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Abstract

Stress and vulnerability for dating violence may be heightened among acculturating Mexican American (MA) adolescents, and MA adolescent parents, because of differing cultural values and norms within romantic relationships. We hypothesized, in a sample of MA heterosexual couples ($N = 30$, 15-17 years), that: 1) within-couple level acculturation discrepancies, and pregnancy/parenting, would predict physical violence perpetration, and 2) that this association would have an indirect effect through couple-level negativity during an observed dyadic video-taped discussion of conflict. Using a path model we found that regnant/parenting adolescents ($B = .37$, $SE = .16$, $p = .002$), and couples with greater acculturation mismatch resulted in greater couple negativity ($B = .16$, $SE = .06$, $p = .01$), which was associated with self-reported physical violence perpetration ($B = .41$, $SE = .22$, $p = .02$; indirect effect, $B = .15$, $SE = .07$, $p = .03$). Within-couple acculturation discrepancies and pregnancy/parenting may be a pathway to dating violence through poor communication skills around conflict for MA youth. Support services that strengthen communication skills, particularly for pregnant/parenting couples, are recommended.

Romantic relationships during adolescence are normative, experienced by nearly three quarters of U.S. youth (Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance [YRBS]; CDC, 2014). Such relationships are not, however, experienced uniformly. Approximately 10% of adolescents have experienced physical violence by a partner; females are particularly vulnerable, with Hispanic female adolescents evidencing the highest rates (13.6%) of physical violence victimization within the past year (CDC, 2014). Although less studied among adolescents, partner violence has been associated with a tendency to invoke heightened negative non- verbal and verbal conflict tactics in young adult couples (Bell & Naugle, 2008; Cornelius, Shorey, & Beebe, 2010). Further, cultural norms and acculturative processes influence adult couples' experiences with relationship conflict and violence. Research with adult Latinas finds that orientation to U.S. culture is predictive of multiple forms of violence victimization and that this relationship is intensified by their adoption of traditionally masculine traits (Sabina, Cuevas, & Schally, 2013). Among adolescents, Mexican American (MA) girls typically adopt egalitarian gender norms at a more accelerated and attenuated rate than boys (Updegraff, Umaña-Taylor, McHale, Wheeler, & Perez-Brena, 2012). This may create unique coupling challenges for MA youth involved in romantic relationships. Additionally, such youth are also more likely to become teen parents (Hamilton, Mathews, & Ventura, 2013), a stressor associated with couples' experience of teen dating violence (TDV; Herrmann, 2013; Newman & Campbell, 2011; Vezina & Hebert, 2007). The present study sought to better understand the role of parenting and pregnancy, dyadic acculturation mismatch, and conflict negotiation (including the potential for physical violence) among a sample of MA adolescent couples.

Conceptual frameworks

Vulnerability-stress-adaptation model. The transition to parenthood

can be a time marked by excitement and anticipation, but can also be a period of heightened couple distress (Petch, Halford, Creedy, & Gamble, 2012). This transition has been associated with immediate deterioration across numerous domains in relationship functioning, including self-reported conflict management and observed communication (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). Here, we draw upon a vulnerability-stress-adaptation model forwarded by Karney and Bradbury (1995), in which couple functioning stems from individual vulnerabilities each partner brings to the relationship (e.g., background characteristics, personality traits), the life stressors encountered (e.g., pregnancy/parenting), and the actions taken (e.g., problem-solving interactions) to adapt to new circumstances. Poor adaptation may spiral into furthered stress and relationship deterioration, where the reverse is also true. Aligned with this model, we posit that couples managing acculturative stress, while also coping with the demands of pregnancy or parenting, are particularly at risk of utilizing poor adaptive coping strategies (e.g., negative conflict styles). This model has similarly been utilized to predict intimate partner violence (Langer, Lawrence, & Barry, 2008) and to qualitatively understand how situational couple violence may result from combinations of vulnerabilities, stressful events, and mal- adaptive communication processes among adults (Stith et al., 2011).

Acculturative stress. Mexican American youth experience stress as a result of acculturation, a multi-dimensional process involving a shift in viewpoints and behaviors as cultural norms representative of Mexico and the United States coincide (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987). That is, each set of norms is negotiated by the adolescent, who may adopt either, both, or neither (Nieri et al., 2014). Thus, alongside a vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), we draw upon theories of acculturative stress to understand the unique interpersonal contexts that bicultural adolescents face as they navigate stress resulting both from conflict between two sets of cultural norms but also as emerging within one's own

ethnic group as acculturative demands are traversed at the individual level. Although these tensions may be particularly pronounced between what Norton (1978; as cited by Robbins and Galan (2006)) has termed the nurturing (i.e., family, immediate community) versus sustaining (i.e., educational, larger societal) systems, they are also salient between members of the same ethnic group as multi-faceted bicultural and inter-generational contexts give rise to various degrees of dual language efficiency and pressures to conform to either one set of cultural norms or the other (Romero & Roberts, 2003).

Related to the present study, Romero and Roberts (2003) suggest that acculturative stress can result within interpersonal contexts when cultural discrepancies are present (e.g., acculturation mismatch), and as affected by one's cognitive appraisal of the situational context. For example, a couple mismatched in their level of acculturation and facing pregnancy or parenting demands may experience heightened acculturative stress, particularly if the situation is deemed undesirable at the individual level and as heightened in the context of mismatched relationship expectations as decisions are negotiated regarding pregnancy or co-parenting. This interpretation fits within the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), whereby couple functioning would be most compromised in the context of heightened stress conditions (i.e., acculturative processes, and specifically as couples differ) and as acute life stressors (i.e., pregnancy/parenting) tax adaptive coping processes. Such stressors may be considered cumulative, increasing risk for couple violence (Chen & Foshee, 2015; Petch et al., 2012).

Acculturation differences and interpersonal conflict

Conflict is an inevitable part of all relationships, and research is needed to better understand how adolescents traverse culturally influenced expectations within romantic contexts. At least in certain interpersonal contexts, acculturation differences (a term preferred to "acculturation gap

distress"; see Nieri et al., 2014) may create stress and heighten conflict. This phenomenon has been studied more extensively within families; findings are mixed and have ranged to include either a negative impact on parentechild quality (Birman, 2006; Dennis, Basarez, & Farahmand, 2010; Dinh & Nguyen, 2006; Schwartz et al., 2012) or no such effect (Lau et al., 2005; Nieri et al., 2014; see also Telzer, 2010). Adolescent romantic con- texts are unique developmentally, however, distinct from parent-child relationships in a number of important ways that hold relevance to understanding conflict negotiation (Welsh & Shulman, 2008).

Acculturation differences have not been studied to our knowledge among romantically-involved adolescent couples, although we do know that gender roles shift in dissimilar manners for MA adolescent girls as compared to adolescent boys throughout acculturation processes (Updegraff et al., 2012). This holds clear relevancy for studying conflict negotiation within dating partnerships as couple-level differences in acculturation and associated belief systems may contribute to tension and heightened conflict among adolescent couples (Sanderson, Coker, Roberts, Tortolero, & Reininger, 2004; Ulloa, Jaycox, Skinner, & Orsburn, 2008); indeed, among MA adult couples, heightened conflict and violence have been attributed to dis- similar rates of within couple acculturation (Miranda, Bilot, Peluso, Berman, & Van Meek, 2006; Montoya, 1996; Perilla, Bakeman, & Norris, 1994). It is unclear whether the underlying mechanisms associated with discrepancies in specified directions (i.e., a departure from Mexican cultural orientation or a shift towards U.S. orientation), although some research suggests that it is the shift away from Mexican-orientation that may be more salient to individual beliefs about relationship expectations (Ulloa et al., 2008). Regardless, in line with earlier discussion of acculturative stress, it is thought that adolescent couples' dissimilar rates of acculturation may exasperate stress (Sanderson et al., 2004; Ulloa et al., 2008; Updegraff et al., 2012), and it is logical that this stress may be further heightened by pregnancy and parenting.

Cultural considerations surrounding pregnancy and parenting

Although all ethnic groups in the United States have evidenced a decline in teen pregnancy over the past 20 years, Latinas ages 15e19 continue to have higher teen birthrates than other groups (49.4 as compared to 31.3 average per 1000 in 2011; Hamilton et al., 2013). As compared to later generations, first generation youth hold attitudes more accepting of teen pregnancy and parenting: according to a 2009 Pew Research Center study, 69% of first generation versus 86% of third generation adolescents reported sentiment that pregnancy during the teen years was "a bad thing for society". Such a sentiment reflects strong family values, particularly inherent among Mexican origin youth (Updegraff et al., 2012). However, these and other research findings underscore that most Latino adolescents do not desire pregnancy during the teen years and rather, that a majority of such pregnancies are unplanned (Child Trends, 2013). Unplanned pregnancies may be understood in part in that sexually active Latino adolescents are more likely to be in committed and longer-lasting romantic relationships (Martinez, Copen, & Abma, 2011), decreasing their tendency to consistently use contraceptives (Manlove, Ryan, & Franzetta, 2003). Females dating older partners are also at reduced odds of using contraception (Manlove et al., 2003), a phenomenon that is more common among Latino youth (Bouris et al., 2012).

Multiple studies have found that Latino parents have difficulty talking to their children about these topics and that, if they do, abstinence or the negative consequences of sexual risk-taking are stressed (see Guilamo-Ramos, Goldberg, Lee, McCarthy, & Leavitt, 2012). Further, studies have found that ethnic minority youth face economic and social challenges that contribute to a lack of sexual health awareness, including reduced accessibility of clinics, and ultimately to the inconsistent use of less optimal forms of contraceptives and the choice of such forms over more optimal methods (e.g., condoms rather than IUDs; see Haider, Stoffel,

Donenberg, & Geller, 2013).

There is a noticeable gap in the literature concerning the experiences of adolescent Latino couples who have decided to co- parent, although research has found that mothers take on co-parenting roles with their adolescent parenting daughters (Pittman & Coley, 2011). Paralleling this trend, and also coinciding with the tendency for most births to be unplanned, qualitative research has found that Latino adolescents do not view themselves as equipped for parenthood (Child Trends, 2013). Where adolescent co-parenting occurs, literature pertaining to within-family cultural socialization is applicable, as the parenting couple represents a newly created subsystem (see Updegraff & Umana-Taylor, 2015). Conflict may arise where there are within-couple acculturation discrepancies, and should be considered within developmental contexts as youth exert agency and actively socialize one another (Updegraff & Umana-Taylor, 2015).

Associations between pregnancy, parenting, and teen dating violence

Pregnancy and parenting are often co-examined in the context of violence. Kan, Feinberg, and Solmeyer (2012) discuss the importance of studying relationship violence across prenatal and early parenting transitions, as each period requires unique demands and adjustments for the couple. Among a sample of adults, the authors found that prenatal relationship violence was associated with co-parenting difficulty and that this relationship was mediated by relationship quality (Kan et al., 2012). A longitudinal study of diverse adolescents found that MA youth were at elevated risk of experiencing physical partner violence within the first six months after the birth of a child (Harrykissoon, Rickert, & Wiemann, 2002). Taken together, studies find that lack of social support, low SES, and a combination of stressors including young age and a first parenting experience, particularly if unplanned, heighten risk for experiencing violence (see Jasinski, 2004 for a review). Of important note, pregnancy itself may

also be an outcome of teen dating violence as a potential result of reproductive coercion, including manipulation of birth control methods (Herrmann, 2013). Such contexts denote important considerations regarding sexual violence as a distinct line of study apart from physical (see Vezina & Hebert, 2007; Wincentak, Connolly, & Card, 2016).

Disentangling the processes that underlie physical violence perpetration is complex, particularly as power and control dynamics intersect with proximal motivators such as anger or frustration at a partner. Although the adult intimate partner violence literature is more developed with regard to these intersections, preliminary research extending Johnson's (2006) typology with primarily Latina youth suggests that most physical violence is characterized by female perpetration within situational contexts marked by low control, but that many couples may also demonstrate mutually violent patterns inclusive of control and fear held by both partners (Messinger, Fry, Rickert, Catallozzi, & Davidson, 2014). This is consistent with other research finding that violence between partners during the adolescent years is often reciprocal (Capaldi, Kim, & Shortt, 2007; Mulford & Giordano, 2008); however, it is important to note that females are more likely to experience extreme fear of partners and to be seriously injured (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). They are also more likely to suffer multiple and more severe psychological (e.g., depression) and behavioral (e.g., suicide attempts) outcomes (Ackard, Eisenberg, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007). Thus, considerations should move beyond gender mutuality to take into account the potentially worse outcomes for mother (and child), while also not neglecting to prevent violence perpetration among females as well as males.

Situational couple violence, the most common type of adolescent violence (Messinger et al., 2014), may be defined apart from a context indicative of patterned fearful control (Johnson, 2006) and reflects a context in which communication skills play a particularly important role (Bell & Naugle, 2008; Cornelius et al., 2010; Johnson, 2008). It is not that

control attempts are entirely absent from these interactions, but rather, that conflict escalation occurs as each partner contests a specific domain that is important to them (Giordano, Copp, Longmore, & Manning, 2015). When lacking in communicative competencies, these negotiations can provoke additional stress via "verbal amplification" (name-calling, blaming), resulting in eventual physical violence perpetration (Giordano et al., 2015). Communication skills are likely to be less developed in adolescents, and these processes are also influenced by gender and cultural norms (Rueda & Williams, 2016). Pregnancy and parenting are likely to be contexts either directly discussed or contributing to conflict domains, and urban youth may learn violent conflict negotiation strategies from high crime and poverty-stricken neighborhoods (Newman & Campbell, 2011).

The present study

  This study is guided by literature pointing to pregnancy and parenting as roles that confer added stress to the adolescent relationship, thus putting them at heightened risk for enacting psychological and physical dating violence (Chen & Foshee, 2015; Roberts et al., 2005). We are also guided by literature pointing to acculturative stress as an additional domain of potential within-couple tension, particularly as discrepancies exist (Romero & Roberts, 2003). Although studies have examined the effects of acculturation discrepancies within families, the role of acculturative stress within differently acculturated pregnant/parenting youth is missing from the literature. Preliminary research also suggests that committed MA couples may employ greater use of negative conflict styles than found in research of other adolescent couples (Rueda & Williams, 2016), the latter of which has been associated with TDV (Munõz-Rivas, Grana, O'Leary, & Gonzalez, 2007). These styles, consisting of blaming and criticism, were particularly pronounced among pregnant and parenting youth (Rueda & Williams, 2016). Although we

have few studies from which to draw, our exploratory hypotheses include the following of MA adolescent couples: a) within-couple discrepancies in cultural orientation will be positively associated with heightened negativity during observed discussion of conflict and physical violence perpetration by either partner; b) adolescent couples that are pregnant and/or parenting will experience greater negativity in their observed interactions, as well as have a greater likelihood of physical violence in their relationships; c) observed negativity will be positively associated with physical violence perpetration, and d) that the association between within-couple discrepancies in cultural orientation and pregnancy/parenting on physical violence will have an indirect effect through observed negativity.

Methods

Sample

The Mexican American Teen Relationships (MATR) study sought to understand the dating experiences of urban MA youth from a border state. A total of 34 dating couples were recruited from a larger sample of 304 self-identified MA adolescents (ages 15-17) that had taken an online survey. Following approval from the governing Institutional Review Board, adolescents were recruited into the MATR study from high schools and community agencies (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs, the YMCA) from an urban area in a large Southwestern state. Adolescents took online surveys either in their place of recruitment or at the university. Youth in dating relationships were told that, following the survey, they would be eligible to participate in a video- taped interaction task with a dating partner e defined broadly as someone with whom they currently held any type of romantic or sexual relationship. Given the study aims, this study includes only couples whereby both members identified as Mexican American ($N = 30$ of 34 dyads). Adolescents were told that their data were kept confidential, including discussion of the federally government-issued Certificate of Confidentiality obtained to protect all participants enrolled in the MATR

study. Identification numbers linked adolescents across study components. Written consent and assent for all study components was obtained from all adolescents and at least one parent or guardian. All materials were available in Spanish and English.

Adolescents were heterogeneous in generation status; almost half (48.3%; 29 individuals) had both parents born in Mexico (2nd generation); another fourth (26.7%; 16 individuals) were themselves born in Mexico (1st generation); and a fourth (25.0%; 15 individuals) were born in the United States and also had parents born in the United States (3rd generation). Youth ($n = 60$) represented 18 different high schools, each having higher crime risk index scores as compared with national averages (CLR Choice, 2012).

Survey

Demographics. Gender and age (15, 16, or 17) were assessed via a drop-down menu on the online survey. Couples' average age was 16.28 ($SD = .67$) years. See Table 1 for further descriptive information. We assessed pregnancy status by asking individuals if they have ever been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant, and assessed parenting by asking if they have children. For the present analysis, if one or both members of the couple reported either past or current pregnancy and/or that they were parenting one or more children, the couple was categorized into one pregnancy/parenting variable. Of the 30 dyads for this study, it was unreported whether three of couples were pregnant or parenting. Two of these couples were categorized as non-parenting, whereas a third couple was categorized as parenting given clear evidence from the video recording that they were raising a child together. In the final sample, one-third ($n ¼ 10$) of couples were pregnant/parenting.

Table 1
Individuals' and couples' descriptive information.

	Frequency
Age	
15	20.0%
16	33.3%
17	46.7%
Both same age	33.3%
Male older (1 year)	53.3%
Male older (2 years)	3.3%
Female older (1 year)	10.0%
Grade	
9	11.7%
10	18.3%
11	38.3%
12	31.7%
Immigration status	
First	26.7%
Second	48.3%
Third	25.0%
Both first generation	6.70%
Both second generation	26.70%
Both third generation	10.00%
Couple mismatch	56.70%
Mother's education level*	
Less than high school	48.1%
High school equivalent	35.2%
Greater than high school	16.7%
Both members of the couple— less than high school	18.5%
Both members of the couple — high school equivalent	11.1%
Both members of the couple — greater than school equivalent	3.7%
Couple mismatch	66.6%
Parental relationship*	
Mother and father at home	54.7%
Mother only at home	41.5%
Father only at home	3.8%
Both have mother and father at home	22.2%
Both have one parent at home	14.8%
Couple mismatch	63.0%

Note: $N = 30$ couples. First generation denotes that the adolescent was born in Mexico. Second generation denotes that the adolescent was born in the United States, but that one or both parent(s) were born in Mexico. *Missing data: Information was unavailable from both partners for three couples on mothers' education level ($N = 27$) and for three couples on parents in the home ($N = 27$).

Acculturation. The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans-Short Form (i.e., ARSMA-SF; Cuellar, Arnold, & Maldonado, 1995) was chosen for its attention to multiple indicators of acculturation as they relate to linguistic, media use, social life, and activity. Sample items include, "*I enjoy speaking Spanish*", "*I enjoy listening to English language music*", and "*My friends are of White origin*". Of note is that the term "*White*" was used instead of the original

term of "*Anglo*" given that MATR study participants reported semantic unfamiliarity with the latter term. This scale also evidences the additional benefit of allowing for high or low degrees of Mexican- or Anglo-orientation simultaneously, preferred to scales that force preference for one or the other (Nieri, Lee, Kulis, & Marsiglia, 2011). The ARSMA-SF, an adaptation from the 30-item measure, has demonstrated high levels of internal consistency, concurrent validity, and construct validity (Cuellar et al., 1995). In a validation study, each acculturation measure was compared within two samples of Mexican American children and adolescents by gender, with no differences detected (Bauman, 2005). Participants answered six Anglo-oriented items (AOS; a = .70) and six Mexican-oriented items (MOS; a = .90) using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *1* ("*Not at all*") to *5* ("*Very much or almost all the time*"). In this manner, adolescents could score high or low on either or both scales. To calculate couple-level discrepancy scores across each dimension (i.e., MOS; AOS), adolescent females' mean scores were subtracted from adolescent males'.

Physical violence. This study utilized the physical violence perpetration subscale of the Conflict in Adolescence Dating Inventory (CADRI; Wolfe et al., 2001). This measure was normed with high school aged youth (14-16 years old). It has demonstrated acceptable test-retest reliability, strong subscale alpha reliabilities, and acceptable partner agreement on perpetration of behaviors (Wolfe et al., 2001). It has been widely utilized with diverse adolescents. The physical violence subscale assesses whether an individual has enacted physical violence against a dating partner within the past year and includes the following four items: "I threw something at my partner"; "I kicked, hit or punched my partner"; "I slapped my partner or pulled my partner's hair"; and "I pushed, shoved, or shook my partner". Participants answered on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*never*), 2 (*seldom*; 1-2 times), 3 (*sometimes*; 3-5 times) to 4 (*often*; 6 or more times). Responses were coded at the dyadic level by whether either partner had perpetrated any form of physical violence. The majority of couples

reported either never or seldom having perpetrated violence within the past year, similar to recent findings with a larger sample of (primarily Latina) adolescents (Messinger et al., 2014). Three couples (10%) reported more severe physical violence: one couple included one partner who reported perpetrating physical violence three or more times in the past year, and for two couples both partners reported perpetrating violence three or more times in the past year. Given the small sample size and skewed distribution of physical violence, for this study responses were grouped into a dichotomous category of whether either partner had perpetrated any form of physical violence perpetration (i.e., answered seldom or higher, $N = 21$, 70.0%). This dichotomization aligns with other research that considers healthy relationships as ones that do not include any level of violence (e.g., Messinger et al., 2014). Thirty percent of couples never perpetrated violence; in 43.3% of couples, one partner perpetrated physical violence, and in 26.7% of couples both partners perpetrated physical violence. These rates are higher than averages obtained through a recent meta-analysis of over 101 studies of teen dating violence (Wincentak et al., 2016).

Observational tasks

The interaction task took place either in a private room where adolescents were recruited (e.g., Boys and Girls Club) or at the university in a quiet and secluded office space. The researchers explained the confidential nature of the video recordings and adolescents gave their assent to participate. Couples were instructed to sit in two chairs next to one another, at an angle that allowed for the video camera to capture their faces and body language. As a warm-up task, couples were given 5 min to collaborate in choosing their "top five movies of all time" and were instructed to write them on a shared piece of paper. Before leaving the room, the researcher asked each partner to privately choose two items from a list of common relationship issues (i.e., the *Conflict Issues Checklist*; Capaldi,

Wilson, & Collier, 1994; also in Spanish), and to star their first choice. Following the warm-up task, the researcher allowed each couple a total of 14 min to discuss each partner's chosen issues. A partner's second issue was discussed when the same issue was starred by both members of the dyad. The researcher left the room following the instructions, returning only at 7 min to instruct the couple to switch to the other partner's issue. The interaction task ended with a 7 min discussion of each partner's goals (i.e., 14 min total). After the interaction tasks, each adolescent was given a handout containing information on healthy dating relationships. As an incentive for their participation, each participant was given $15 for the online survey and $15 for the video-taped interaction task.

      Negativity and conflict. Video-taped dyadic interactions were coded using the *System for Coding Interactions in Dyads* (SCID; Malik & Lindahl, 2000). The SCID includes 14 subscales, each assessing different communication processes essential to couple functioning including individual negative (e.g., verbal aggression, coerciveness, negativity) and positive (e.g., problem-solving, support, positive affect) behaviors and overall patterns at the dyadic level (e.g., conflict management style, balance of power). The SCID was designed from theoretical and marital communication literature as an overall assessment of couple functioning. It is reliable across European-American, Hispanic-American, and African-American adult couples, and has been used with a diverse range of populations and sample demographics (e.g., distressed, satisfied; Malik & Lindahl, 2000). It has also been employed to code adolescent dating couples' discussions of conflict-laden issues (Darling, Cohan, Burns, & Thompson, 2008).

      Researchers were trained on using the SCID and coded independently only after demonstrating high inter-rater reliability with another trained coder on the same videos (an *r* of at least .8 on each subscale). Coders were multi-ethnic and all were blind to the research questions and hypotheses. Native Spanish-speaking bilingual research assistants coded videos that included Spanish dialogue. Videos were

coded at 30-s intervals, and ratings were aggregated (i.e., across time discussing each partner's issue and across gender) for the present analysis given our interest in couple-level communication outcomes.

This study employed the use of aggregated ratings from the *Negativity and Conflict* SCID subscale. This scale measures the extent to which an individual manifests frustration, anger, tension, or irritation in a verbal (e.g., through dialogue, tone of voice, or speaking through teeth) or non-verbal manner (e.g., glaring or cold facial expression, tapping of hands or fingers, rigid posture). Ratings were coded for each partner on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*very low*) to 5 (*high*). Across both partners' issues, couple level grand means were created. Higher degrees of negativity and conflict reflected communication behaviors that were moderate to high in intensity and that clearly evidenced anger or defensiveness towards a dating partner. Couples were low in overall observed negativity and conflict (*M* = 1.31, *SD* = .42), although their means ranged from 1 ("very low") to 2.71 ("moderate"). See Table 2 for individual- and couple-level descriptives and discrepancies in negativity and conflict, AOS, and MOS.

Results

All analyses were conducted at the dyadic level. Dyads were, on average, moderately oriented to Mexican cultural norms (*M* = 2.99, *SD* = .86; i.e., they tended to answer that they "moderately" enjoyed Spanish language and social activities). They were, on average, more oriented to Anglo cultural norms (*M* = 3.95, *SD* = .52; i.e., they tended to answer that they enjoyed English language and social activities "a lot or very much"). Couple-level differences in Mexican orientation were small with girls (*M* = 3.20, *SD* = 1.15) tending to be more Mexican-oriented than their male (*M* = 2.78, *SD* = 1.02) partners (*M* difference = -.42, *SD* = 1.31, *t*(29) = 1.77, *p* = .09). Similarly, girls (*M* = 4.10, *SD* = .57) were more Anglo-oriented than their male (*M* = 3.30, *SD* = .82) partners but differences were small (*M* difference = -.30, *SD* = .96, *t*(29)

Table 2
Couple-level descriptive statistics for MOS, AOS, and negativity and conflict.

	Range	Min	Max	M	SD
MOS					
Individual-level	4.00	1.00	5.00	2.99	1.10
Couple-level discrepancy	5.17	−3.67	1.50	−.42	1.31
AOS					
Individual-level	3.67	1.33	5.00	3.95	.71
Couple-level discrepancy	4.17	−2.67	1.50	−.30	.96
Negativity and conflict					
Individual-level	1.81	1.00	2.81	1.31	.45
Couple-level mean	1.71	1.00	2.71	1.31	.42

Note. N = 30 dyads. Negativity and Conflict was computed at the couple-level, represented as the grand mean of individually rated scores for adolescent males and females within couples and across partners' issues. Discrepancy scores were created by subtracting females' scores from males'.

Bivariate and point biserial correlations were conducted on all independent and dependent variables (see Table 3). The results indicated that within-couple Mexican orientation discrepancy was not significantly associated with observed negativity or physical violence. The remaining variables were then estimated in a path model, controlling for average level acculturation. Mplus with maximum likelihood estimation with robust standard errors was used as well as the model indirect command to test for significant indirect effects. A path model is used when all of the variables in the set of equations are observed. Three tests of model fit were used to evaluate statistical significance: the comparative fix index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). CFI and TLI model estimates greater than .90 indicate a good fit (Bentler, 1990; Bentler & Bonnett, 1980), estimates greater than .96 indicate a very good fit (Yu, 2002). RMSEA model estimates less than .05 indicate a good fit (Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Yu, 2002). The path model fit indices met these criteria: RMSEA = .000, CFI = 1.000, and TLI = 1.000. The model accounted for 26.3% of the variance in physical violence, p = .006, and 33.6% of the variance in negative conflict style, p = .009 (see Fig. 1).

Pregnant/parenting was associated with greater negativity (b = .42, B = .37, SE = .16, p = .002) but there was no direct effect on physical violence perpetration (b = .17, B = .16, SE = .18, p = .38). That is, compared to non-

parenting couples, adolescent parents experienced greater negative conflict styles. Couples with greater Anglo-orientation discrepancies had higher observed negativity scores (b = .36, *B* = .16, *SE* = .06, *p* = .01), but not significantly greater physical violence perpetration (b = .02, *B* = .01, *SE* = .07, *p* = .89). That is, compared to similarly matched couples on Anglo acculturation, greater acculturation mismatch was associated with higher observed negativity. Observed couple negativity was significantly associated with self-reported physical violence perpetration (b = .37, *B* = .41, *SE* = .22, *p* = .02). Estimation of the indirect and total effects (indirect þ direct effects) were significant: indirect effect (b = .16, B = .15, SE = .07, *p* = .03) and total effect (b = .32, B = .31, SE = .15, *p* = .04). That is, the association between pregnancy/parenting and physical violence was explained through observed negative conflict styles.

Table 3
Bivariate and point biserial correlations of independent and dependent variables.

	a	b	c	d
a. Pregnant/Parenting				
b. Mexican orientation discrepancy	−.19			
c. Anglo orientation discrepancy	.20	−.15		
d. Negativity communication style	.47**	−.06	.39*	
e. Physical violence	.31*	−.19	.11	.45*

Note. **p < .01; *p < .05.
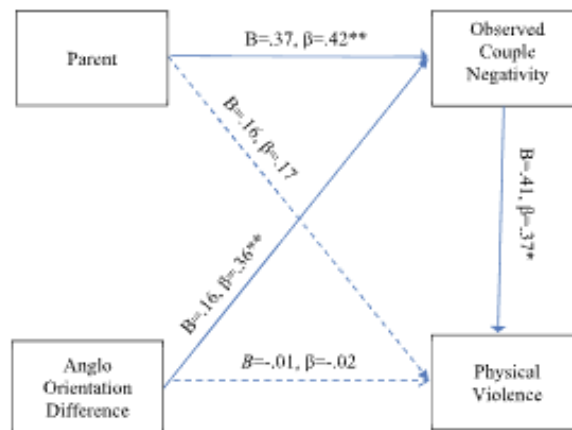
Note. **p<.01; *p<.05. RMSEA = .000, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.000, R² physical violence =.263,
p=.006, R² negative conflict style = .336, p=.009. Statistically significant indirect (β=.16, B=.15,
SE=.07, p=.03) and total effects (β=.32, B=.31, SE=.15, p=.04).

Fig. 1. Path model of parenting and acculturation difference on observed couple negativity and physical violence.

Discussion

Observational methods, coupled with self-report methods, offered a unique opportunity through which to directly assess the roles of acculturation discrepancy and pregnancy or parenting as risk factors for heightened negativity in adolescent couples' communication of conflict issues and physical violence perpetration in their relationships. Although studies with Latino heterosexual adults have suggested that acculturation differences may be problematic, this assertion had not been assessed with adolescent dating couples. We found that couples' discrepancy in Anglo-orientation was associated with observed negativity and conflict, which was associated with a greater likelihood of physical violence perpetration by one or both partners. Similarly, couples that were pregnant or parenting evidenced heightened negativity in their discussions with one another, which was associated with a greater likelihood of physical violence perpetration. There were no direct effects on self-reported physical violence perpetration once observed negativity was taken into account. Differences evidenced by this preliminary exploration highlight the need for further study of adolescents' coupling experiences, and suggest acculturation discrepancy and pregnancy/parenting experiences as risk factors for teen dating violence among Mexican American youth.

Although studies with adults have suggested the importance of studying conflict and even violence within the context of mismatched acculturation level (Miranda et al., 2006; Montoya, 1996; Perilla et al., 1994; Sanderson et al., 2004; Ulloa et al., 2008), observational studies of adolescents have generally found relationships marked by degrees of positivity, harmony, and conflict minimization (Welsh & Shulman, 2008). Although the MA couples in our sample similarly evidenced a low average mean of observed negativity and conflict, research with MA youth suggests that the low levels of negativity captured by an observational task may point to the start of an escalation that can occur in a natural environment among couples that utilize physical violence (Adams & Williams, 2014). Mirroring

vignettes of situational couple violence among adults (Stith et al., 2011), Adams and Williams (2014) found that highly acculturated and bicultural MA youth (similar to those in the present sample) had difficulty avoiding violence in the midst of escalating anger at a partner within specific situational contexts (e.g., "*It's like instead of controlling yourself*, *your anger controls you*." p. 303). Other research suggests that quantitative coding schemes developed from studies of (primarily Caucasian) adults may not capture developmental and cultural nuances reflective of maladaptive conflict resolution strategies (Rueda & Williams, 2016). Given emerging research on the distinct nature of adolescents' conflict negotiation (e.g., Giordano et al., 2015; Welsh & Shulman, 2008), measurement of observed negativity and conflict may also be made more valid via the inclusion of sarcasm and certain forms of joking, and in the context of conflict issues and stressors.

Findings from this study suggest that couples may experience increased difficulty in negotiating problem areas in their relationships as they acculturate to U.S. dating norms dissimilarly and that pregnancy/parenting increases their risk for dating violence. This work is informed by theories of acculturative stress (Romero & Roberts, 2003) and stress adaptation (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). Mexican American youth in border states face unique acculturative challenges in forging their identities amidst distinct and often divergent norms for relationships (Matsunaga, Hecht, Elek, & Ndiaye, 2010; Milbrath, Ohlson, & Eyre, 2009). For example, Mexican norms that value child-bearing and family relations are challenged amidst U.S. peer and media messages that popularize less committed forms of sexual relationships (Williams & Adams, 2013). How- ever, cultural proscriptions continue to be important among MA youth and remain influential over time (Milbrath et al., 2009; Updegraff et al., 2012). For example, *familismo* may be demonstrated in part by a lessened tendency for MA females to terminate their unplanned pregnancies (Ryan, Franzetta, & Manlove, 2005). Important to the present study, acculturation processes do not necessarily shift in similar manners;

while *familismo* remains influential, gender views are more fluid, especially for females who may perceive more to gain through U.S. gender ideals (Updegraff et al., 2012). In the context of our findings, girls scored higher on subscales of both Mexican- and Anglo-orientation than did boys, indicating greater overall biculturalism. In part, this may indicate higher sociability (i.e., having and spending time with both White and Mexican friends), perhaps further exasperating stress as Latino boys have fewer restrictions put on them by parents than do girls (Raffaelli, 2005). The content of the conflict conversations themselves point to how pregnancy and parenting may add further acute challenges amidst this dynamic ("*My time is like staying at home being nauseous or sleepy…that's why I don't think it's fair. Cuz your time you can still go out with your friends.*"). Greater Anglo-orientation (experienced by couples in this study) is associated with increased peer delinquency and substance use (Kulis, Marsiglia, & Nagoshi, 2012; Tyrell, Wheeler, Gonzales, Dumka, & Millsap, 2014), which may also contribute to increased couple conflict, particularly for pregnant/parenting couples in which one-sided (i.e., male) substance use and partying may add another source of tension and stress.

Together, our findings lend support to the role of cumulative stress as putting youth at risk for teen dating violence. Specifically, it may be that culturally-influenced norms, expectations, and ways of relating are experienced differently by each partner among MA couples, particularly as a facet of individual acculturative processes (Romero & Roberts, 2003); together with individual vulnerabilities (e.g., trait characteristics), couples' adaptive processes are out-resourced by the acute stressor of pregnancy/parenting (Karney & Bradbury, 1995). This lends support to the utilization of explanatory models of physical violence perpetration that take into account the interrelationships among a number of potential risk and protective factors to include skills repertoires (e.g., communication/conflict resolution skills) and the presence of current relationship stressors (Bell & Naugle, 2008). Similarly, in their application of the vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (Karney & Bradbury,1995), Stith et

al. (2011) found that adult partners brought individual vulnerabilities (e.g., anger prone) into the relationship, which intersected with acute and chronic stressors to create situations where "adaptations that supported conflict, appeared to be essential in the escalation toward violence" (p. 86). Of note, the most salient acute stressor among couples in their study was the transition to parenting roles (Stith et al., 2011). This study extends our understanding to include the potential importance of mismatched acculturation and adolescent pregnancy/parenting as stressors that should be assessed as they contribute to dating violence among MA adolescent couples. Further, this and other research (e.g., Giordano et al., 2015) suggest a closer examination concerning the role of communication as critical to our understanding of TDV.

Conflict negotiation skills may be particularly important for young adolescent parents, who are learning to navigate their first romantic relationships while also transitioning to parenthood. Although it is important for future research to separate the unique influence of pregnancy versus parenting as the acculturating couple navigates each process sequentially, research points to the importance of also assessing the continuity of violence across prenatal and co-parenting stages, whereby enhancing relationship quality is an important practice consideration in supporting young couples (Kan et al., 2012; Petch et al., 2012). Recently, the United States has witnessed a rapid interest in couple relationship education (CRE) and meta- analyses have found that such interventions may benefit new parents and children, although few studies have included Mexican origin couples (see Cowan & Cowan, 2014). Pertinent to the present study, Petch et al. (2012) utilized a randomized control trial to assess the efficacy of a coparenting versus mother-focused intervention on high- versus low-risk new parenting couples, whereby risk was determined in part by having experienced violence in the relationship. The study found that a couples intervention was associated with improved communication and reduced parenting stress for both

males and females, and less intrusive parenting for high-risk females (Petch et al., 2012).

Clearly, the presence of partner violence denotes a central indication that the couple is adapting poorly to the relationship demands of pregnancy and parenting (Petch et al., 2012); conducting a risk assessment is critical in order to understand the extent, type(s), and severity of violence, as well as to determine the appropriateness of couples' level intervention work. This work and others' (Harrykissoon et al., 2002; Newman & Campbell, 2011; Toews, Yazedjian, & Jorgensen, 2011) lends support to consideration of preventative interventions for pregnant and parenting MA youth with the inclusion of a communication skills component in order to support young couples in their transition to parenthood. This timing may be critical, particularly as youth are motivated to learn about such skills (Wolfe & Feiring, 2000) and as adolescent Hispanic mothers report such programs as effective in helping them to better handle conflict with their romantic partners (Toews et al., 2010). Programs should include attention to specific contested domains as likely to be issues of jealousy and cheating (Adams & Williams, 2014; Giordano et al., 2015), developmental challenges which may pose particularly injurious effects for young parenting couples. Within specific topic areas that are important to the adolescent, attempts to control a partner's behaviors or attitudes are not uncommon (Giordano et al., 2015); however, apart from situational couple violence, patterned, coercive, and mutually high controlling partnerships are also experienced by some youth (Messinger et al., 2014). Of important note, we drew from research with MA youth (Adams & Williams, 2014) finding that highly acculturated and bicultural youth's descriptions of violence mirror those of situationally violent couples and other research finding that this is the most common type of violence during this developmental time period (Messinger et al., 2014). While we feel that providing universal TDV preventative interventions inclusive of communication skill sets would benefit most youth, it should

not be understated that safety planning be the priority and more tailored interventions utilized for adolescents experiencing more patterned and coercive types of violence.

Limitations

This study has a number of important limitations. First, future research should assess pregnancy and parenting separately, which may be considered a weakness of this study. Others have, however, found high rates of physical violence among pregnant and parenting Latina adolescents and that rates did not vary significantly dependent on whether youth were pregnant (Newman & Campbell, 2011). We did not consider length of commitment in our analyses; thus, the extent to which commitment level may have affected adolescents' experiences with conflict and negotiation is unknown aside from parenting and pregnancy status. It may be that couples together for longer periods of time may have navigated conflict differently than others who had just begun dating or that were involved in a relationship that was primarily sexual in nature (e.g., a friends with benefits relationships).

Future research should gather larger samples and utilize longitudinal designs to understand how conflict negotiation is associated with relationship outcomes. In a similar vein, the nature of the conflict (e.g., what to do with their time versus how to parent), and the extent to which more mature forms of conflict negotiation are demanded of them are also important variables for consideration. For example, while many adolescent couples are less likely to face pressing demands (e.g., financial concerns, how to co-parent) and thus have more flexibility to leave the relationship if conflict becomes burdensome, MA couples that are pregnant or parenting face unique developmental and relational demands. Further, this research is not necessarily generalizable to other Latino youth's coupling experiences as the small sample was recruited from a specific urban geographic location of the Southwest.

Other unmeasured influences undoubtedly also affected couples' experiences with dating conflict; for example, dissimilarly changing gender role expectations lie at the heart of theoretical postulations concerning acculturation and couple stress (Sanderson et al., 2004; Updegraff et al., 2012). Future studies should examine the role of traditional versus egalitarian beliefs about gender from individuals within the couple, and including attention to partner, actor, and interaction effects concerning risk for partner stress and violence. Further, in Updegraff et al.' (2012) study, adolescent boys' (but not adolescent girls') endorsement of more traditional gender attitudes was associated with lower educational aspirations over time. It may be that differing long-term plans are a source of conflict for dating couples as well, an additional direction for future research particularly among adolescent couples that are pregnant and/or parenting.

Conclusions

Relationship experiences may be particularly significant for acculturating MA adolescents. Intimate partnerships help such youth to successfully develop their personal and ethnic identities (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997), yet take place in the context of acculturative demands that remain understudied in the context of romantic relationships. This study is preliminary and the results should be considered in light of research finding that retention of ethnic norms is protective against numerous maladaptive health outcomes (e.g., drug and alcohol use, sexual risk taking) including affiliation with other Spanish-speaking individuals, participation in Latino cultural practices, and having been born in Mexico (see Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010). Educational programs or agencies working with pregnant and parenting adolescents are well-positioned to address topics such as teen dating violence and individual vs. collective acculturative experiences. Although communication skills and violence are starting to be addressed

within such populations locally (e.g., Teen Outreach Pregnancy Services), acculturation has been discussed less often. This study suggests that acquiring U.S. cultural proscriptions for dating behavior may be particularly problematic where there are mismatches in acculturation within the relationship. Such mismatches likely create additional stress on the couple e stress that is com- pounded by pregnancy and parenting decisions that necessitate cooperation and long-term negotiation. Cumulative stress increases adolescent risk for violence victimization (Chen & Foshee, 2015), and requires that the adolescent receive additional personal and relational support.

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