities took on a greater support role, and thus non-family members often serve as coparents (Kurrien & Vo). Similarly, Latino immigrant mothers have left their country of origin, which often includes leaving their parents, siblings, and other children behind, and as a result many initially feel isolated and depressed (Hovey & Magaña, 2000).

Caldera, Fitzpatrick, and Wampler’s (2002) qualitative research suggested that most of Feinberg’s (2003) components of coparenting are evident in the structure of coparenting among Mexican American families. Same-gender focus groups were conducted with 14 sets of low- to middle-income Mexican American parents, a third who were first generation immigrants. The authors identified six themes, most of which can be mapped onto the conceptual models presented above. A consistent element of coparenting across conceptualizations is “conflict,” which the Mexican American parents described as disagreeing with, contradicting, and interrupting each other, in most instances regarding discipline.

In this sample, “joint management” involved valuing the input of both parents, recognizing the importance of reaching a joint rather than unilateral decision, and presenting a united front and interparental consistency to children. This theme

integrates Feinberg's (2003) joint family management and coparenting support and is akin to Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) "coparenting solidarity." Caldera et al. also identified "coordination of parenting tasks," an element of Feinberg's joint family management and Van Egeren and Hawkins (2004) shared parenting. Relevant to these theorists' emphasis on satisfaction with division of labor, the Mexican American parents highlighted the *process* of mutually agreeing on how to divide tasks. Mexican American parents defined "support" as providing relief when one parent (typically the mother due to traditional gender roles) is experiencing role strain, reinforcement of the parent who is currently playing a lead role, and not with the lead parent, particularly in discipline. Although the specific manifestation of coparenting support identified by Mexican American parents may be unique to this population, the conceptualization of support is similar to those presented in other models (Feinberg; Van Egeren & Hawkins).

Two additional coparenting themes from the Mexican American parent focus groups seem distinct from prior conceptual models: coordination and compensation. The authors defined "coordination" as "working together as a team on a single task" (p. 121), which involves both parents compromising, and "compensation" as when one parent makes up for the other's lack of life skills (e.g., driving) or takes charge when the other parent is unsuccessful (e.g., with discipline). On the whole, this study supports the validity of existing models of coparenting for Mexican American families, and where discrepancies exist, it may be due to methodology. A strength of Caldera et al. (2002) qualitative study was that themes were derived from parents' own words as opposed to having parents respond to conceptually driven survey instruments. It may be that other American parents identify the same aspects of coparenting when allowed to share open-ended responses.

## Gender Roles in Latino Families

Interest in coparenting has grown alongside a trend toward greater father involvement. The father's role has expanded beyond primary breadwinner to include nurturance and process responsibility (Pleck, 2010). There is evidence that despite the "machismo" stereotype, Latino fathers are more likely to participate in traditionally female household tasks than White fathers (Shelton & John, 1993). Furthermore, the current view of Latino fathers' suggests that they are more egalitarian, are engaged in caregiving and physical play with their toddlers (Cabrera et al., 2004; Cabrera & Garcia Coll, 2004), share caregiving responsibilities with their partners in about the same as or greater proportion than do other ethnic groups (Cabrera, Ryan, Jolley, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2008; Hofferth, 2010), and are more flexible and adapt to new roles in the family than the traditional view of Latino fatherhood would suggest (Caldera et al., 2002).

Studies have also shown that fathers' sensitive engagement and warmth are associated with toddlers' and preschoolers cognition, language, and social competencies (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda, London,

& Cabrera, 2002; Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera, & Lamb, 2004). In contrast, Parke et al. (2004) found that hostile parenting among Mexican American fathers was negatively associated with middle school-age children's behaviors.

One aspect of coparenting is coordinating the mother and father role. It is unclear, however, whether this division of labor is satisfying for Latino fathers and mothers. Their satisfaction may be determined through comparison to cultural norms such that, regardless of how much the father participates in household tasks, a mother may be less satisfied if her partner contributes less than other men in their family/community. Latino fathers' increased involvement in more traditional maternal roles (e.g., caregiving) could also mean increased coparenting conflict since fathers may have stronger opinions about how their children are being raised, thus challenging what has been more traditionally the mothers' role.

## **Multiple Influences of Coparenting: Individual, Family, and Extrafamilial**

Feinberg (2003) proposed an ecological model of the antecedents and consequences of coparenting relationships (e.g., support, childrearing agreement, division of labor, and joint family management), which are hypothesized to link coparenting to parenting and child well-being both directly and indirectly. Specifically, according to Feinberg's model, variables at the individual level (e.g., depression), family level (e.g., couple relationship quality), and extrafamilial level (e.g., social support) are important influences on coparenting.

### ***Individual-Level Influences***

Parents' mental health is an important predictor of their parenting skills (National Research Council 2009). Parents who are depressed may be less likely to express support or resolve childrearing difficulties in a positive way, hence creating more conflict than parents who are not depressed (National Research Council 2009). Although a growing number of studies have examined the effects of maternal and paternal depression on hostile or negative parenting (Cummings, Davies, & Campbell, 2002; Parke et al., 2004), very few have explored the effects of depression on coparenting and even fewer have examined this link among Latino American families. This is particularly notable given that young Latino women are at highest risk for developing depression than other immigrant groups (Vega, Kolody, Valle, & Weir, 1991). In our research with a national representative sample of Mexican American infants and their biological parents, contrary to our expectations, we found that maternal and paternal depressive symptoms were not associated with coparenting (interparental conflict and support) (Cabrera, Shannon, & La Taillade, 2009). Perhaps it is clinical depression or posttraumatic stress disorder, which was not measured, rather than depressive symptoms that may be more disruptive to the coparenting relationship.



## ***Family-Level Influences***

The quality of the couple relationship is considered to be the most important influence on cooperating relationships (Kitzmann, 2000). Couples who support each other and are able to discuss disagreements are more likely to have a positive coparenting relationship than those who do not (Feinberg, 2003). Drawing from the research on parenting, positive mother–father relationships in European American and Mexican American families have a direct positive effect on child adjustment (Parke et al., 2004), whereas marital conflict predicts child maladjustment (Cummings, Goeke-Morey, & Raymond, 2004). Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study–Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), we expanded this research by examining the effects of couple relationship quality on the coparenting relationship (i.e., interparental conflict and father support) among a nationally representative sample of Mexican American families (Cabrera, Shannon, & La Taillade, 2009). In particular, when parents reported high couple conflict, they also reported less shared parenting (e.g., high interparental conflict and fathers reported less support for mothers). This finding supports Feinberg’s model that conflict in the couple relationship is the strongest predictor of conflict in the parenting relationship. Hence, couple conflict is not only negatively associated to the quality of parent–child interactions, as others reported (e.g., Margolin et al., 2001), but it is also negatively related to shared parenting, which in turn is likely to compromise child development. However, in this same sample of Mexican American families, we also had some counterintuitive findings between couple happiness and coparenting, which are difficult to explain. Specifically, mother-reported happiness (but not father report) was associated with less father coparenting support for mothers. This contradictory finding may reflect a measurement issue. In our study, couple happiness was assessed with a single item, had low variance, and is a categorical item, which may have contributed to a loss of meaning. However, other studies using similar variable have found associations between couple happiness and parenting processes with African American samples (Cabrera et al., 2006). This would suggest that there is a need for qualitative research to understand how Latinos conceptualize and define being happy in a romantic relationship as well as their definition of coparenting support.

## ***Extrafamilial-Level Influences***

Stress on the family will tend to undermine harmonious coparenting, whereas support may enhance it. Social support can improve coparenting by enhancing the competence of each parent as well as enhancing the couple relationship. Latino families’ social network primarily comprises their extended family and they maintain a strong sense of closeness to their family members (Cuellar, Arnold, & Gonzales, 1995; Hardway & Fuligni, 2006; Miller & Harwood, 2002). Latinos have been described as highly *familistic* (being close to family) and as having a moral obligation to help their extended family members who are experiencing financial, health, or other



problems with material or emotional support (Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995). In addition, they encourage their children to develop intimate relationships with their immediate and extended families as well as their *compadrazgo* (godparents) (Lopez, 1999).

Emotional support that Latinos receive from their extended family members has been linked to positive parenting, mainly for mothers, and positive school outcomes for middle school children (Harwood, Leyendecker, Carlson, Asencio, & Miller, 2002). Father-reported extrafamilial support (e.g., neighbors, coworkers), but not extended familial support (e.g., grandparents), has been associated with increased engagement in Mexican immigrant fathers of school-age children (Hossain & Shipman, 2009).

Traditionally, Latino grandparents have provided childcare or passed on cultural traditions and the Spanish language to their grandchildren, which allowed parents to complete their education, work outside the home or get more involved with their children, while also preserving Latino values for their children (Sarkisian, Gerena, & Gerstel, 2007; Silverstein & Chen, 1999). Current research on Latino families, however, indicates that family structures where grandparent(s) frequently coreside with their children and grandchildren exhibit a high rate of family stress, which can undermine harmonious coparenting (Goodman & Silverstein, 2006). For example, grandparents are often called upon to coparent their grandchildren due to a family crisis (e.g., single parent, adolescent parent, parent unemployed), making the parent–grandparent relationship more tenuous and/or placing additional emotional and psychological stress on grandparent(s) (e.g., increased depression) (Goodman & Silverstein, 2006). While social support can aid coparenting by enhancing the competence of each parent or caregiver (e.g., grandparent), stress on the family will tend to weaken the coparenting relationship (Feinberg, 2003; McHale, 1995; McHale et al., 2004). Coparenting requires mutual support as well as coordination of childrearing strategies. Since Latinos continue to reach out to extended family to coreside with them and their children as well as to assist with caregiving, research needs to explore multiple caregiver coparenting relationships (e.g., grandparent–parent).

## Acculturation and Coparenting

An important characteristic of Latino parents is their level of acculturation. Acculturation is the process of adapting and adjusting beliefs, behaviors, and values as a result of interacting with a host culture (Berry, 1990). It is most typically measured in terms of language proficiency and use, length of residency in the host country, and generation status (Arcia, Skinner, & Bailey, 2001; Buriel, Calzada, & Vasquez, 1988; Cabrera et al., 2006; Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995; Cuellar & Glazer, 1995). The process of acculturation has been viewed both negatively (e.g., the erosion of traditional values, customs, and language) and positively (e.g., the host culture is adopted while traditional culture is maintained) (Cuéllar, 2000).

Studies of the influence of acculturation on parenting have shown that less acculturated parents can be more controlling and have a stricter style of parenting than more acculturated parents (Buriel, 1993; Chun & Akustu, 2003). Also, more acculturated Latino mothers and fathers are engaged in more positive interactions with their infants and reported more engagement in caregiving and play activities with their infants than their counterparts, respectively (Cabrera et al., 2006). On the other hand, more acculturated mothers who use harsh discipline and are intrusive can have more negative effects on children's outcomes than less acculturated parents (Ispa et al., 2004; Parke et al., 2004). Because parenting and coparenting are highly correlated, coparenting is also expected to be influenced by levels of acculturation. The longer Latino families reside in the United States, the higher the probability that they will adapt certain aspects of the host culture, including coparenting practices (e.g., support of partner's parenting behavior, shared parenting), which is encouraged and promoted as ideal parenting in the United States (Pleck, 1997).

In a recent study where we examined whether levels of acculturation (measured as English proficiency) when infants were 9 months of age predicted coparenting at 24 months with a national sample of Mexican American families using the ECLS-B data, we found that fathers who were more acculturated reported more interparental conflict than fathers who were less acculturated (Cabrera et al., 2009). Also, mothers who were more acculturated had partners who reported less support for their partner's role than mothers who were less acculturated. A possible explanation is that, in contrast to less acculturated mothers, mothers who are more acculturated are more in tune with American parenting practices and may have more expectations for shared coparenting, which can lead to conflict with fathers and less support from them (Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). A limitation of our research is the use of English proficiency as a proxy for acculturation; a more refined measure tapping both acculturation and enculturation might help explain these associations further.

## Coparenting Associations to Parenting

One of the mechanisms by which coparenting is hypothesized to influence child development is through parenting. Cooperative coparenting within two-parent families has been linked to more maternal and paternal responsiveness with infants and school-age children (Caldera & Lindsey 2006; Floyd, Gilliom, & Costigan 1998; Margolin et al., 2001). Similarly, in a nationally representative sample of families with children and adolescents 10–18 years of age found that cooperative coparenting (but not conflict) was positively associated to fathers' involvement (i.e., father contact, quality of father–child relationships, and responsive fathering) among non-resident fathers (Sobolewski & King, 2005). Similarly, in a high-risk sample of never-married couples, coparenting promoted father–child contact with nonresident fathers (Carlson et al., 2008). Also, a study of White middle-class fathers found that fathers spent more time with their preschool-aged children when they perceived that their partners had confidence in them as parents and provided emotional appraisal of their parenting (McBride, Rane, & Bae 2001).

On the other hand, higher levels of interparental conflict may reduce mothers' feelings of parenting self-efficacy while increasing parenting stress levels, resulting in poor parenting behaviors (Margolin et al., 2001). Additional qualitative research shows that interparental conflict in the home is linked to harsher and less responsive parent-child interactions (Katz & Woodin, 2002). Qualitative studies of young non-residential fathers also reveal high levels of undermining between new parents, particularly in relation to fathers' lack of financial support of children (Young & Holcomb, 2007).

In a national representative sample of Mexican American families with infants born in 2001, we found that coparenting conflict at 9 months had a concurrent significant effect on mother-infant interaction and father engagement (Cabrera et al., 2009). However, further analyses showed that coparenting conflict at 9 months was not long term related to parenting at 24 months. But, fathers' coparenting support of mothers at 9 months (measured as frequency of conflict with their partner about their children) was positively related with maternal support and father engagement in caregiving and play activities and negatively related to fathers' use of harsh punishment at 24 months. It would appear that fathers, but not mothers, who support rather than undermine their partners do better in their own parenting role (use less harsh punishment and are engaged). Perhaps, as Feinberg and others note, cultural norms, values, and expectations might play a significant role in how parents relate to each other and the meaning of these interactions in ways not captured by our measures and methodology. Because Latino households are more likely to consist of extended families, a coparenting relationship may exist between mother and grandmother rather than mother and father (Goodman & Silverstein, 2006). Thus, interparental conflict between mother and father might not be as important for parenting, while the quality of the coparenting relationship between grandmother and mother may be more important to mothering for Latino families. Clearly, there is a pressing need to explore these findings with in-depth, qualitative research.

## **Coparenting Associations to Child Well-being**

Several studies have shown that coparenting is a stronger predictor of parenting and child adjustment than are other aspects of the couple partnership (Abidin & Brunner, 1995; Feinberg, 2003; Feinberg, Kan, & Hetherington, 2007; Margolin et al., 2001). Interparental conflict prevents parents from coordinating their efforts in child rearing and supporting each other, which can create an environment of confusion and hostility that can directly influence children's social development. For example, findings show that interparental conflict is linked to children's and adolescent behavioral and emotional problems (Margolin et al., 2001; McHale, 1995). In one study of Latino families with early adolescent sons, researchers found that less interparental harmony was linked to more child externalizing behavior problems (Lindahl & Malik, 1999).

In contrast, in our research with a nationally representative sample of Mexican American families, we found that coparenting (interparental conflict and father coparenting support) was not related to children's adjustment at 24 months (Cabrera et al., 2009). A possible explanation is that if these effects exist, they might emerge later on in children's lives rather than during toddler years. It is also possible that the negative effects of coparenting would be more evident as parents become more acculturated to the practices and meanings of American parenting behaviors. It is also possible that these measures may not be sensitive enough to get at direct effects, which have been shown using observational measures (McHale, 1995). There is some evidence that self-report and observed measures of coparenting are weakly associated (Van Egeren, 2003; Van Egeren & Hawkins, 2004). Further research needs to be done to elucidate the nature of coparenting among Latino families and its links to parenting and child outcomes.

### ***Directions for Research***

In this chapter we have shown the importance of looking beyond the parent-child relationship to include coparenting processes in the study of Latino families and their children. Coparenting research needs to include Latino families from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds as well as consider the importance of examining multiple caregivers (e.g., mother, father, and grandmother) as a coparenting unit. We need to move beyond studying the "who" of coparenting in diverse cultures to the meaning (i.e., predictors and outcomes) through the use of multidimensional ways of measuring coparenting.

### ***Examination of Intracultural Variation in Coparenting***

Researchers who study coparenting not only need to make a commitment to including Latino families in their research, but also should attend to interethnic differences since Latinos come from such diverse cultural, linguistic, economic, immigration, and acculturation backgrounds (Cabrera et al., 2006; Tamis-LeMonda, Baumwell, & Diaz, 2011). There needs to be a closer examination of the acculturation process in relation to coparenting (e.g., how acculturation may moderate associations between coparenting and parenting and children's development). In addition, the inclusion of a multidimensional measure of acculturation rather than resorting to solely dichotomous indicators of acculturation (e.g., English proficiency) needs to be a priority so that investigators can more deeply explore and understand the process of acculturation and enculturation in relation to Latino coparenting within and across families.

## ***Inclusion of Multiple Caregivers***

Latino families maintain a strong sense of closeness to their family members and rely heavily on extended family members (e.g., grandparents) for emotional and financial support (Goodman & Silverstein, 2006). Thus, there is a high incidence of Latino grandparents coresiding with and coparenting their grandchildren. Therefore, coparenting research with Latino families needs to examine parallel coparenting processes with multiple caregivers (e.g., mother–grandmother coparents, mother–nonresident fathers).

## ***Validated and Multidimensional Coparenting Measures***

Much of the coparenting research in Latino populations has only included one or two aspects of coparenting using unidimensional self-reported measures, which derived from other populations and have not been validated for Latino groups or immigrants (e.g., Cabrera et al., 2009). Future research on the quality of coparenting relationships with Latino families should use culturally sensitive measures, including self-report measures with demonstrated reliability in the couple and family relationship literature that assess multiple aspects of coparenting (e.g., shared, supportive, undermining), as well as parents' respective perceptions of the other's degree of coparenting. Although observational methods examining triadic interactions among mother, father, and child have been used, virtually no studies have included videotaped triadic interactions with Latino families. Videotaped triadic interactions are particularly valuable to understand the quality of partner interchanges when interacting with their child (e.g., harshness vs. warmth) (McHale, 1995). Moreover, future research needs to build on the work Caldera et al. (2002) conducted almost a decade ago by including qualitative interviews that tap into parents' (mothers and fathers and parent-figures) perceptions of coparenting in their own words to both validate existing coparenting constructs and include new measures relevant to Latino families.

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<http://www.springer.com/978-1-4614-6734-2>

Gender Roles in Immigrant Families

Chuang, S.S.; Tamis-LeMonda, C.S. (Eds.)

2013, X, 224 p., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-1-4614-6734-2