

Cultural Values, Perceived Parenting Practices and Prosocial Tendencies Among Mexican American Early Adolescents

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INTRODUCTION

Mexican American adolescents are often viewed as an at-risk population, leading scholars to focus heavily on negative outcomes among this group (Gonzales et al., 2004). However, empirical evidence demonstrates that Mexican American adolescents engage in a number of positive social behaviors (Knight, 1977). Scholars have suggested that prosocial behaviors (i.e. actions intended to benefit others) can stem from the internalization of cultural values and exposure to parenting practices that promote such behaviors (Carlo & de Guzman, in press; Knight et al., 1995).

Familism (i.e., valuing family cohesiveness, bonds, and well-being) is a core aspect of the Mexican American cultural value system (Contreras, 2000) and may promote prosocial behaviors common within the family context. Parents engage in a number of practices designed to foster prosocial behaviors (Carlo et al., 2007). One might expect that adolescents would be more likely to internalize prosocial values if their perceptions of prosocial parenting practices are congruent to parents' perceptions of their own practices. If, on the other hand, there is a mismatch between adolescents' and parents' perceptions of prosocial parenting practices, one might expect adolescents to display fewer prosocial tendencies.

HYPOTHESES

We predicted that mother-child discrepancies in prosocial parenting practices would be negatively associated with prosocial tendencies, whereas adolescents' endorsement of familism values would be positively associated with prosocial tendencies.

METHOD

Participants were 204 early adolescent Mexican Americans (M age = 10.91; 51% girls) and their mothers (M age = 35.87). Most mothers had either completed high school (41.3%) or some college (41.3%).

Procedure. The interview took place at home and took approximately two hours to complete. Each family was compensated \$25.

- Familism values* were assessed using the familism subscales of the *Mexican American Cultural Values Scale* (Knight et al., 2008). Adolescents responded to 16 items, such as "A person should always think about their family when making important decisions" on a 5-point scale, anchored by 1 (*not at all*) and 5 (*completely*) (α = .84).

- The *Prosocial Parenting Practices Measure* (Carlo et al., 2007) was used to assess the use of social rewards, material rewards, moral conversations, experiential learning, and discursive communication. Adolescents and their mothers responded to 38 items, such as "Your mother talks to you about being a moral and responsible person," on a 5-point scale, anchored by 1 (*Does not describe your mother (child) at all*) and 5 (*Describes your mother (child) very well*) (α = .62 - .93).

- The *Compliant, Emotional, and Dire* subscales of the *Prosocial Tendencies Measure* (Carlo et al., 2003) includes 10 items, such as "You can help others best when people are watching you." Adolescents responded to these items on a 5-point scale, anchored by 1 (*Does not describe you at all*) to 5 (*Describes you very well*) (α = .52 - .76).

RESULTS

As shown in Table 1, the sample was relatively high in prosocial tendencies and familism values. Preliminary analyses showed that gender was not associated with prosocial tendencies.

Correlation and regression analyses were used to test our hypotheses. •As shown in Table 1, endorsing familism values was positively associated with tendencies to engage in each of the prosocial behaviors.

- In addition, discrepancies in social rewards and moral communication were negatively associated with each prosocial tendency and discrepancies in discursive communication were negatively associated with emotional prosocial tendencies. Moreover, discrepancies in experiential learning were positively associated the emotional and dire prosocial tendencies.

- As shown in Table 2, familism remained a significant predictor of each prosocial behaviors after taking discrepancies in parenting practices into consideration. Moreover, familism values accounted for many of the associations between mother-child discrepancies and prosocial tendencies.

Table 1. Descriptives Statistics & Correlations.

	Prosocial Tendencies			Descriptives	
	Compliant	Emotional	Dire	Mean	SD
Familism	.43**	.43**	.41**	4.34	.43
Social Rewards	-.17*	-.39*	-.33**	.68	.64
Material Rewards	.06	-.01	-.04	1.03	.72
Moral Conversations	-.20**	-.26**	-.29**	.78	.60
Experiential	.05	.15*	.15*	1.01	.73
Discursive	-.11	-.19**	-.05	.90	.68
Descriptives					
Mean	3.70	3.84	4.00	-	-
SD	1.02	.76	.84	-	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

Understanding the origins of prosocial development and factors that influence prosocial behaviors among Mexican American adolescents can be beneficial for parents and society alike. Unfortunately, much of the research has focused on Mexican Americans as an at-risk population, resulting in a large focus on negative social outcomes.

The present investigation showed that familism values were positively associated with compliant, emotional, and dire prosocial tendencies, even after taking into consideration discrepancies in perceptions of prosocial parenting practices. Moreover, the findings show that discrepancies in some of the perceived prosocial parenting practices generally were associated with less prosocial tendencies; for the most part, however, these associations became non-significant when familism values were taken into consideration.

These findings suggest that the internalization of familism values may be particularly beneficial in the development of prosocial tendencies among Mexican American adolescents. Importantly, whereas discrepancies in perceived prosocial parenting practices were related to prosocial tendencies, they did not provide additional explanatory power above and beyond the contributions of familism values.

These results have a number of theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, traditional models have focused on how development in factors such as prosocial moral reasoning and empathy influence the development of prosocial behaviors. The present findings suggest, however, a need for scholars to give greater attention to the role of ethnic specific cultural values in promoting positive social behaviors. These findings also suggest that efforts to increase Mexican American adolescents' endorsement of familism values may be useful in fostering their tendencies to engage in prosocial behaviors. Thus, programs aimed at the prevention or intervention of negative social outcomes may benefit from taking familism values into consideration.

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Table 2. Regression Analyses Predicting Prosocial Tendencies.

Models	Prosocial Tendencies		
	Compliant	Emotional	Dire
Social Rewards			
Discrepancy	-.06	-.31**	-.24**
Familism	.41 **	.35**	.34**
Material Rewards			
Discrepancy	.05	-.02	-.05
Familism	.42**	.43**	.41**
Moral Conversations			
Discrepancy	-.05	-.13	-.17
Familism	.41**	.38**	.35**
Experiential Learning			
Discrepancy	.03	.13	.13
Familism	.42**	.42**	.40**
Discursive Communication			
Discrepancy	-.00	-.08	.06
Familism	.42**	.41**	.42**

** $p < .01$