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Abstract

This study explored parental beliefs surrounding prosocial behaviors and the parenting practices that promote them. A total of 47 mothers of young adolescents participated in one of the seven focus groups, three of which were conducted in Spanish with first-generation Mexican-American immigrants, two were conducted in English among second generation (US-born) Mexican Americans, and two were conducted with European Americans. Responses were coded using elements of the grounded theory approach, and results indicate patterns of shared and unique beliefs about prosocial behaviors in

ways that reflect the sociocultural context and acculturative experiences of the respondents. Findings suggest that beliefs about prosocial behaviors and parenting are culturally-structured and dynamic—changing to reflect the experiences and developmental landscape of parents and children.

Keywords: prosocial behaviors, parental beliefs, ethnotheories, acculturation

Culturally-structured beliefs play an important function in child rearing—serving as the underlying motivation for parenting practices and the way by which adults organize children’s early experiences. Parenting beliefs have been found to be related to parenting practices, and researchers suggest that they serve as the link between broad cultural values and the socialization experiences of children (Parmar et al., 2004). As Harkness and Super (2006) suggest, ethnotheories are the ‘nexus through which elements of the larger culture are filtered’ and as such are ‘an important source of parenting practices and the organization of daily life for children and families’ (p. 62). In the current study, we explore parents’ notions of prosocial behaviors (acts intended to benefit others, Eisenberg, 1986) and their beliefs about the parenting practices that promote such behaviors among European American, and first and second generation Mexican American immigrant mothers in the United States.

Parental Beliefs

Examining parents’ notions of prosocial behavior across ethnic groups and generational status is important for at least two reasons. First, theory and research suggest that parenting beliefs underlie behaviors and reflect the broader sociocultural and ecological context in which parents raise their children (Bornstein and Cheah, 2006; Harkness et al., 2000; Parmar et al., 2004). Indeed, parental beliefs differ across groups in ways consistent with broad cultural variables (e.g., Miller et al., 2002; Rosenthal and Roer-Strier, 2001; Wang and Tamis-LeMonda, 2003). Thus, examining parental beliefs might provide insights on how culturally shared beliefs are translated into children’s prosocial socialization.

Second, emerging research suggests that some culturally structured beliefs change as families acculturate into a new host country while others remain. For example, Suizzo (2007) found that Mexican American and Chinese immigrants, consistent with traditional cultural beliefs, valued conservation (e.g., tradition) and self-transcendence (e.g., helping others) more so than European Americans, suggesting at least some continuity in beliefs even after migration. In contrast, Nigerian immigrant mothers' beliefs about infant health have been shown to reflect traditional conceptions, however, with time those beliefs changed to reflect predominant medical beliefs in their host country (Moscardino et al., 2006).

Also indicating acculturation in parenting beliefs, a series of studies by Bornstein and Cote (2001, 2004; Cote and Bornstein, 2000, 2003) has shown how parenting cognitions about child success among immigrant South American mothers are more similar to beliefs expressed by native-born European Americans as compared to beliefs expressed by South American mothers still living in their country of origin. In contrast, Japanese-American immigrants' beliefs reflected both European-American and Japanese traditional beliefs. Together, this body of work is beginning to show a complexity in the acculturation of parental beliefs, with some notions resistant to change, and others changing at different rates for different groups. In light of these findings, studying parental beliefs across native and immigrant ethnic groups can shed light on what aspects of cultural belief systems are dynamic, and which are resistant to change.

Parental Beliefs about Prosocial Behaviors

Prosocial behaviors are valued in most if not all societies and is an important dimension of social competence (Carlo and de Guzman, 2009; Eisenberg et al., 2006 for review). Culture-comparative naturalistic (de Guzman et al., 2008; Edwards, 1998; Whiting and Edwards, 1988) and experimental studies (Madsen and Shapira, 1977; Munroe and Munroe, 1977) have shown cultural differences in prosocial responding among children, however, research examining parental beliefs about what constitutes and promotes prosocial behaviors in sparse.

Anthropological field research suggests cultural differences in parents' expectations regarding children's responsibilities in housework, caring for younger siblings, and participating in wage labor (Whiting and Edwards, 1988). Survey self-report findings similarly find cultural differences in parents' values, goals and expectations for their children. For instance, Chinese-American parents report valuing benevolence and prosocial goals (valuing the welfare of people with whom one has frequent and personal contact) among their children more than all other groups, followed by Mexican Americans, African Americans, and lastly by European Americans (Suizzo, 2007). In cross-cultural research (Suizzo and Cheng, 2007), European American parents valued these same goals of benevolence and prosociality more than Taiwanese parents. While these studies are beginning to show cross-ethnic and cross-cultural differences in the degree to which parents value prosocial behaviors by their children, the basic question of what they consider as prosocial and what practices they believe help promote it in their children has been left unexamined.

Prosocial Behaviors and Latino Youth

There is a dearth of studies looking at prosocial behavior among Latino youth in the United States (Carlo and de Guzman, 2009), nonetheless, the limited body of work indicates that Latino children and adolescents in the United States are more likely to display some types of prosocial tendencies than their native peers, and that those levels of prosocial tendencies and related outcomes erode with acculturation (e.g., Knight and Kagan, 1977, 1982; see Knight et al., 1995 for a review). Children's sense of ethnic identity has been linked to patterns of resource allocation preference (Knight et al., 1993), and acculturation among Latino adolescents is negatively associated with prosocial tendencies (de Guzman and Carlo, 2004). What accounts for cross-cultural differences and the dissipation of these selected types of prosocial tendencies with acculturation has not been fully explored, and certainly the role of parents' beliefs in this regard is not quite understood.

Familismo and Other Culturally-Relevant Values among Mexican Americans

Only a few studies have directly examined Mexican or Mexican American parents' beliefs or ethnotheories (e.g., Delgado and Ford, 1998). And while Mexican and Mexican American families are diverse, and parenting beliefs are influenced by a multitude of contextual, personal and economic factors, nonetheless, the current literature broadly highlights culturally valued traits that might impact upon parents' beliefs about children and their prosocial behaviors. In particular, Mexican American families typically emphasize 'familismo' or interdependence among family members (Garcia Coll et al., 2002; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2002). This includes relying on family members in ways unique from mainstream American culture, such as flexible assignment of roles and reliance on extended family for support (Garcia Coll et al., 2002; Harrison et al., 1990). In fact, Mexican American adolescents describe a good relationship with their parents as one which includes sacrifice and instrumental dependability of extended family through non-demonstrative displays of affection (Crockett et al., 2007). Consistent with this characterization, research has shown that immigrant Latino children participate responsibly in household tasks even at very young ages (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994), and that children serve integral roles in responsible work and in tending to younger siblings (Zayas and Solari, 1994). This is sometimes further emphasized among immigrant families who face additional challenges associated with adjustment to a new community (McDermott, 2001). In such circumstances, it becomes advantageous to take on roles outside one's own—such as when children tend to younger siblings, serve as language brokers, or when extended family pitch in to help in various ways (Morales and Hanson, 2005).

Other culturally valued concepts include *respeto* and *bien educado* (Arcia and Johnson, 1998; De La Vega, 2007; Delgado and Ford, 1998). Mexican American parents have described a child who is *bien educado* as one who 'has good manners and is respectful of others', with respect for others (*respeto*) including 'a strong sense of obedience towards adults related to them, other adults, children, and others' property'. (Delgado and Ford, 1994, p. 8). *Bien educado* does not necessarily refer to academic education or achievement, but instead refers to proper upbringing as reflected in a

person's demeanor towards others (Borrego et al., 2006). Finally, *personalismo*, or the valuing of warm and amiable relationships, and *simpatia*, or the valuing of positive personal relations with little conflict, have also been reported as being cultural scripts and values that are deemed important in Mexican and the general Latino culture (Borrego et al., 2006). Most, if not all of these values can have important implications for beliefs about prosocial behavior, for instance, to whom it should be directed (e.g., family versus non-family), and what constitutes helping others.

In the present study, we examine parental beliefs about what constitutes prosocial behavior among European American, and first and second generation Mexican American mothers. This qualitative study was guided by the following central questions: (1) How do mothers conceptualize children's prosocial behaviors and the parenting practices that promote them? (2) What are the shared and non-shared elements of those parental beliefs across the three culture groups? (3) Are there cultural and acculturative elements that are reflected in mothers' conceptions about prosocial behavior and parenting practices? Because of the paucity of research on naturalistic beliefs about prosocial behaviors and research on parental beliefs among Latinos in the United States, it was difficult to develop firm hypotheses for this exploratory study. Nonetheless, because all the mothers are living in the United States and thus there is significant overlap in the contexts they access and their exposure to predominant norms and beliefs, and based on the cross-cultural and cross-ethnic literature on parental beliefs reviewed, we expected substantial overlap in conceptions, as well as unique beliefs across groups. Further, based on the noted literature on the acculturation of parental beliefs, we expected that the two Mexican American groups, and the second generation Mexican American and the European American groups would have more shared conceptions than the first generation Mexican and the European American groups.

Methods

Participants

Forty-seven women (M age = 38.26, SD = 9.85), recruited through various community centers in two Southwestern cities in the United States

participated in one of seven small focus group discussions. Three of those focus groups ($n = 12, 9, 5$) were conducted in Spanish and were attended by first-generation Mexican American immigrants who had been in the US between 1 and 25 years ($M = 11.70, SD = 5.92$). Two focus groups comprised English-speaking self-identified US-born Mexican Americans ($n = 5, 9$) and were conducted in English. Finally, two focus groups comprised European Americans ($n = 3, 4$). Participants all had at least one child between the ages of 9 and 14. Approximately 23 per cent were working full time, 23 per cent working part-time, 23 per cent unemployed, 15 per cent reported being unable to work.

Procedures

The focus group method was chosen for this study for several reasons, particularly for an exploratory study that is aimed at better understanding a culturally-structured concept. First, focus groups can represent a natural setting (e.g., compared to a questionnaire or interview) where data can be generated from participants' interactions. In other words, focus groups can be synergistic and participants can listen to each other, build upon each others' responses, and together develop insights (Hoppe et al., 1995; Lindlof and Taylor, 2002). Second, focus groups allow for a common language and for normative responses to emerge (Hollander, 2004). This was particularly important for this study because the goal was to begin to explore what is typically believed among each of the groups represented.

The disadvantage of focus groups is that sometimes, a few voices can dominate the conversation and others might be hesitant in expressing dissenting views. For this reason, prior to the discussions, parents completed a short demographic questionnaire, and were asked to free-list the types of behaviors that their children do to "help others." These free-list responses were intended to stimulate parents' thinking about the topic at hand, and to help them actively consider the topic before hearing those of everyone else. Furthermore, each discussion was facilitated by two bilingual graduate students who were trained in leading group discussions and highly involved in the Latino community and in Latino research. Facilitators were trained to elicit the views of, and engage everyone in the discussions.

Facilitators led discussions by using two main open-ended questions. The first question asked parents to give examples of the types of behaviors that their children did to help others. The second question asked about what types of parenting practices they did/do to encourage children to perform those prosocial behaviors. Discussions each lasted for approximately one hour and participants received \$35 for their time.

Discussions were audio-taped and transcribed. All transcripts were checked for accuracy before analyses. Transcription of the English-language tapes was carried out by a graduate student trained in qualitative research. The Spanish transcription and translation were carried out by two bilingual graduate students familiar with qualitative research and translation protocols.

Data Analysis and Coding

Elements of a grounded theory approach were used to identify themes emerging in the discussions (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory is a particularly useful method in exploring new areas of inquiry and in describing subjective experience as is the case in the current study (Creswell et al., 2007; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Coders (three graduate students) initially read the transcripts in their entirety in order to familiarize themselves with the questions and the overall flow and content of the discussions. Two of the coders then identified units of the text that were pertinent to the issues discussed. Coders met to discuss and resolve discrepancies in their identification of pertinent textual units. As part of this first step, coders worked independently to label the textual units identified and collapsed synonymous codes. Coders then discussed their codes and resolved discrepancies. This step was done repeatedly until codes could no longer be collapsed. This iterative process resulted in refinement of codes.

The second step involved axial coding, or linking coded units into broader categories that better capture the phenomenon of interest. In this step, codes from the first step were examined together with the intent of looking for underlying themes or broader categories into which the codes might be subsumed. Eight themes were identified for types of prosocial behaviors and similarly eight broad themes were extracted for parenting practices.

In the final step, relations among themes were discussed and positioned within a theoretical model (selective coding). A larger story was developed from the interconnections among themes and compared across groups based on respondents' discussions regarding the relations among those issues. Validation of this final phase was done by searching for confirmation and disconfirmation in the transcripts (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Coders continued discussion and comparison of their procedures through these final steps. Throughout the analyses, procedures were repeated until themes and codes could no longer be collapsed into broader ideas, and until all coders were in agreement. Reliability checks were conducted using four out of seven (57 per cent) focus group discussions. Cohen's kappa for the reported types of prosocial behaviors was .90, and .84 for parenting practices.

Results

Part I: Notions of Prosocial Behaviors

Nine themes were identified in discussions regarding what constitutes prosocial behavior. Five themes were shared across groups, three themes were unique to the first generation Mexican American immigrants, and one theme was shared only by second-generation Mexican Americans and European Americans.

Themes Shared by all Groups

a) *Participation in Household Tasks.* The theme "helping at home" was common in each of the focus groups and was often among the first things mentioned. Parents listed such chores as "cleaning their rooms," "helping take care of the pets," and "helping clean the house." European American mothers specifically emphasized that doing chores was the child's responsibility as a member of the family for instance, "Just like every member of the family, they're responsible for keeping their room clean, helping with the dishes and pooper scooping with the dog. All that stuff ... because everybody is to do their share."

While first-generation immigrant respondents did not differentiate between helping at home that was voluntary and not, the two other groups

did. Those mothers emphasized that even if the child does not want to do the task, they must do it.

Michael is pretty good at doing his chores at home. He takes out the trash and cleans his room. I have to tell him to do it. But he usually, he frowns a little bit, he pouts a little bit but then he does it you know. (Second generation Mexican American)

b) *Tending to and Caring for Siblings*. Parents discussed a range of specific sibling-care behaviors such as helping with homework, teaching various skills/tasks, and watching over and caring for younger brothers and sisters. In general, these behaviors evoked a sense of caring for and tending to another person who is less able because of age. A European-American mother, notes, "Sometimes my 5th grader takes his brothers to the park, you know. It's his responsibility then to make sure they cross the one little street that's not very busy but they still cross the little street you know." Many mothers talked about how their children helped younger siblings do homework or learn skills. A first generation Mexican American mother, "My son teaches his sister how to learn her letters."

c) *Helping Others through Organized Programs*. Parents in all groups discussed their children's experiences in helping others through organized school service programs. All groups talked specifically about a school program in which their children read books to younger school children. For example, a mother from the second generation group notes,

It's a program that they established at school and I don't know the details of it, if there is any type of reward system or something but apparently they work with the younger kid to just read to them and become like a reading buddy.

Mothers expressed that such programs provided opportunities for their children to help others, but did not generate much discussion and thus will not be further discussed.

d) *Sharing With and Helping Others*. Another emergent common theme was that prosocial behaviors included sharing with and helping other

people. While this theme was common in all groups, the degree to which they emphasized particular recipients or benefactors varied. Whereas all groups talked about being responsive to a detected need as well as helping and sharing with family members, European American mothers uniquely discussed sharing with friends and peers and Mexican Americans uniquely emphasized helping those who are in economic need. A European American mother describes her daughter giving a gift to a friend,

She is getting a book for her first grade buddy. She was all excited because they got gifts for the reading buddies. She had made something. My daughter loves to draw and do arts and crafts and things like that. She was very excited about giving her a gift of the holiday.

In contrast, Mexican American mothers, and particularly the first generation groups, talked about sharing with people who were economically disadvantaged. In many ways, parents discussed this almost as an obligation because their families also experienced economic disadvantage in the past or that they could end up in the same predicament in the future.

Sometimes we are going to Mexico and we go sometimes, and they tell me ... (to get) a bag of toys to take to Mexico for the children over there who don't have toys. And, well, of course, my children also have a bit more, but from that little bit he takes any toy to bring it over there.

e) *Prosocial dominance*. A final shared theme that emerged was that prosocial behaviors included leading others, similar to prosocial dominance in which a person limits or controls the behavior of another for that person's benefit (de Guzman et al., 2005). This included instructing others ("He likes to teach what he has learned to his friends," "Kristen showing Kevin how to sew part of a banner; Kevin showing Kristen how to start a stamp collection") and also guiding others to follow their prompting. For instance, a mother notes, "Kristen will make up creative games for her and her two brothers to play," and another similarly states, "She likes to be the boss and organizes games." Mothers suggested that leading others, not just those who are less able or younger, was a service to others.

Themes Unique to First Generation Mexican American Immigrants

Three themes emerged that were unique to first generation immigrants. These themes were discussed at length in each of the three focus groups, but were not mentioned in the second-generation Mexican American or the European American groups.

f) *Being Well-behaved and Respectful.* First generation mothers emphasized that being respectful and well-behaved were examples of their children's prosocial behaviors. This included showing appropriate behavior and responsibility. For instance, "One of his (prosocial) behaviors is that he respects what does not belong to him.... I taught him that you have to respect what is not yours.... He is responsible in the home, in the school, and in church." Another parent talks about being respectful as a prosocial behavior,

Ever since he was little, he would take his books and put them in pairs and his blankets. Sometimes I would just put them inside and he would take them out. And I would notice and say "how nice".... He is respectful with older people especially. He has manners, saying "thank you very much" and "please."

Yet another parent describes her child, "Respectful, because he has to be respectful. We are people and we deserve the respect." These and other responses suggest that behaving well and showing proper demeanor were considered prosocial even when there was no clear direct benefactor. One parent summarizes this by saying, "By behaving well they help others."

g) *Being a Good Student.* Similar to the previous theme, first generation Mexican American mothers suggest that being a good student and excelling in school, despite there being no immediate direct benefactor, was a prosocial behavior. Parents talked about how their children participated in school, did homework, and behaved well in class. For instance,

She likes to help other children a lot. She likes to participate a lot. Participate, she likes to sing, she likes to dance, she likes, she has many activities. She comes to school, she takes the classes, after classes, after school program, she takes the talent class. And every day, at 5:30, she has energy to be in a soccer team. And at 7:30 pm, she comes, takes

a bath, does her homework, eats something and goes to bed. The next day, by 6:30 she is up, is already bathed, already changed, and already combed, and wakes me up to tell me that she is ready. She is a lot of work and she is very responsible.

Similar to the previous theme, parents suggest that their children's participation and activity in school, their excelling in academics and being a good student represented behaviors or demeanor that was helpful to others. Again, there is no clear direct benefactor, however, children serve as models to others, and fulfil their obligations, thus were considered as prosocial.

h) *Translating for Others*. While this is a specific behavior, this is noted as a theme here because of the heavy emphasis that first generation Mexican American parents placed on this specific behavior. Mothers repeatedly gave examples of their children helping translate for them, their teachers, and their classmates, and in assisting newly arrived immigrants to understand and be better understood by. This was perhaps the most mentioned and type of prosocial behavior during discussions. Parents often gave examples of how their children translated for classmates or other children in their school,

The example is that the child helps in school with the children that speak Spanish ...that are good in the classroom let's say. And they don't speak enough English or they don't speak enough English. She helps them in everything she can so they will understand better. It's work but

Similarly, parents also talked about how their children translated for teachers.

My daughter, sometimes the teacher ... suddenly comes to the classroom and they need to get something and the teacher does not speak Spanish. So then, they say "Can you please help me?" And English the same way like in Spanish. An example is when they have seen the news which are being said in English and so that they understand, there is a person who is translating at the same time, that is how my child translates. She speaks the two languages the same way.

Finally, parents also often talked about how, because of their limited English, their child translates for them, "Sometimes, we go out, like this also,

and I don't understand ... (name of child) translates for me, saying 'this and this mommy'."

One Theme Unique to European Americans and Second Generation Mexican Americans

i) *Social Inclusion*. European American and second generation Mexican Americans discussed their children's attempts to include others into their games or their social groups as being a prosocial behavior. Parents often suggested that these children were either younger or had some developmental issues that might have otherwise precluded them from easily entering a social situation.

Part II: Parenting Practices that Promote Prosocial Behavior

Eight themes were identified in the types of parenting practices respondents discussed that they believed encouraged prosocial outcomes in their children. Five of themes were shared across all groups, two themes were shared between European American and second generation Mexican Americans, and one theme was unique to the first generation immigrants

Themes Shared by all Groups

a) *Supportive Parenting*. The theme that was perhaps the broadest and most commonly discussed centered around the idea that generally supportive and positive parenting resulted in positive socialization and thus prosocial behaviors in children. Parents in all groups discussed being involved, fostering open communication, and positive modelling as essential in the socialization of prosocial acts. Parents talked about encouraging their children to be prosocial, and communicating their general expectations for prosocial behaviors—all invoking the idea of a supportive and positive relationship between the child and parent, where expectations were clear and where parents modelled positive behaviors.

b) *The Use of Rewards*. Parents in all groups mentioned that they used rewards to encourage prosocial behavior. Parents gave varied examples of

the types of rewards they gave such as “giving extra money” for tidying up their rooms, taking the child “out to dinner,” or “taking the child out to a movie.” Parents noted, however, that these rewards were never too extravagant though were often something meaningful to the child. One first generation Mexican American parent stated,

I say to them that I am going to give them a little gift, not something of great value, but something that you want. For example, the girl is of the age that she likes to paint [signals that she means nail polish], it is the only thing that I permit her to use. And I tell her something like that. “Mommy something for the hair” “... ok,” I tell her, “let’s go.”

Most other examples that parents gave reflected this same idea.

c) *Exposing Children to the Needs of Others.* Mothers put their children in contexts that elicited discussion about the needs of others. While the experiences that mothers chose for their children differed, this theme was found in all three sub groups in the study. One European American mother describes the evolution her children went through when they were surrounded by homeless people at a local shelter.

.... It was a real eye opener. The first time they [my children] didn’t want to get out of the truck. There were homeless people all around and it was kind of scary. They see that they have a lot less than we do but they are grateful, very thankful.... They understand that they are just people and they can still laugh.

It is the combination of experiencing the needs of others and processing those needs with the children that mothers spoke of most. Another European mother explained how she helps her child better understand a neighbor child that is always wanting to play with her daughter who she described as “kind of a social misfit.” “We talk to her and tell her that he is lonely and needs someone to play with. We tell her it is a good thing to do.”

While many parents said that volunteering helped their children learn to help others, one Mexican American mother thought that being enrolled in a low-income and ethnically diverse child care facility helped her daughter understand the needs of others.

They were raised there [child care facility] and they were raised around a lot of kids who come from very serious problems and my kids are part of it. Now my daughter is going to the Dominican Republic and I think some of it dates back to this: her exposure to other situations and cultures and stuff.

d) *Placing Children in a Prosocial Context.* Placing children in contexts that elicit prosocial behavior is a technique utilized by all groups of mothers. As one might expect, however, the context in which children experienced this parenting practice varied across groups. The European-American mothers urged their children to volunteer in the community to help others. They volunteered as a family. One European American mother explains her belief, "I think that if they [children] have a giving parent and that parent shows kindness and generosity to others, your children are much more likely to do the same."

Volunteering as a family did not emerge as a parenting practice used by Mexican American mothers. One mother explained how her recent financial difficulties have forced them to use the food bank to supplement their income. But while receiving help from the food bank the mother remembers that her and her children would often walk past the volunteers packing boxes. She used this as an opportunity to encourage her kids to also give back to the community, "I told them maybe one day we can come and do this, we can volunteer to pack up the food." This came full circle for the family when the children were asked at school to donate to the food bank. The mother remembers the children asking for food and replying, "I told them (the children) that people in the community do this so that people like us are able to supplement their own groceries. They now knew the real reason behind it because they had experienced both sides first hand."

e) *The Use of Religion.* Finally, a theme that emerged in all groups was the sentiment that religion, in one way or another, had a role to play in parents' encouragement of prosocial behavior. Some parents indicated that religion inherently stood for certain values and behaviors that prompted prosocial action and that by teaching their children those values, prosocial actions are encouraged. For instance, a first generation Mexican American parent notes, "Well, we are Christians and we always speak about the good things from our Lord, to do good things." More explicitly, another parent notes,

For me and my family, the values which are instilled as Christians, what the Bible teaches. It's the foundation of my family. And that, that not just be good children, be good citizens because the word of God teaches this. Thank God the foundation in the Bible is strong, it's the faith in God first of all, and not just to please, but do it for God.

A European American mother echoes the idea that religion can help teach certain values that underlie prosocial action, "The religious aspect, no matter what your religion is it just teaches them more to be a unity and to be respectful of other people and their choice and the diversity with other people." In other words, these parents suggest that religion itself espouses certain values and expectations which encourage prosocial action. Thus, by espousing and teaching the values of their religion, prosocial behavior is also encouraged.

One other way that parents mentioned that religion helped in promoting prosocial behavior is that they provide a way by which they can discuss their expectations. That is, through the examples and stories that are provided by religion, for instance, through the Bible, parents are able to discuss their expectations and to talk about their values. A second generation Mexican American mother describes her example,

Oral traditional trying to make sure that gets passed on. I tried it not so much tied in to the culture but I think through my religion like Jesus, Jesus used illustration. I guess because that is how I was taught in my faith that he used illustrations to make things easier for other people to understand.

Themes Unique to European-American and Second Generation Mexican American Groups

f) *Natural Inclination*. Parents in both the European American and second generation Mexican American groups reported observing their children engaging in prosocial behaviors early on and without prompting or purposeful socialization from their part. Parents suggested that they did not know how their children learned those behaviors, and attributed such acts to innate tendencies. Parents used such terms as having a "good heart" or being "naturally sensitive" to explain their children's behaviors. For instance, a second generation Mexican American mother describes her child,

“The whole time, she’s been very sentimental—a very good girl. Yes, very sensitive, generally with all people. Since she was very little she has always been like that. To this date, she is 11 years old and she hasn’t changed at all.” Another parent from the same group, in explaining her son’s prosocial acts, “I think it is because of his ... how do you say, what it is called, ‘the heart.’ He has a good heart. I don’t tell him to help.”

European American mothers expressed the same sentiment. One mother describes her child,

My daughter, a real nurturer. You know she’s a little mother and she likes to take care of people, take care of her friends and help mom out around the house and stuff. Kinda intervenes when her brother’s getting into trouble, she tries to say take him under her wing and you know say “now, Zackery, you gotta not do this, this and that.” She’s just kinda that way. She is just one that tries to soothe her friends over when they are arguing and fighting and that kind of thing.

Parents did not attribute all prosocial acts to innate tendencies, and in fact described other means by which they purposefully tried to inculcate prosocial values or express expectations. Parents specifically attributed to natural inclination those prosocial behaviors that emerged early, thus assuming that socialization efforts could not have exerted their influence yet. Interestingly, these ideas were not reflected in the discussions among the first generation Mexican Americans.

g) Supporting and Following-up a Child’s Prosocial Intentions/Actions.

One type of parenting discussed was by supporting and following up a child’s prosocial intentions or actions. One mother from the second generation Mexican American group discusses, for example, how her son had indicated that he wanted to help as a teacher’s aide, and thus she had gone to the teacher to help make this happen.

I’m the type of mother that if my kids want something and it’s positive I will advocate for them. And, if they say “no” they have to give me a good reason why they’re not going to be able to do it. And, so I said “Miss Vernacey (teacher) Michael has a question for you,” and so Michael went up to her and said “well Miss Vernacey can I be an office aide?”

And while the teacher declines the child due to the fact that all office aide positions had been filled, nonetheless, the mother felt that this was still a way by which the child learned and was encouraged towards prosocial behaviors. She added, "I really felt proud about the fact that he made the initiative, well actually he didn't make the initiative I kinda pushed him a little, but he went up there and he asked her and its kinda a scary thing."

Other examples from parents included helping their children buy gifts for others who they wanted to help or show generosity towards. In other words, parents noted that one way they encouraged prosocial action was by being aware of their children's prosocial actions or intentions, and following those up by supporting or helping them carry out prosocial actions.

One Theme Unique to First and Second Generation Mexican American Groups

h) *Punishment*. Parents from the first and second generation Mexican American groups, but not the European parents, talked about the use of punishment for negative behavior. Often, these punishments comprised removing privileges rather than imposing an actual aversive stimulus. For instance, a first generation Mexican American parent describes how she deals with her daughter when she exhibits negative behavior,

... her worst punishments are to not let her use the computer and (not) letting her go to the store with me. She gets ooh! Its one of the things that I can do so that she thinks about what she did. Because I think that ... how should I tell you ... you have good feelings and all that, but it's a struggle with children, you have to be more with children/people, I think who have a strong character like that, that are variable. So then I say, I have to fight against that because many times even if you have instilled in them good things at home and all that....

Like that first parent, a second generation Mexican American mother suggested that removing privileges was a way to punish negative behaviors, particularly among teenagers and notes, "When they are teenagers, timeout can be difficult," and says that she removes television watching privileges instead. Other parents talked about grounding and removal of allowance benefits as punishment. Parents used the term "discipline"

and described themselves as being “strict.” A second generation parent described herself as being “hard on (my) her kids.... expect a lot.” Yet another mother describes herself as someone who does not “beat around the bush.”

Related to the use of punishment, immigrant parents also discussed being strict and not allowing the child to have too much in the way of material goods, helped teach prosocial behaviors, albeit indirectly. Moreover, not letting children have too much also allowed them to have more empathy or be on an equal plane with others. As one first generation mother explains, “I have always told them that, in my way of thinking, you should not have more, much more than what you need. Because in reality many people need much more and they don’t even have one fourth of what you have.”

Discussion

This study was designed to examine conceptions about prosocial behaviors and the parenting practices that promote them among European-American and first and second generation Mexican American mothers. This study utilizes a qualitative approach to explore and provide preliminary information on these issues. Consistent with previous research on parental beliefs and acculturation (Bornstein and Cote, 2001, 2004), findings revealed several shared and unique notions, reflecting cultural beliefs and the acculturative experience.

Cultural Similarities in Prosocial and Parenting Notions

Several common themes emerged in parents’ beliefs about prosocial behaviors across Mexican American and European American groups. Many of those behaviors, such as sharing and helping others (e.g., Eisenberg, 1986; Eisenberg et al., 2006), or directing and controlling others for their benefit (de Guzman et al., 2005), are generally consistent with current conceptualizations and measures of prosocial behaviors. Similarly, mothers identified and often differentiated prosocial actions that were specific to the home (e.g., household tasks) and directed towards particular family

members (e.g., care for siblings) versus more general helping. This is consistent with researchers' assertions regarding potential differences in prosocial action toward different recipients, for instance, kin versus non-kin, and the corresponding need to account for such differences in measurement of prosocial behavior (e.g., Eberly and Montemayor, 1998; Kumru et al., 2004). These latter forms of prosocial behaviors might provide a critical training ground for promoting general prosocial tendencies. Moreover, although prosocial behaviors in the home are often associated with the culturally based notion of familism, the present findings suggest that such behaviors are also prevalent in both European American and Mexican American families.

Similarly, commonalities emerged in parents' beliefs about their own practices that promote prosocial behaviors. These themes were consistent with prior research on parenting correlates of prosocial behaviors and included supportive parenting, communicating expectations, modelling positive behavior, and placing children in prosocial contexts—all of which have been linked to the development of prosocial dispositions or behaviors in children (for reviews, see Carlo et al., 1999; Eisenberg and Valiente, 2002; Hastings et al., 2007).

At this point, it is difficult to ascertain what might account for such similarities in parents' beliefs. Certainly, research on parental beliefs and cultural values often show at least some overlap across culture groups (Suizzo, 2007). It is possible that such commonalities similarly reflect an underlying basic belief about these issues, and indeed these ideas also overlap with how researchers often conceptualize prosocial behaviors (e.g., Eisenberg et al., 2006). Alternatively, shared ideas could reflect the experiences common to the mothers in this study, for instance, all their children are enrolled in schools in the United States that require service learning. Whether or not immigrant mothers (particularly the first generation Mexican Americans) originally held these beliefs before coming to the United States is unclear and merits further investigation.

Similarly, because all the mothers in this study are living in the United States, parents' beliefs about their practices that encourage prosocial behaviors might also reflect the influence of shared parenting beliefs and values in the United States. Research suggests that immigrant mothers' childcare beliefs acculturate with time, and often begin to reflect the predominant ideas in current countries of residence, even when those ideas

run contrary to their original cultural beliefs (Miller and Harwood, 2002). Furthermore, overlaps in parenting beliefs might be reflecting the predominant beliefs in the US to which they have all been exposed through their participation in the school system, neighborhoods, community programs (from which they were recruited for this study), and other culturally embedded contexts in which they are now raising their children.

Culturally Structured Beliefs

While many common themes emerged in parenting beliefs about prosocial behaviors, several interesting differences also emerged. Notably, first generation Mexican Americans uniquely discussed behaviors that did not imply an immediate benefactor, for instance, being well-behaved and respectful, as well as being a good student. Mothers indicated that exhibiting such behaviors served as a good example and thus a service to others, and some suggested that showing such behaviors represented the family and their upbringing. Those themes elicit notions that researchers have indicated are underlying values among many Mexican families, namely *familismo*, *bien educado* and *respeto* (Arcia and Johnson, 1998; De La Vega, 2007; Delgado and Ford, 1998). *Bien educado* and *respeto* do not necessarily reflect behaviors that have direct benefactors, as was more common in all the other descriptions of prosocial behaviors, but are consistent with researchers' assertions that these are deeply held values in Mexican American culture, and have been found to be reflected in their parental beliefs and expectations (Carlo and de Guzman, 2009; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Furthermore, that good behavior, with or without a benefactor, was considered helpful because the children's behaviors represent the family reflects the value of *familismo* which includes not just interdependence but also honoring the family.

Another type of prosocial behavior that garnered much discussion among first generation Mexican Americans was how their children served as translators. Parents discussed this as a big help to themselves as well as for others, and translating was seen as beneficial to English- and Spanish-speaking peers, teachers, and relatives. Consistent with language brokering research (Morales and Hanson, 2005), this theme reflects an experience that many immigrant children face.

Unique themes also emerged in mothers' beliefs about parenting practices. Only first generation Mexican American mothers discussed punishment and firmness/strictness as methods of promoting prosocial outcomes. Again, this is consistent with studies suggesting that Mexican American parents are more likely to utilize strong disciplinary practices, such as punishment, compared to their native counterparts, and that such practices may dissipate with acculturation (Harwood et al., 1996; MacPhee et al., 1996). Thus, like the unique conceptions of prosocial behaviors, notions about parenting practices also seem to reflect culturally-rooted beliefs.

Acculturation of Beliefs

Findings corroborate earlier studies suggesting that with acculturation, many parenting beliefs change as parents adjust to their host countries (e.g., Moscardino et al., 2006). Both in parenting beliefs about prosocial behaviors and beliefs about practices that promote them, there was substantial overlaps in the themes that emerged in the discussions among second generation Mexican and European American mothers that did not emerge in the discussion among first generation Mexican Americans. This included considering "social inclusion" as a type of prosocial behavior and the emphasis on the child's natural prosocial inclinations and thus the need for parents to simply foster those proclivities. That both European American and second generation Mexican American mothers expressed these ideas may suggest that these are beliefs more commonly held in the US and may reflect an acculturation of notions about prosociality.

Implications and Limitations

Two important implications can be drawn from the current findings. First, results emphasize the roles that underlying cultural beliefs and acculturative experiences play in parents' notions of prosocial behaviors and parenting practices that promote them. Particularly with first generation mothers, their notions of prosocial behaviors reflected such values as *bien educado*, *respeto* and *familismo*, as well as unique experiences such as

language brokering. However, prosocial behavior research and measures do not typically incorporate cultural elements that reflect underlying values or experiences. As the concept of prosocial behaviors seems to hold different meanings across culture groups particularly those outside of majority populations in Western countries like the United States, these ideas should be taken into account in both theoretical formulations and measurements of prosocial behaviors in order to more accurately depict the phenomenon. Second, findings suggest that like other parenting beliefs, notions of prosocial behaviors and related parenting practices are closely linked to acculturative status. While this finding might not fully explain generational status and acculturative differences in prosocial behavior found among Latinos in the US (e.g., de Guzman and Carlo, 2004), it provides some insights on some of the potential underlying processes linking acculturation, parenting, and prosocial behavior.

Several limitations of the study should be noted. First, like many focus group discussions, responses from specific individuals could not be differentiated in the transcripts of recordings, making it difficult to ascertain the degree to which individuals within each group agreed with the discussed issues. Nonetheless, it should be noted efforts were made to encourage each participant to develop and express their own ideas (e.g., individual free listing of responses prior to discussion). And second, participants were recruited from specific settings (i.e., community centers) that likely limited the sample characteristics of respondents (e.g., mothers who brought children to specific activities). This study was intended to generate preliminary ideas regarding the topic of interest. Caution should be exercised in generalizing findings.

Notwithstanding those limitations, the study provides important information regarding the culturally based nature of parental beliefs, and sheds light on current conceptualizations of prosocial behaviors, particularly among immigrant and Mexican American populations. Findings have theoretical implications regarding how prosocial behavior is conceptualized and measured, and the role of culture and generational status in parents' conceptions of what constitutes prosocial behaviors and what practices promote them. Further studies are needed to more closely examine these preliminary findings.

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