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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

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### Examining the Role of Self Efficacy and Communication as Related to Dimensions of Latino Parent Involvement in Head Start

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This study reports data on a sample of Latino immigrant parents and their associated levels of parent involvement in Head Start. Parent involvement was defined and measured as parent behaviors supporting educational and developmental outcomes occurring in the home and community setting (home involvement), the school context (school involvement), and also the home-school relationship (home-school conferencing). Latino parents reported the highest levels of parent involvement at home, followed by home-school conferencing, and then school involvement. Differences in parents' comfort and ability to communicate with the school were found to significantly predict all three dimensions of parent involvement. Parent self efficacy was negatively related to levels of school based involvement and also parents' endorsement of the importance of a Latino identity. Communication and parent self efficacy were positively related. Overall, the results suggest that our understanding of factors that promote parent involvement for Latino preschool children is only emerging; moreover, results may differ from those obtained with samples of older Latino children and their parents. Implications of this study for the implementation of Head Start best practices, including promoting teacher-invited parent involvement and greater awareness and recognition of the amount of home involvement being provided by Latino families, are discussed in this paper.

Since its inception, the primary objective of Head Start has been to enhance the social and cognitive competence of preschool children. In addition, Head Start encourages parent involvement, recognizing that families are the primary sustainers of their children's development. With changes to the demographics of young children in the United States, a pressing mandate for Head Start is to better understand the family context that supports learning for diverse groups of children. In 2002, the Census Bureau officially declared Latinos as the largest ethnic minority group in the U.S, comprising 13% of the population (Harwood & Feng, 2006). Latinos are now one of the largest groups served by Head Start programs (36%) and over one quarter of all children attending Head Start live in households where English is not the primary language spoken (Aikens, Tarullo, Hulsey, Ross, West & Xue, 2010).

Latinos are a heterogeneous population who originally migrated to the U.S. from many different countries. Latino children may be raised in monolingual (e.g. Spanish only) or bilingual environments (e.g. Spanish and English) prior to entering into preschool. As children enter a

Head Start program, the family environment is likely influenced as a result of children's participation. For example, family members may be interacting with a school staff for the first time, and these interactions may be a positive or negative experience. To date, the degree and manner by which Latino parents of preschool children are likely to be active participants in their children's education has received limited attention in the literature (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Moreover, some constructs that have been reported as important cultural practices by parents of Latino preschool children, such as *respeto* for authority figures, have not been well integrated into an overall discussion of how parent involvement may facilitate a healthy transition to the school setting for Latino preschool children (Calzada, Fernandez & Cortes, 2010; Fuller & Garcia Coll, 2010).

The present study seeks to describe and understand factors that may promote or inhibit rates of parent involvement among Latino immigrant parents of children attending Head Start. In our research, parent involvement was defined and measured as parent behaviors supporting educational and developmental outcomes occurring in either the home and community setting (home involvement), the school context (school involvement), or involvement in developing and maintaining a home-school relationship (home-school conferencing). A number of studies have established the beneficial impact of parent involvement in schooling on academic performance for children of all ages (Jeynes, 2003; Reynolds, Mavrogenes, Bezruczko, & Hagemann, 1996). For example, among preschool children, parent involvement has been found to be associated with higher grades and enhanced verbal, motor, and social development (Marcon, 1999). In one recent study, Latino parents noted that structural barriers associated with poverty, such as limited transportation and work schedule inflexibility were negatively associated with parent participation in school-based programs (Mendez & Westerberg, 2012). A second study of urban Latino parents showed that parent involvement was greater among both mothers and fathers when satisfaction with the Head Start program was high (McWayne, Campos & Owsianik, 2008). More attention to the variety of ways that Latino parents support the educational and developmental outcomes of their young children would contribute to our understanding of parent involvement.

Applying developmental ecological theory to the study of parent involvement involves examining multiple systems that can impact a child's resilience, specifically the family system and the school system (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993; Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Mendez, 2010). For children attending Head Start programs, involvement by their families enhances the link between home and school learning opportunities (Mendez, 2010). Parent involvement is not only the behaviors that parents engage in with their children at home; parents can also be invited by the school to help bring their cultural worldviews into the classroom, thereby enhancing the collaboration across the home and school systems (Maríñez-Lora and Quintana, 2009; Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2011). These linkages, or the connectedness of the home and school settings (microsystems), are conceptualized by theorists as a feature of the mesosystem level of the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1989). As a strong mesosystem is associated with positive child outcomes, the study of connections between home and school is of critical importance (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Waanders, Mendez & Downer, 2007).

Children maximize their learning when parents and school personnel convey similar expectations and nurture competencies across settings. Slaughter-Defoe (1995) notes that parent involvement enhances continuity across home and school contexts in several ways. Parents are the best source for information about the child's unique talents and interests and for representing the cultural worldview of the family to the school, which is particularly important for children

from immigrant families. Parents can also provide important information about emerging developmental competencies that may not yet be apparent in the school setting (Mendez, 2010). Again, this may be of particular importance for families raising dual language learners, as children's language or social abilities may be highly dependent upon the dominant language and expectations within the home or school environment. For teachers, strong relationships with families give teachers opportunities to communicate school expectations, model age-appropriate educational interactions with children, and share learning resources with families (Marinez-Lora & Quintana, 2009).

Unfortunately, the process of developing a quality home-school relationship for Latino parents may be impacted negatively by a range of factors. First, if parents have more difficulty communicating with school personnel due to language barriers, the full impact of Head Start programming for enhancing family well-being is not achieved. In a study of first grade parents in Texas, Spanish-speaking parents reported the lowest levels of communication with the school and low sense of shared responsibility with teachers, as compared to both English-speaking Hispanic parents and groups of Black and White parents (Wong & Hughes, 2006). Directly measuring immigrant parents' English proficiency is important, and research shows this variable may not be related to the number of years of residency in the United States (Lara, Gamboa, Kahramanian, Morales & Bautista, 2005).

Second, the role of parent self efficacy may be important to consider, as parents with low self efficacy may not be comfortable approaching Head Start staff for assistance. Self efficacy has been defined in the literature as a belief in one's ability to engage in a behavior to bring about a particular outcome (Bandura, 1997). The parent involvement literature has measured self efficacy in terms of how strongly parents endorse beliefs about being able to positively impact their children's education (Downer & Mendez, 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Iruka, 2008). For Latino parents, it may be that parents with high self efficacy may be the least likely to volunteer or become active in the school setting, primarily because they engage in high levels of parent involvement in the home. Similarly, Latino parents with high self efficacy regarding involvement in children's education would be able to demonstrate sufficient parent involvement in terms of home-school conferencing, regardless of encountered language barriers. Therefore, testing the relations between self-efficacy about educational involvement separately for each dimension of parent involvement is needed. In prior research with African American Head Start mothers, self efficacy was an important predictor of involvement by parents within the home context, but not the school context (Waanders et al., 2007). Research has not yet adequately addressed these questions for Latino participants.

Iruka (2008) conducted a study of African American Head Start mothers' self efficacy and school involvement. She found that for highly efficacious mothers who were also rated as having high school involvement by teachers, their children scored higher in their academic readiness, defined as children's approaches to learning and socioemotional development. In contrast, for children whose mothers showed low levels of efficacy, school readiness abilities were higher when these mothers were less involved. This study shows an interesting relation between the belief in making a difference in education and actual involvement, suggesting that educators must pay attention to fostering both efficacy and opportunities for meaningful involvement (Goldenberg, Reese, & Gillmore, 1992) in order to promote readiness for preschool children. In a study of African American fathers, Downer and Mendez (2005) documented that fathers who rated themselves higher in self efficacy about impacting children's education also reported greater levels of parent involvement in the home, but not at school.

In developing this study's conceptual model for studying parent involvement with Latino immigrant families, we consider how factors such as communication skills and self efficacy would impact three dimensions of parent involvement – home, school, and the home-school relationship. In addition, we included in this study a measure of acculturation, which is defined as the strategies used by immigrant families to adopt features of the new culture and also maintain their cultural heritage. In his work on acculturation, Berry (2006) noted that acculturation strategies used by minority groups often involve a struggle with how to embrace features of the new culture (e.g. language, customs, beliefs) while considering how best to maintain features of their own native culture and transmit this knowledge to their children. The degree to which parents maintain culture of origin values, beliefs, and practices and how these processes unfold over time could have a significant impact on parental decision-making regarding parent involvement during preschool. For example, as noted by Wong & Hughes (2006), language ability and acculturation differences are just two of a number of variables that may vary for groups of parents who are defined as *Latino*, which in turn could influence their level of parent involvement. In keeping with recommendations from the acculturation literature, we examined two features of acculturation on a continuum. They include the degree to which parents report a) valuing and engaging in maintenance of a Latino identity, and b) accepting and embracing a U.S. American Identity. These constructs were thought to represent different strategies that immigrants use when engaging in decision-making about parent involvement; therefore, we sought to test if these constructs would explain differences in the three dimensions of parent involvement.

Existing studies of acculturation with Latino immigrant families illustrate how cultural beliefs and values impact the process of parent involvement in children's education. For example, Mapp (2003) found that Latino parents reported that they held beliefs regarding the importance of education and respect for teachers; however, they did not expect to be involved with the school directly. In fact, parent involvement was sometimes seen as disrespectful to the teacher and school. Moreno and Lopez (1999) observed that a lack of familiarity with expectations of U.S. schools could influence parents' efficacy about school involvement. These researchers demonstrated that lower acculturation to the U.S. of Latina mothers was associated with less knowledge about school activities and more barriers to parent involvement; however, these parents reported higher levels of efficacy and expectations for their children's educational attainment than more acculturated Latina mothers. Leidy, Guerra, and Toro (2010) reported that Mexican American immigrant mothers felt that acculturation differences between parents and children, separation from extended family, discrimination against immigrants, and concerns about legal status would negatively impact their parent involvement in schooling.

Taken together, it is possible that immigrants will vary on their endorsement of the importance of embracing aspects of U.S. culture. This could be for a variety of reasons including limits on access to information, opportunities for interactions with members of the mainstream culture, or a lack of awareness or confidence with such interactions. We believe variation in these acculturative processes would impact the ability and success of a parent to engage in communication with Head Start staff. Latino families who are less acculturated to life in the United States may be less likely to be aware of, agree with, or endorse the importance of participation in children's education as articulated by staff at Head Start.

Moreover, because the construct of parent involvement is multidimensional (Fantuzzo, Tighe & Childs, 2000), acculturation factors may have a differential impact on types of involvement within the home or school settings. For example, parents who strongly endorse their

own Latino cultural values may be less likely to see their role as parent as someone who participates in school events. Schools systems that are unaware of these potential cultural values neglect important avenues for fostering involvement that can incorporate Latino beliefs about education and the role of parents (Goldenberg, Reese, & Gallimore, 1992). Because parent involvement includes a variety of behaviors and attitudes that families may exhibit that contribute to a child's school success (Fantuzzo et al., 2000; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Kohl, Lengua, & McMahan, 2000), it is critical to examine how and why Latino families become involved in Head Start programs. While prior research shows that parent involvement is affected by personal characteristics, contextual factors, and opportunities for learning (e.g., Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Downer & Mendez, 2005; Epstein, 1996; Waanders et al. 2007), these studies generally have not included Latino families in their samples. Studies of elementary and adolescent children generally show that Latino/Hispanic parents report the least involvement in the domain of school involvement (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; Wong & Hughes, 2006).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the multidimensional construct of parent involvement within a sample of Latino immigrant families with children enrolled in Head Start. In this study, we examine three dimensions of parent involvement: at home, at school, and the home-school relationship. First, we examine potential differences among scales measuring home involvement, school involvement, and home-school conferencing to understand the relative levels of involvement and differences associated with context. Next, we examine differences in parent involvement with respect to acculturation. We tentatively hypothesize that parents who endorse high levels of Latino cultural identity may be more involved in the home, but not necessarily in the school setting due to the cultural beliefs about involvement in this setting as disrespectful to the teacher. Third, we examine the impact of engagement variables on the likelihood of different types of parent involvement in either the home or school context. Specifically, it is hypothesized that perceived economic stress and barriers associated with poverty will be associated with lower levels of parent involvement in all domains. Finally, we test if parent characteristics including self efficacy and communication skills might predict higher parent involvement, above and beyond the impact of engagement variables and demographics. Ultimately, we seek to understand if various dimensions of parent involvement are compromised for parents who report difficulties in overcoming language barriers.

## METHOD

### Participants

Latino parents of children enrolled in Head Start programs who expressed interest in an adult literacy and parenting program were eligible for this study. Parents in our study lived in suburban areas on the outskirts of a major metropolitan area in the Northeast. A total of 63 Latino parents [92% female (89% mother, 3% aunt or grandmother); 8% adoptive or step father], participated in the study representing a variety of countries of origin including Ecuador (30.2%), Mexico (20.6%), Brazil (20.7%), Honduras (17.5%), Peru (4.8%), Colombia (3.2%), and Puerto Rico (1.6%). The participants' mean reported monthly income was \$1009 (N = 49, range, 0-2,400) with a median length of residence in the US of six years (range 1-20; mode = six years). Ninety-five percent of the sample reported living in the United States for 10 or fewer years. Participants

had a child 3.61 years of age on average (57.1% male), which is consistent with the target age group for Head Start children (ages 3-5). The majority of the parents (55.5%) were married or living with a significant other, 34.9% were single, and 9.5% were divorced or separated. In terms of employment status, most parents worked part-time (42.9%) and 23.8% worked full-time, whereas 20.6% were unemployed or looking for work, and 12.7% did not work outside the home. The majority of parents (84.1%) did not attend school in the United States. Of the eight parents who reported attending school in the United States, one completed 9th grade, two earned a high school diploma or GED, two completed job training or vocational school, and three did not report the level of schooling completed.

## Study Procedures

This study was conducted over a three-year period in partnership with a community action agency offering Head Start services in accordance with approvals from our university IRB. Parents were invited by the Head Start center director to attend information sessions held during the beginning of the school year regarding types of parent programming available each year specifically for bilingual parents. Additionally, parents were provided with information about the study at parent orientation sessions during the beginning of the school year and at monthly parent meetings held in the evening. Flyers in both the Spanish language and English language were sent home with children identified by Head Start records as Dual Language Learners. School staff and parent leaders also directed potential parent participants to meet with our research staff. During enrollment, study facilitators presented parents with written information in both Spanish and English about the study procedures and copies of consent forms. A bilingual research assistant explained project goals and objectives to the participants and read consent forms orally. All parent data were collected via individual interviews completed in about 60 minutes either in person or via telephone with a bilingual interviewer. Although parents were given a choice about language, all Latino parents chose to complete the interview using the Spanish language. Parents received a 30-dollar gift card for participating in the data collection.

## Measures

All study measures were selected for their use in prior published research with Latino samples where possible. The measures developed for this study or for prior research in our laboratory used a back-translation process (Knight & Hill, 1998) where items were translated from Spanish to English using two independent translators. A third bilingual psychologist or graduate student in psychology compared the translations to resolve errors when they occurred. Measures have been subjected to tests of internal consistency and validity data is described.

*Parent involvement.* The Family Involvement Questionnaire (FIQ) is a multidimensional measure of caregiver involvement in early childhood education (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000). The FIQ was developed for use within Head Start settings and tested with low-income families of preschool children, and has been adapted for use with Spanish-speaking populations using recommended translation procedures (Knight & Hill, 1998). The measure consists of three empirically derived scales: School-Based Involvement, Home-Based

Involvement, and Home-School Conferencing. Internal consistency of each FIQ scale is high, with alpha coefficients greater than .80. The School-Based Involvement scale assesses parents' participation in activities such as volunteering in the classroom and going on class trips with the children. The Home-Based Involvement scale assesses parents' behaviors at home to promote readiness to learn, including providing materials and initiating activities for their children at home or in the community. The Home-School Conferencing scale assesses communication between school personnel and parents regarding children's difficulties and accomplishments in the classroom, as well as educational ideas for parents to do at home with their children. In a study with only African American parents, school involvement was validated through comparisons with attendance records at school events and teacher ratings of home-school connection (Waanders et al., 2007).

*Parent efficacy.* To assess parents' sense of efficacy regarding their children's education, the About Being a Parent Scale (ABPS; Wentzel, 1993) was used. This measure was adapted from a measure of teacher efficacy developed by Hoy and Woolfolk in 1993 (Seefeldt et al., 1998). It assesses parents' beliefs about their ability to influence their children's educational outcomes. The ABPS includes items such as, "Even parents with good teaching abilities cannot teach their children as well as a classroom teacher," and "Parents do not have a powerful influence on children's achievement when all factors are considered." Parents rate each item on a six-point Likert scale, where 0 represents "strongly agree" and 5 represents "strongly disagree." Higher total scores on the efficacy measure represent higher levels of parent self efficacy. The scale shows good internal consistency, with a Cronbach alpha of .86, and has been used previously in research with Head Start families (Downer & Mendez, 2005; Seefeldt et al., 1998).

*Communication in educational settings.* The Communication Questionnaire (COMM- Q) was developed as part of the present study. This 8 item scale is a self-report measure of the ease or difficulty a bilingual parent has in bidirectional communication with Head Start staff, particularly teachers. The measure has eight items, but only six are used in the total score. Items 7 and 8 indicate if parents use family members or other parents to assist them in communicating, but these items are not included in the total score. Items are rated from 1 to 4, where 1 = "Rarely", 2 = "Sometimes", 3 = "Often", and 4 = "Always". Sample Items include, "I am able to share my ideas with someone in Head Start" and "The Head Start program gives me written materials I can understand." Higher scores indicate more adaptive communication is occurring between parents and members of the Head Start program, while lower scores indicate communication difficulties. Cronbach's alpha for this measure using the six items was adequate ( $r = .77$ ). A comparison of this scale with a teacher rating of Latino children's use of English in the classroom ( $r = .269$ ,  $p < .05$ ) provides some concurrent validity.

*Barriers.* The Barriers measure (Mendez et al., 2009; Mendez et al., 2010) was developed in prior intervention research studies to assess barriers that impact families from low-income backgrounds when they consider accessing family or educational services through Head Start. Barriers assessed by this measure include: No need for parenting program, lack of child care, not comfortable with talking about parenting with others, work schedule conflict, concerns that your family or friends would disapprove, health related problems, religious activities, transportation, night classes, too tired, or "other" barriers not captured by the previous categories. Parents indicate if they perceived each item as a potential deterrent from their

participation with a rating scale of 1-4 (1 = Definitely Yes, 2 = Probably Yes, 3 = Probably No, 4 = Definitely No). Items are reverse coded for scoring so that higher scores represent more barriers.

*Acculturation.* The Abbreviated Multidimensional Acculturation Scale (AMAS-ZABB) (Zea, Asner-Self, Burman, & Buki, 2003) is a 42-item measure that assesses aspects of acculturation in both the native culture and American culture. This scale was validated in prior research by Zea and colleagues (2003) with a sample of Latino adults. We selected the Native Identity and U.S. Identity subscales for this study as indicators of the likelihood parents would hold Latino values as important to them for raising children. Zea et al. (2003) define cultural identity as “an individual’s self-identification, affiliation, and pride as a member of the culture of origin or of the host culture.” (p. 108). These six item subscales ask identical questions about aspects of their identity, one referring to U.S. American Identity and the other their Native Identity. Items include “I feel good about being U.S. American” or “I think of myself as being Latina” and “Being Latina plays an important part in my life.”

*Demographics and economic stress.* Parent reported demographic information included duration of residency in the United States, country of origin, number of children, number of people living in home, marital status, occupation in U.S., education, income, and economic stress. Economic stress was measured using 2 items developed by Conger and colleagues (1992) that assess the degree to which parents’ perceive their income as sufficient to meet their needs. Perceived stress is a variable of importance because low-income families with the same income may report different levels of stress associated with finances.

## Data Analysis

We computed means and standard deviations for demographic and study variables. We determined that one participant who reported living in the U.S. for 20 years was an outlier from the remaining parents who were in the U.S. for 12 or fewer years; this subject was removed from the analyses. For the FIQ only, we divided the total raw score for each scale by the number of items on the scale following procedures outlined by McWayne and colleagues (2008). We also examined bivariate correlations involving key demographic variables, predictors and the outcomes. To examine differences in acculturation for this Latino immigrant sample, we conducted one-way ANOVAs. First, we constructed two groups based on scores on the U.S. Identity subscale of the AMAS-ZABB measure of acculturation. Participants with scores of 3 or 4 were in the “Higher U.S. Acculturation” group and participants with scores of 2 or 1 were in a “Lower U.S. Acculturation” group. We were most interested in comparing parents on the extremes of this measure, so we only examined differences in parents in the high and low groups. We excluded parents with scores greater than 2 but lower than 3 from this analysis. Because parents overall were endorsing lower levels of U.S. Acculturation as recent immigrants, we thought this analysis might suggest if differences for those parents with some acculturation to the U.S. were also showing more parent involvement.

Lastly, we tested our hypotheses that parent efficacy and school communication would interact to impact parent involvement above and beyond demographics, economic stress and acculturation dimensions. We ran three hierarchical regressions using the same set of predictors

but with the three dimensions of parent involvement, Home Based Involvement, School Based Involvement, and Home-School Conferencing, as the dependent variable for each regression. Specifically, in step one of the regression, we entered length of stay in the United States, perceived economic stress, access barriers, Native/Latino Identity, and United States Cultural Identity. In step two, school communication and parent efficacy were entered into the model. In step three, we entered the interaction term of communication\*efficacy.

## RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and means for all study variables can be found in Table 1. In reviewing the scales for the FIQ, results show that the highest mean was obtained for home involvement, followed by home-school conferencing. The lowest mean score for the sample was obtained for school involvement. Paired samples t-tests revealed significant differences between home based involvement and school based involvement ( $t = 16.70, p < .001$ ), home-school conferencing and school based involvement ( $t = 6.50, p < .001$ ), and home based involvement and home-school conferencing ( $t = 8.16, p < .001$ ).

TABLE 1  
Study Variable

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean (SD)
Parent Efficacy	5.00	26.00	15.62 (5.06)
Parent Communication	8.00	24.00	17.98 (3.81)
U.S. Identity*	1.00	4.00	2.64 (0.98)
Native Identity	2.83	4.00	3.83 (0.31)
Barriers	12.00	45.00	24.34 (8.57)
Perceived Economic Stress**	1.00	4.00	2.37 (0.90)
School Involvement	1.00	4.00	2.04 (0.67)
Home Involvement	2.15	3.92	3.23 (0.42)
Home-School Conferencing	1.00	4.00	2.55 (0.79)

*Note.* N = 62 \*N=61 \*\*N=60

Bivariate correlations revealed correlations among the scales of the FIQ. For example, parent home based involvement was significantly related to parent home-school conferencing ( $r = .55, p < .001$ ) and parent school involvement ( $r = .56, p < .001$ ). Parent home-school conferencing and parent school involvement were also significantly related ( $r = .66, p < .001$ ). Examination of the predictor variables revealed that parent self-efficacy was significantly and negatively related to school-based involvement ( $r = -.33, p < .001$ ), but not the other FIQ scales. A significant, negative correlation was also obtained between parent self efficacy and Native Identity ( $r = -.33, p < .01$ ). Parent reports of adaptive communication on the COMMQ were

significantly and positively correlated with home involvement ( $r = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and home-school conferencing ( $r = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but not with school involvement. Lastly, a positive relation between efficacy and adaptive communication was obtained ( $r = .24$ ,  $p < .06$ ).

In examining acculturation differences, the sample mean for Native Identity was 3.83 ( $SD = 0.31$ ), indicating a relatively strong level of endorsement of items consistent with a Latino identity. The overall endorsement of the sample of items relative to their U.S. identity was considerably lower ( $M = 2.64$ ,  $SD = 0.98$ ). ANOVA showed that parents in the higher U.S. acculturation group reported marginally higher levels of school based involvement as compared with parents in the lower acculturation group [ $F = 2.95$ ,  $p = .093$ ; High  $M = 2.24$  (.72); Low  $M = 1.89$  (.65)]. There were no significant differences between groups for home based involvement [ $F = .27$ , ns; High  $M = 3.28$  (.43); Low  $M = 3.21$  (.38)] and home-school conferencing [ $F = .80$ , ns; High  $M = 2.70$  (.77); Low  $M = 2.50$  (.81)].

Table 2 reports the results of the hierarchical regression analyses predicting home based involvement [ $F(7, 51) = 1.52$ , ns], school involvement [ $F(7, 51) = 1.93$ ,  $p < .10$ ], and home-school conferencing [ $F(7, 51) = 2.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ]. For each dimension of involvement, step 2 was significant (home involvement,  $F = 4.79$ ,  $p < .01$ ; home-school conferencing,  $F = 4.44$ ,  $p < .05$ ; school involvement,  $F = 4.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and had a medium effect size (Cohen, 1992). The interaction step was not significant and thus was not included in the final model. The dimensions of parent involvement were predicted by different sets of variables. Communication was the only significant predictor for home involvement and home-school conferencing, whereas for school involvement, communication and parent efficacy were both significant predictors.

TABLE 2  
Hierarchical Regressions Predicting Dimensions of Parent Involvement<sup>a</sup>

Model	Home Involvement	School Involvement	Home-School Conferencing
Step 1			
R <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.08	0.10
f <sup>2</sup>	0.02	0.09	0.11
Length of time in the US	0.02	-0.07	-0.01
Perceived Economic Stress	0.06	0.14	0.21
Perceived Barriers	-0.09	-0.01	-0.15
Native Identity	0.06	0.17	0.18
US Identity	0.09	0.14	0.07
Step 2			
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	0.16*	0.13*	0.13**
f <sup>2</sup>	0.20	0.16	0.17
Parent Efficacy	-0.22	-0.38*	-0.16
COMM-Q	0.42***	0.27*	0.40**
R <sup>2</sup>	0.17	0.21	0.23
Model F	1.52	1.93†	2.19*

Note: N = 59. \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$  † $p < 0.10$ . Medium effect sizes are bolded. Standardized Betas from each step are listed.

## DISCUSSION

This study provided data on a sample of Latino immigrant parents and their associated levels of parent involvement in Head Start. One contribution of the study was to examine factors associated with parent involvement for this understudied population across the different contexts of home and school. Differences in parent comfort and ability to communicate with the school were significantly associated with all three dimensions of parent involvement. Additionally, parent self efficacy played a role in explaining school based involvement. The results suggest that our understanding of factors that promote parent involvement for Latino children is only emerging; moreover, results may differ from those obtained with samples of older Latino children and their parents.

Latino families are a heterogeneous population, defined by variability in their level of acculturation, familiarity with U.S. culture and schooling, and language competence. Additionally, Latino parents range in characteristics previously included in conceptual models of parent involvement, such as parental role construction and parent self efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). A more comprehensive model for explaining Latino family involvement needs to consider how these factors, as well as parents' cultural values and beliefs, may interact to influence specific involvement behaviors at home and school. In our study, parent perceptions of the degree of comfort with bidirectional communication played a significant role in predicting parent involvement, even after controlling for acculturation factors, economic stress, and contextual barriers (e.g. work schedules, transportation). This suggests that Head Start programs might benefit from discerning how parent communication can be improved, perhaps by use of interpreters, bilingual staff members, and translation of written materials into multiple languages. Because communication is a variable that can be modified or enhanced, greater attention to how this process unfolds between parents with limited English proficiency and teachers/staff may result in an improvement in parent involvement in all domains.

Limited evidence was found for the impact of acculturation on parent involvement in children's education. This may be due to the overall relatively high endorsement of a native, Latino identity by this sample of recently arriving immigrants. In our sample, Latino identity (e.g. being a Latina is important in my life) was negatively associated with parent self efficacy. This may indicate that parents with less familiarity and comfort with U.S. schools and culture are less confident in their ability to help their children succeed in school. This finding might also reflect a Latino parent's role construction suggesting parental involvement in the school setting is disrespectful to teachers and their expertise (Dumas, Arriga, Begle, Longoria 2010; Mapp, 2003). Future work may assist the Head Start community with uncovering a thorough understanding of how cultural beliefs define or determine specific parenting practices for Latino families in particular. Because parents with low self efficacy may be at risk for low levels of all dimensions of involvement in the educational process, adjusting expectations for parents during early childhood may be critical to maximizing involvement by parents during later academic years.

The role of self efficacy has been the focus of a number of investigations of parent involvement, with mixed evidence of its importance. In a study of urban minority parents of kindergarten children, Marinez-Lora and Quintana (2009) found that efficacy was higher among African American parents as compared with Latino parents. However, sense of efficacy was only predictive of Latino parents' at-home involvement practices and not those for African American

parents. In their study, home-involvement was measured during the kindergarten year by surveying frequency of reading with child, helping with homework, and practicing spelling or math before a test. These results contrast with studies of preschool populations, which support the importance of self efficacy for both African American and Latino parents. For example, associations between self efficacy and home-based parent involvement have been found for African American Head Start mothers (Waanders, et al., 2007) and fathers (Downer & Mendez, 2005).

The present study found that efficacy was negatively related to all dimensions of involvement for Latino parents, and was a significant contributor to the regression analysis for school-based involvement. This may indicate that Latino parents who are high in self efficacy regarding their ability to help their child success do not perceive the need to be involved in the school setting, as they are seeing their children as already successful. Alternatively, it may be that parents with low self efficacy are more involved at school because they believe they are limited by language or other knowledge deficits and are seeking to provide the best opportunities for their preschool child. Future research involving Latino samples will need to use longitudinal designs to uncover how parent involvement unfolds across the preschool and kindergarten period of development, as the behaviors required for parents of kindergarten children are considerably more academic in nature as compared to the preschool period. Moreover, Iruka (2008) showed that preschool children were rated as higher on academic readiness when African American mothers with low efficacy were less involved; therefore, future studies must compare self-efficacy and parent involvement with data on Latino preschooler's school readiness.

A compelling finding, which replicates other work on Latino family involvement and has significant practice implications, is the high amount of home-based involvement reported by Latino families in our study. Examining the means for each dimension of involvement shows that home-based involvement is the highest on average, followed by home-school conferencing and then school-based involvement. Because low levels of school involvement relative to home involvement are reported throughout the literature with Latino populations (e.g. Marinez-Lora & Quintana, 2009; Steinberg et al., 1992; Wong & Hughes, 2006), and they appear to emerge early in development (McWayne et al., 2008), this is an area for Head Start to carefully monitor. Because home-based involvement is a more natural fit with Latino parents' cultural beliefs, a more successful intervention strategy may be to encourage and celebrate high levels of home involvement during preschool. Intervention programs that provide parent education and opportunities for modeling parent-child interactions in the home, such as Parents as Teachers, can be consistent with cultural values (see Castro, Mendez, Garcia, & Westerberg, 2012 for a review). Additionally, providing culturally-relevant information regarding strategies for increasing school involvement would benefit Latino families with low levels of participation.

One such practice discussed in the literature is teacher invitations. Marinez-Lora and Quintana (2009) found that parent perceptions of teacher-invited parent involvement was significantly related to reports of parent involvement for both groups of African American and Latino kindergarten parents. Given that only 13% of Latinos in this sample reported speaking mostly English at home, this suggests that teacher invitations for involvement are an excellent strategy for use in overcoming communication barriers often affecting bilingual or monolingual Spanish speaking parents. Additionally, McWayne and colleagues (2008) showed that parent involvement at school by immigrant Latino and Polish families was high when satisfaction with school contact was also high. It may be that the process of teacher outreach to families, whether in person or via interpreters or translated written materials, may not only increase satisfaction but

also enhance the likelihood of school involvement. Marinez-Lora and Quintana (2009) note that invitations are often specific requests that can provide messages to parents about the specific skills that are expected and valued by the teachers. Workshop opportunities that provide sustained and repeated opportunities for parents to learn about the school system and strategies for promoting child development will likely be well-received and appreciated by Latino parents.

Lastly, increased attention to cultural factors can inform what factors may be needed to design parent involvement programs for Latino parents that are culturally appropriate. Because Latino individuals navigate two cultural contexts, many experience acculturative stress associated from exposure to different world views and cultural expectations (Berry, 2006). Therefore, support from other immigrant or Latino parents with children attending Head Start could be a critical element in promoting greater family involvement and home-school connection. Reducing acculturative stress for immigrant populations can also have long-term benefits for both parents and children, as acculturative stress has consistently been linked with increased depressive symptoms among adolescent Latino populations (Hovey & King, 1996; Polo & Lopez, 2009). Across a number of health care domains, the literature suggests that generally, greater barriers to care are found for families who are less acculturated to the U.S. (for review see Lara, Gamboa, Kahramanian, Morales & Bautista, 2005). Because acculturation varies for families who immigrate to the U.S., and adaptive communication facilitates parent involvement, greater assessment of the values, knowledge and skills that families initially bring to their Head Start experience could positively impact their participation.

Other research has examined factors that relate to parenting beliefs endorsed within Latino families. For example, the emphasis within Latino culture on *familism* (White, Roosa, Weaver & Nair, 2009) suggests that programs should emphasize and celebrate the important contributions that all family members make to the upbringing of the child, and how the school can best support the family. Gamble and Modry-Mandell (2008) found that warmth and closeness in family relationships among Mexican families, coupled with a cultural value endorsing interdependence in those relationships, promoted the best outcomes for Head Start children. In another study, focus group methodology revealed the potential benefits of incorporating discussions and examples of *respeto* within parent training interventions targeting the preschool period, particularly children ages four and five (Calzada et al., 2010). In a study by Goldenberg and colleagues (1992), exposing Latino parents to strategies to promote literacy was found to be more effective when they were aligned with parents' own beliefs about how children learn.

Overall, the use of early childhood practices involving purposeful invitations from teachers for meaningful involvement by Latino families, which are also consistent with cultural values of *familism* and *respeto*, may sustain parent involvement during preschool. Berry (2006) notes that aspects of the receiving context for immigrants (e.g. in this case, Head Start programs in the U.S.) can play a significant role in how successful families are in promoting a healthy, bicultural identity for children. It is recommended that members of the Head Start community should strive to embrace and not underestimate the contributions made to the development and emergence of competence for Latino children (Fuller & Garcia Coll, 2010). These efforts will likely involve the development and testing of new methods and practices for promoting parent engagement by Latino and other immigrant groups who enroll their children in Head Start. Also, assisting programs with producing translations of written documents, using interpreters, and offering staff training in cultural awareness and cultural practices will require additional

resources in a time where Head Start programs are often asked to stretch resources to meet emerging needs of families.

Limitations of the present study include considerations involving the sampling and data collection procedures. First, we examined parent involvement among recently arriving Latino immigrant parents from a variety of Central American nations with relatively high levels of native, cultural identity. Therefore, we do not know if these findings are representative of particular ethnic backgrounds or would generalize to Latino samples more broadly, or to parents with a more bicultural identity. Second, we examined communication difficulties purposefully with a sample who reported difficulties with English and who were interested in parent programming for bilingual families offered within Head Start. Because of this recruitment, we may have a sample that is more involved with children in the home setting that we may obtain within other Head Start programs. It is notable that our means are remarkably consistent with those reported by McWayne and colleagues (2008), and the pattern of involvement (high home-based involvement, followed by home-school conferencing and then school-based involvement as the lowest) was identical. Finally, future research should expand upon the use of self-report measures and address shared method variance by examining other indicators of involvement, particularly those of objective participation in the school setting, measures of home-based involvement with children, or observations of parent-teacher conferences held at Head Start. These efforts, and greater awareness and inclusion of cultural factors in the development of studies of this population, will help address the complex problem of promoting parent engagement during the early childhood period and transition to formal schooling.

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