

## Parent-Child Relationships and Peer Association in Immigrant Children and Adolescents

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### ABSTRACT

Links between parent-child relationship quality, acculturation conflict, and peer affiliation were addressed in this study of 507 immigrant children and adolescents in their third year following migration. Parent-child relationship quality was linked directly to negative peer association measures and acculturation conflict, as well as indirectly to friends' negative behaviors through acculturation conflict. Results suggest that strong parent-child relationships may offset potentially negative peer influences.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the number of immigrant children has grown dramatically. However, little is known about the dynamics of parent and peer relationships in the years following migration.

Past research suggests that immigrant children who become minorities within their communities may associate with peers who devalue achievement, which may account in part for declines in achievement and higher drop-out rates associated with length of residence in the U.S. Also, family cohesion has been linked to parent-child acculturation conflict and acculturation conflict has been associated with problem behavior.

In this study, the extent to which parent-child relationship quality is associated with acculturation conflict and with the values and behaviors of the child's friends was assessed for a sample of immigrant children and adolescents in their third post-migration year.

We predicted that poor relations with parents would lead to greater acculturation conflict and to association with peers who devalue achievement and engage in more negative behaviors.

### METHOD

#### Participants and procedure

- The sample consisted of 507 public school students (254 male; 253 female) in grades 5 through 11. Participants were from Argentina, Colombia, Cuba, Haiti, and the West Indies.
- They were interviewed individually, at school, in their primary language by interviewers of similar ethnicity.

#### Measures

- Parent-child relationship quality* was measured with three 5-point scale items regarding the extent to which students confide in, argue with, and want to be like their parents (1 = little or none, 5 = the most).
- Acculturation conflict with parents* was assessed with two 5-point scale items (Gil & Vega, 1996) (1 = never; 5 = almost always):  
 "How often have you had problems with your family because you prefer American ways of doing things?"  
 "How often do you get upset at your parents or the persons raising you because they don't know American ways of doing things?"
- Friends' values regarding achievement* were measured with two 4-point scale items asking how important it is to the student's friends to get good grades and to continue their education past high school (1 = Not at all important; 4 = Extremely important) (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, in progress).
- Friends' behaviors* were assessed with four 4-point scale items asking how many of the student's friends get into fights, have repeated a grade, have used drugs, or belong to a gang (1 = None; 2 = A few; 3 = Most; 4 = All) (Jackson, in progress).

### RESULTS

- The hypothesized relations were assessed with structural equation analysis (AMOS 4).
- Specifically, the model tested was that poorer relationship quality would be linked to acculturation conflict and associated directly and indirectly (through increased acculturation conflict) to more negative peer values and behavior.
- The model fit very well ( $\chi^2 = 1.37$ ,  $p > .24$ ;  $CFI = 1.00$ ).
- As depicted in Figure 1, parent-child relationship quality was linked directly to both peer association measures and indirectly to friends' negative behaviors through acculturation conflict.
- However, the path from acculturation conflict to friends' education values was not significant.
- A multi-group analysis indicated that parent-child relationship quality was a significant factor overall, but there were some differences with respect to specific paths, suggesting that cultural differences may moderate the outcomes of parent-child relationships in immigrant students.
- Standardized path coefficients obtained by group in the multi-group analysis are included in Table 1.

### DISCUSSION

Poor relationship quality with parents appeared to exacerbate parent-child acculturation conflict, placing immigrant children at risk for affiliating with peers who have less desirable behaviors.

Better relations with parents were linked to more positive friendships, suggesting that strong parent-child relationships may serve to offset potentially negative peer influences in the destabilizing period following migration.

Figure 1. Structural Model

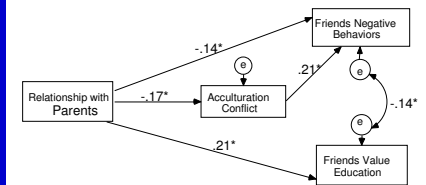


Table 1. Effects by Group

	Arg.	CoL.	Cub.	Hai.	W. I.
Ac Conf<PC Rel	-.31*	.04	-.23*	.29*	-.05
Fr Value Ed<PC Rel	.43*	.28*	.41*	.11	.19
Fr Neg Beh<PC Rel	-.32*	-.03	-.10	.04	-.30*
Fr Neg Beh<Ac Conf	.22*	.41*	.21*	.07	.24*

### REFERENCES

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### NOTES

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