FATHERHOOD RESEARCH
AND MEXICAN AMERICAN
FAMILIES: THEORY,
METHODS, AND A CALL TO
ACTION
Thank you, authors, for inviting me and for a stimulating set of papers!
Common strengths of these studies

- Monoethnic Mexican American samples
- Large samples
- Theory based research questions
- Both generative and intervention research
Travel with me back to 1990

- Smoking on domestic flights ends
- Iraq invades Kuwait
- Americans with Disabilities Act is passed
- Nelson Mandela released from prison
- World Cup won by West Germany
- I’m living in Mexico with a family
- Sincere study of MA fathers began for me a decade later, but I was ahead of the game…
PsycInfo search of MA fathers

- 15 publications
  - 60% dissertations and chapters
- First peer-reviewed paper was Davis, Updegraff, Delgado, & Fortner (2006)
- But the study of MA fathers is an analog of the study of fathers more broadly
  - 92 MA mother studies (37% dissertation and chapters)
Considerations in studying fathers (broadly) and MA dads

- Theoretical
- Methodological
- Next steps
Theories of fathering

Provider (Demos, 1982)
Theories of fathering
Lamb & Pleck (1985)

Paternal Involvement

- Interaction/Engagement
- Availability
- Responsibility
Pleck (2010, in press)

Positive Engagement

Warm - Responsive

Control

Indirect care

Process Responsibility

Paternal Involvement
Today’s paper from White et al.
Today’s paper from Nair et al.

Positive Engagement

Warm - Responsive

Paternal Involvement
Today’s paper from Wong et al.

- Positive Engagement
- Warm - Responsive

Paternal Involvement
Summary of theory

- Not all of the father involvement constructs are represented here
- BUT that’s forgivable
  - They rarely are!
- More attention needed in the field to indirect care and process responsibility
- Also....
When is a father not a mother?

When is mothering not fathering?

Are we ready for a theory of parenting?

Fathering X Child $\rightarrow$

OR

Fathering $\rightarrow$ Mothering $\rightarrow$ Adjustment
Methodological issues in studying fathers

1) Account for mother effect (despite double-standard)
Methodological issues in studying fathers

2) Account for selection effects
Methodological issues in studying fathers

3) Account for reciprocal effects between child qualities and fathering
Methodological issues in studying fathers

4) Look for non-linear trends

- Failure to specify an existing nonlinear term can lead to spuriously significant interaction terms
- Enter the squared term of fathering in the model.
- This term indexes the degree to which there is a nonlinear association between fathering and child outcomes

(Thanks, Melinda Leidy, for this one!)
Today’s talks

- None accounted for mom
- Nair et al. controlled earlier child behavior and Wong et al. accounted for earlier fathering
- None accounted for reciprocal relations
- None included nonlinear trends
But it may be unrealistic to expect all four in a study!
Call to action...

- Further studies of co-parenting needed!
  - Cowan et al. (2007)
  - Cookston et al. (2007)
  - Wong et al. (2010, Mar)

- Are there MA-specific constructs that march to a different drummer?
  - Familism
  - Respecto
  - Machismo…
Let’s not be imprisoned by the past
More positive psychology and interdisciplinary focus on immigrant fathers...
Dynamic Interplay of Immigrant Father Experiences

Immigrant
1) Age at time of entry
2) Type of economic opportunities
3) Commitment to host country
4) Identification with country of origin
5) Type of immigration status
6) Cultural context in US

Host country fathers
1) Experiences
   - Exposure to immigrant fathers and families
2) Attitudes
   - About immigrant families
   - Perception of economic threat
   - Beliefs about the educational impact
   - Ideas about how medical and social services will be affected

From Parke, Vega, Cookston, Brena-Perez, & Coltrane (2007)
Thank you again!