

## Commands, Competence, and Cariño : Maternal Socialization Practices in Mexican American Families

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### **Abstract:**

Early research on the socialization of Latino children has posited that mothers exercise authoritarian practices, compared with lateral reasoning (authoritative) strategies emphasized by Anglo mothers. This work aimed to categorize fixed types of parenting practices tied to the mother's personality rather than to culturally bounded contexts; it often ignored the emotional warmth or harshness present in compliance attempts and relied on interview questions rather than naturalistic observation. We built from ecocultural theory to observe daily home activities in which Mexican American mothers attempted to correct their young child's behavior or encourage completion of a task (compliance attempt). We observed 24 first or second-generation mothers and their 4-year-old children and analyzed the activity contexts and multiple forms of 1,477 compliance attempts. Mothers typically led with direct verbal commands in their attempt to achieve compliance. Many blended commands with other compliance strategies, rather than repeating simple behaviors. Drawing on Crockenberg and Litman's (1990) differentiation of variable compliance strategies, we find that most mothers relied on low power-assertive methods, including verbal commands, rather than inductive strategies that involved reasoning. Few compliance episodes prompted high power-assertive or harsh strategies. The degree of reliance on verbal commands and the complexity of mothers' repertoires appear to be related to their education and acculturation levels.

**Keywords:** Latino child development, maternal socialization practices, immigrant families

### **Article:**

The past generation of research by cultural psychologists has described how many Latino parents seek compliance from young children within a framework of cultural values that places paramount importance on familism (*familismo*) and respect for and obligation to adult authority (*respeto*; García Coll & Pachter, 2002; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006; Harwood, Miller, & Irizarry, 1995). While parents' focus on compliance within these cultural logics has been documented, few studies have examined the discrete strategies that Mexican American mothers use to achieve such compliance, especially among young children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995). Instead, developmentalists and social scientists often infer that Latino parents engage in authoritarian parenting by relying on maternal interview questions based on hypothetical discipline episodes, rather than observing parenting practices over time.

This article builds from earlier work by examining the range of compliance or limit-setting strategies that Mexican American mothers deploy with their 4-year-old children within their cultural contexts. We depart from previous work that categorizes Latino parenting into Baumrind's (1989) theorized archetypes of authoritarian, authoritative, or permissive parenting and sees fixed practices as stemming from the parent's own personality.

Instead, our analysis draws on ecocultural theory, defining mothers' compliance practices as guiding how the child becomes a socially competent participant in the family (Harkness & Super, 1996; Li & Wang, 2004; Weisner, 2005). We detail prevalent forms of compliance strategies deployed by these mothers, as well as mixes of differing strategies. We investigate whether the mother's generation of residence, education level, and acculturation is related to her reliance on certain compliance strategies or a wider mix of practices.

### **Learning Social Competence in Cultural Context**

Cultural psychologists emphasize that socialization practices enable young children to become competent participants within the family, situated within bounded cultural expectations and norms, whether this ecocultural context is delimited by the family's ethnic and linguistic heritage or social-class position (e.g., García Coll & Pachter, 2002; LeVine, 1998; Shweder et al., 1998). While certain social–developmental processes may similarly unfold across populations (Maccoby, 1980), such ethnotheories of socialization are not necessarily fixed among subgroups, neighborhood contexts, or time as mothers acculturate to novel practices. The child's ecology (or developmental niche; Dasen, 2003; Harkness, 2002) may change markedly when parents emigrate to a new setting or adapt socialization practices to novel economic demands or norms pressed by surrounding institutions (Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1995; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008).

### **Placing Authoritarian Socialization in Cultural Context**

The ecocultural framework departs sharply from the earlier postulate that socialization practices stem from the parent's own personality attributes, which manifest authoritarian, authoritative, or permissive preferences for achieving social control (Baumrind, 1989).<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that Baumrind (1989) focused on the contextual warmth or harshness with which parents press for child compliance (i.e., being demanding and responsive; see also Barber, 2002). But it is the authoritarian category that has come to shape how developmentalists and social scientists interpret Latino socialization practices. This earlier work described such practices as strict and controlling, embedded in hierarchical social relations, and discouraging of the child's own cognitive problem-solving (Durrett, O'Bryant, & Pennebaker, 1975; Hill, Bush, & Roosa, 2003). One major study found that Latino students, on average, reported unilateral decision-making by their parents and strict parenting, and the intensity of such authoritarian practices was negatively related to school outcomes (Glasgow, Dornbusch, Troyer, Steinberg, & Ritter, 1997; Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992).

Other scholars have inferred that Latino parents emphasize goals and practices associated with the archetypal authoritarian pattern, where authoritative or permissive classifications are the exclusive options (Arcia & Johnson, 1998; Knight, Virdin, & Roosa, 1994; Parke et al., 2004). The specific maternal practices cited as exemplars of authoritarian parenting include a wide range of direct discipline and compliance strategies, from verbal commands and scolding to harsh threats and physical punishment, often pegged to hypothetical discipline situations. Additional studies have found that parents in low-income Latino subgroups are more likely to mete out physical punishment than middle-class Anglo parents (Calzada & Eyberg, 2002), although incidence rates remain unknown and verbal directives are conflated with harsh punishment—a limitation of Baumrind's (2005) scheme, built from a modest sample of Anglo parents raising their children in Berkeley, California. Categorizing Latino parents also proves challenging under the Baumrind, Larzelere, and Owens (2009) scheme, as they combine “retaining hierarchical family relationships” with the “domineering” and “arbitrary” exercise of authority (p. 4). Appendix A summarizes the prior literature on Latino socialization (see also Halgunseth et al., 2006).

This work suffers from both theoretical weaknesses and limited measurement approaches. First, the assumption that socialization practices operate as fixed scripts over context and time, rooted in the individual's personality type, runs counter to the recent advances in cultural psychology that detail how parents' cultural heritage, language, and acculturation help to account for variation in socialization practices. Parents' compliance strategies, when framed by ecocultural theory, inform young children of the legitimate ways to participate in daily activities within a broader cultural logic. Or, as Barber, Maughan, and Olsen (2005) emphasized, socialization practices involve “parental behaviors that are intended to regulate children's behaviors in accord with prevailing family or social norms” (p. 7). Psychologists have detailed prevailing norms within Latino households, which stress the paramount importance of the family (*familismo*), learning proper comportment (*bien educado*), and respect for

adults (*respeto*; Harwood et al., 1995; Valdés, 1996), rather than the child's autonomous development or concerted cultivation (Landale, Oropesa, & Bradatan, 2006; Lareau, 2003).

Second, most early studies relied on interview or survey measures that assumed unidimensional discipline or compliance practices that were fixed and easily placed into a single archetype, independent of the child's daily activities or culturally bounded context. Two elements of social context remain absent from this fixed-trait conception of socialization: the activities in which compliance strategies are deployed and the parent's emotional tone or support in which strategies are couched (Barber, 2002). Research in Chinese American families, for example, has revealed mothers who are quite directive, exercising close supervision and strict discipline of young children. Yet harshness or negative affect is infrequently observed; child outcomes remain positive, despite compliance strategies that Baumrind's (2005) scheme would categorize as authoritarian (Chao, 1994; Li & Wang, 2004). Stronger physical guidance has been observed among Mexican and Puerto Rican mothers during feeding, play, and instructive episodes, yet these interactions are simultaneously often characterized by warmth and support (*cariño*), not harshness (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Ispa et al., 2004).<sup>2</sup>

Third, few studies have advanced Laosa's (1980) early focus on how socialization practices vary among Latino subgroups. Parents situated in differing linguistic or social-class communities likely adapt their socialization practices to prevailing norms and the social behaviors that display competence in local settings, according to ecocultural theory. This holds direct implications for identifying the social pathways along which acculturation pressures the family and how immigrant parents adapt to novel models for socializing children. Laosa emphasized the role of maternal education; other attributes and community-level factors (linguistic norms or institutions, like churches or preschools) may shape socialization practices as well (Harwood, Schölmerich, Ventura-Cook, Schultze, & Wilson, 1996; Holloway & Fuller, 1997).

Fourth, the earlier conception of authoritarian parenting fit well the “culture of poverty” conception of home practices in poor families, postulating that material conditions determined the discipline and control strategies employed by parents (Lewis, 1966). Under some conditions, material poverty is linked to maternal depression and harsh parenting practices (McLoyd, 1990). But Sheinberg (2003) showed how Latina mothers often act to protect their young children from surrounding exigencies and those raised by stricter mothers (couched in warm and responsive relations) display stronger outcomes, compared with children of less attentive mothers.

### **Analytic Approach: Socialization Strategies of Mexican Mothers**

Our analytic approach moves beyond this earlier work by building from ecocultural theory, yielding three direct implications for how we study the compliance practices of Mexican American mothers. We posit that the mother's attempt to achieve compliance from a misbehaving child or one who is failing to complete a task (the core construct, *compliance attempt*, detailed below) must be understood within the context of daily activities in which the mother and child interact. To ask mothers about hypothetical episodes of discipline holds limited external validity. Instead, we observed Mexican American mothers and their 4-year-old children during a 14-month period inside their homes, situating the mother's compliance attempts in the context of daily activities that require children's participation. We recorded the count and character of multiple compliance strategies when employed by mothers and disentangled steady oversight and direct compliance attempts from harsh and affectively negative forms of parenting (i.e., demandingness vs. warmth, responsiveness [*cariño*]).

Our design differentiated various types of compliance strategies and combinations of strategies during a single episode, situating the mother and child in a discrete activity and attentive to the complexity of maternal behavior. This design draws on Crockenberg and Litman's (1990) classification scheme and Barber's (2002) theoretical distinction between limit-setting with harsh vis-à-vis warm and supportive affective in context.

Finally, we question whether maternal compliance strategies are constant attributes of individuals or conditioned by the mother's ecocultural location, defined by home language, generation, and education level—indicators of her acculturation or adaptation to novel strategies (Super & Harkness, 1997; Weisner, 1984, 2005). While the psychological and social mechanisms and child effects of acculturation have become a vibrant topic, little

developmental research has focused on how immigrant Latino parents may adapt to novel socialization practices. We do not assume that compliance strategies are fixed personality traits or essentialized cultural attributes; instead, we assume that they may vary depending on the mother's adaptations to constraints and opportunities within the child's ecocultural context (Harkness, 2002).

## **Method**

### *Procedure*

Twenty-four families of Mexican heritage, who were either first- or second-generation U.S. residents and had a resident 4-year-old child, were recruited for the study. The overall project focuses on how mothers' socialization strategies and teaching behaviors in the home affect children's competencies prior to entering kindergarten. Candidate families, living in Arizona or California, were contacted with the help of staff at churches, family support groups, and community organizations. Each mother received a modest gift if she agreed to 12 home visits spread over a 14-month period, with each visit lasting between 2 and 4 hr.

Bilingual field workers were assigned to follow the same families over the 14-month period to establish trust and ensure thorough knowledge of the family context. Spanish-speaking or bilingual families were assigned a bilingual first- or second-generation Latina field worker. Three English-speaking, second-generation families were assigned Anglo field workers (one man and one woman). During the visits, mothers were asked to follow their daily activities with their child. Observations most often occurred in the home, but at times the mother would take the child on a shopping trip, to the park, or to a child care setting, accompanied by the field worker. Mothers and children were very receptive to the field staff as they became integrated in the family's typical activities. Three structured interviews were conducted, in part to obtain basic demographic information on the mother and her household.

Data for the present analysis were recorded by field staff, including each episode in which the mother attempted to alter the focal child's behavior in response to action that was deemed unacceptable or when the child was urged to complete a task. We recorded the activity in which the child was engaged whether a compliance attempt was exercised by the mother or not (the actors in the setting, doing what, and with what materials). We also recorded two or three activity snapshots, selected at constant times during each home visit, detailing the context and nature of the activity. This corroborated the field notes with regard to the child's activities as the settings in which misbehavior and maternal compliance strategies commonly surfaced.

### *Sample*

Each participating mother was the primary caregiver for her 4-year-old; a few mothers worked part time for wages. The mean age of mothers equaled 31 years at entry to the study. Seventeen of the 24 participants had immigrated to the United States during childhood or early adolescence (first generation); seven were born in the United States of immigrant parents (second generation). Ten of the families resided in Arizona, and 14 lived in the San Francisco Bay Area in California. The mean age of focal children equaled 4.3 years at entry. Table 1 displays additional demographic characteristics. First-generation mothers were less likely to have completed high school, to speak English in the home, or to have enrolled their child in preschool. On the other hand, first- and second-generation mothers were about as likely to live in families in which household income ranged under \$30,000 annually.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of 24 Participating Mothers and Focal Children*

Characteristic	First-generation mothers ( <i>n</i> = 17)	Second-generation mothers ( <i>n</i> = 7)
Mother's geographical location		
Arizona ( <i>n</i> = 10)	9	1
Bay Area ( <i>n</i> = 14)	8	6
Mother's school attainment		
Some high school or less (%)	59	0
High school diploma or more (%)	41	100
Mothers whose dominant home language is Spanish (%)	94	0
Family income less than \$30,000/year (%)	59	57
Average number of children per household	2.94	2
Children attending a preschool center (%)	59	100
Female children (%)	47	57

*Data Collection and Coding Procedures*

Field staff were trained to take detailed notes regarding the child's activities, the talk between children and adults, and instances where the mother attempted to achieve compliance when the focal child behaved inappropriately or failed to complete an assigned task. Research staff met after each home visit to read through and refine each set of field notes, clarifying the microcontext and character of interactions between mother and child and descriptions of the child's most common activities. Before coding the field materials, three staff members reread all field notes to identify each compliance attempt by each mother and to discuss the emic meanings of these socialization practices. All coding was conducted by a subset of the research team that was blind to specific study hypotheses and excluded the coprincipal investigators. For example, one mother scolded her child by saying, “*es mala educación interrumpir a los adultos*” [it's bad comportment to interrupt adults]. The term *educación* holds particular cultural meaning (a proper way of carrying oneself and being respectful of others) and was thus coded with the meaning held by the mother.

First-level codes were attached to the field notes with a qualitative software program (NVivo, Version 2), identifying the activity context, utterances or behavior by the mother, and the focal child's behavioral involvement. Second-level codes were then identified, including maternal behaviors focusing on the child's behavior or emotional well-being. The subset that was tied to compliance attempts included 21 different types of strategies employed by mothers, including verbal commands, reasoning, modeling proper behaviors, even tricking the child in some cases (*engañar* [tricking]; e.g., secretly unplugging the television). Note that field notes captured sequences of compliance *strategies* (attempts) exhibited by a mother for a complete compliance *episode* (when compliance was not immediately achieved). This allowed us to study the multidimensional nature of compliance strategies deployed. Coding definitions for all 21 compliance strategies appear in Appendix B.

The coding team met several times to discuss and sharpen the constructs represented as first- and second-level codes in consultation with the full research team, with a goal of 70% agreement between the (rotating) master coder and each colleague (Fleiss & Cohen, 1973). Mean kappa statistics for first-level codes equaled 0.83 for context, 0.91 for activities in which the child was engaged, 0.77 for maternal behaviors, and 0.73 for child responses. Kappa statistics for second-level coding exceeded the 0.70 criterion.

We then identified the subset of maternal behaviors that represented compliance attempts targeted at the focal child. This equaled 1,477 specific attempts (strategies) or utterances by the mother, prompted by her desire to alter the child's misbehavior or complete a requested task. Mothers achieved immediate compliance in 73% of the episodes. If not, we coded whether the mother simply permitted or ignored the misbehavior, repeated the initial strategy, or shifted to another compliance strategy.

*Data Analysis*

We first examined the activity sets in which focal children misbehaved or failed to complete an assigned task, most often prompting a compliance attempt by the mother. Each compliance attempt was sorted into one of the

21 compliance behaviors (Appendix B). We then reduced the 21 types of compliance strategies into the three categories defined by Crockenberg and Litman's (1990) framework for defining socialization practices (see also Hart, DeWolf, Wozniak, & Burts, 1992; Kochanska & Aksan, 1995), allowing us to get beyond authoritarian versus authoritative archetypes. This includes *low power-assertion* via direct verbal commands, gestures or nonverbal commands, and redirecting or distracting the child from the misbehavior. *High power-assertion* includes physically maneuvering the child, physical punishment, threatening, or shaming the child. The first two categories (high or low power-assertion) were often conflated in prior work on Latino socialization practices, grouped under authoritarian. *Inductive* strategies include reasoning, explaining consequences, negotiating, and clarifying normative expectations. <sup>3</sup> Culturally specific practices, not anticipated by Crockenberg and Litman, were coded and analyzed separately.

Next, we analyzed all instances where mothers followed up with additional strategies to achieve child compliance, labeling the sequence of maternal behavior a *compliance episode* (flowing from 14% of all initial compliance attempts). The sequence of multiple strategies deployed during the full compliance episode was analyzed to examine multiple types of strategies deployed by the mother: low power-assertion, inductive, high power-assertion, and/or culturally specific strategy. Mothers who used similar strategies during the full compliance episode were grouped together. Thus, we grouped together (a) mothers who used low power-assertion and inductive practices; (b) mothers who used low power-assertion, inductive, and high power-assertion practices; and (c) mothers who used low power-assertion, inductive, high power-assertion, and culturally specific practices during their compliance episodes. Within each group we determined whether the same strategy was relied upon throughout the full episode in which the mother attempted to achieve compliance (50% or more of all compliance attempts in the episode), versus mothers who used a wide mix of strategies. <sup>4</sup>

Finally, we report qualitative data that illustrate the major types of compliance strategies employed by mothers, along with complexity of compliance episodes when children were slow to comply. We also detail how mothers' compliance strategies are embedded within children's everyday home activities, often overseen by mothers who exhibit warm and supportive behavior while interacting with their young children.

## Results

### *Children's Activities in the Home*

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the 1,228 discrete activity segments in which focal children were engaged, observed by field staff and aggregated across all homes and visits. Children engaged in six commonly seen activities: playing, preparing or eating food, watching television, helping with chores and routines that contribute to the household, engaging in learning activities (e.g., reading with the mother, engaged with a workbook or puzzle, exploring computer programs), and engaging other materials or media (playing with electronic toys and computer games, attending to the radio or to arts and crafts tasks). <sup>5</sup>

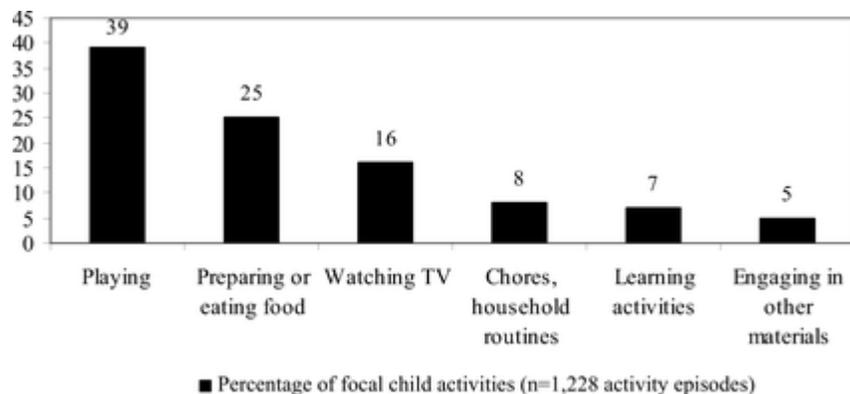


Figure 1. Distribution of focal children's activities in the home.

Playing and eating often dominated the afternoon or early evening, when most of our observations were conducted. About one sixth of all activity segments involved the focal child passively watching television, while in just 12% of all segments the child engaged with learning materials, including arts and crafts or electronic

games with rich language or arithmetic content. Note that a *segment* refers to full coded activity in which the child was engaged, while the compliance episode refers to a single or sequence of multiple compliance strategies (or *attempts*) employed by the mother within an activity segment.

### Mothers' Compliance Strategies

**Overall reliance on commands.** Figure 2 reports the distribution of compliance strategies employed by all mothers over the 14-month observation period. These are counts of discrete socialization strategies used by mothers, prior to sorting strategies into the three categories of parental control put forward by Crockenberg and Litman (1990). Direct verbal commands to focal children represented the dominant compliance strategy, making up 42% of the 1,477 coded compliance attempts. Below we illustrate how the bulk of these commands were not harshly delivered, but they were direct and clear, allowing the child little room for discussion or reasoning between the mother and child.



**Figure 2.** Distribution of compliance strategies by mothers (n = 1,477 compliance attempts). Note: Other coded strategies include shaming the child or invoking guilt, threatening a clear consequence, gesture or nonverbal command, tricking the child (*engañar*), physical punishment, negotiating with the child, teasing or playing, guiding of behavior, bribing, and unclear threat.

The mother's clarification of the proper or normative behavior occurred in just 9% of her compliance attempts (strategies), and reasoning was observed in 8% of the attempts. Praise or positive reinforcement was rare, observed in just 3% of the segments. We observed very little spanking, physical punishment, or harsh control. That is, we commonly observed mothers expressing direct demands to children within daily activities, but this was rarely couched in anger, loud commands, or negative affect.

**Differing patterns by maternal background.** Next, we turn to the compliance episodes in which a mother attempted to curb a behavior that the mother deemed inappropriate (e.g., throwing dolls or hitting a younger sibling), or when a mother desired the child to complete a behavior (e.g., say thank-you for a gift or greet a new guest) but the child did not respond to the mother's initial attempt (14% of the 1,477 coded strategies). For each compliance episode, we analyzed the sequence of strategies parents used, the count of strategies (attempts) the mother deployed, and whether compliance was achieved.

Analysis of the compliance episodes revealed similarities and differences across mothers' use of low power-assertive, inductive, highly power-assertive, and culturally specific practices during the compliance episodes (following Crockenberg & Litman's [1990] classification). Table 2 reports differing patterns in those compliance episodes in which mothers deployed multiple strategies, given the child's initial resistance. We sort most mothers, first, into those who primarily relied on inductive and low power-assertion strategies—that is, those who invoked high power-assertion in less than 10% of all their compliance attempts. If mothers relied on high power-assertion in at least one third of all observed compliance strategies, they were sorted into the second block. The third group of mothers employed all three strategies, including inductive reasoning and rich information, more evenly. They also tended to employ more culturally specific compliance methods (which could not be reliably categorized under the Crockenberg & Litman [1990] framework).

Table 2

*Differing Patterns for Compliance Episodes in Which Mothers Employed Multiple Compliance Strategies (Not Achieving Compliance From First Strategy)*

Variable	Average no. of compliance episodes	Average no. of compliance strategies (attempts) per episode	Mothers achieving compliance after employing strategies (%)	First-generation mothers (%)	Mothers without high school diploma (%)	Mothers below median household income (%)
Mothers relying on low power-assertion and inductive strategies ( $n = 7$ ) <sup>a</sup>	5.9	2.6	79	57	0	0
Mothers relying on inductive, low, and high power-assertion strategies ( $n = 4$ ) <sup>b</sup>	8.0	3.2	63	75	50	100
Mothers exhibiting mixed strategies ( $n = 9$ ) <sup>c</sup>	7.2	3.5	78	78	56	67

<sup>a</sup> Mothers who exhibited low power-assertive or inductive compliance strategies in at least 90% of all observed instances. <sup>b</sup> Mothers who exhibited high power-assertive compliance strategies in at least one third of all observed instances. <sup>c</sup> Mothers with a distributed mix of compliance strategies who did not meet the criterion for either of the first two groups. Mothers who could not be categorized are excluded ( $n = 4$ ).

Mothers often employed a mix of least two different compliance strategies during the median compliance episode. The focal child responded immediately to the mother's initial compliance strategies in 73% of the compliance episodes observed. This suggests a high level of maternal efficacy when it comes to socialization practices in cultural context, at least among 4-year-olds. Mothers deployed a blend of compliance strategies, often distributed across inductive and low power-assertion, including reasoning and explaining the logical consequences of persistent misbehavior.

The mothers in the first group, one third of the sample, almost never exerted high power-assertion strategies, even after issuing a verbal command. Only one of these mothers ever employed a high-power method, observed during one episode. Noncompliance by the child for this group did not result in harsh commands, threats, or physical punishment. After issuing their first command, mothers achieved child compliance in 79% of the instances after two or three low power-assertion or inductive strategies.

The second group, just one sixth of the mothers, used high power-assertion behaviors, such as threatening utterances, shame or guilt, or physical punishment after initial child noncompliance. It is important to note that while direct commands were common and seemingly effective in the majority of their observed parenting strategies, these mothers did resort to trying harsh practices, threats, or hostile affect as strategies during their episodes. Mothers in this second group achieved compliance in 63% percent of their compliance episodes after deploying an average of three strategies, indicating less success in achieving compliance.

The findings that appear in Table 2 also suggest that second-generation mothers and high school graduates are more likely to employ inductive and low power-assertive methods, compared with first-generation and less educated mothers, who rely more on high power-assertion. Mothers in the third group, who deployed a wider blend of strategies, were less likely to have completed high school. These statistical comparisons must be viewed as suggestive, since larger samples would be required for hypothesis testing.

### *Complex Compliance Strategies: Qualitative Findings*

Our qualitative data help to illuminate the high and low power-assertion strategies employed by mothers and how they were couched in the child's daily contexts and home activities. These data also show how many mothers deploy direct commands in the context of generally warm and responsive social relations. Given space constraints, we have selected episodes that illustrate the activity context and maternal behaviors manifest in power-assertive, inductive, or culturally specific strategies, along with how mothers blended these strategies when compliance was not initially achieved.

*Low power-assertion and inductive practices.* Maria Fernanda <sup>6</sup> is a 41-year-old, first-generation mother of three children who arrived from Mexico with her husband about 15 years before entering the study. While she primarily cared for the focal and youngest child, Andres, Maria Fernanda also began selling traditional Mexican cheese to supplement her husband's income and to offset northern California's high cost of living. Andres spent much of his day playing with his mother or siblings and tagging along when Maria Fernanda ran errands or moved through the neighborhood as a street vendor.

She relied largely on low power-assertion practices, most often direct verbal commands. Yet when this strategy did not move Andres to comply, she often shifted to inductive practices, such as reasoning or trying to persuade Andres to conform to expectations. In one episode, Andres started to play with marbles under the table. A toddler visiting the home came into the dining room. Maria Fernanda told Andres to stop playing and then explained that the marbles could be dangerous for the toddler. When Andres failed to respond, Maria Fernanda repeated the explanation; he stopped playing and moved quickly to feed his fish in a nearby aquarium.

In a similar episode, Maria Fernanda urged Andres to start cleaning up the living room, which was strewn with toys and pillows; he ignored her and continued to watch television. She walked closer, turned off the television, and explained that she should not be the only person helping to clean up. Andres then complied without objection. What is notable is how Maria Fernanda rarely escalated or became aggressive when her verbal commands proved ineffective. She acted firmly while offering an explanation to, or often reasoning with, Andres.

Maricruz is the 31-year-old, second-generation mother of Hailey, her only child. Maricruz, Hailey, and her husband live with her husband's parents to offset high housing costs. Maricruz had more difficulty achieving compliance with her use of low power-assertive and inductive practices, especially with the use of normative messages. Although she achieved compliance following 80% of her attempts, she often had to repeat her low power-assertive and inductive strategies. However, like Maria Fernanda, interactions between Maricruz and her daughter rarely escalated into aggressive language or physical intimidation.

In one episode where Maricruz used reasoning successfully, Maricruz, Hailey, and the researcher were playing with a Dora doll in Hailey's room. Hailey decided to look for another doll and started digging through her toys, throwing them behind her as she dug. Maricruz told Hailey she should not throw her toys. Hailey continued to throw toys, and Maricruz said her name to remind her to stop. Hailey continued her misbehavior, and her mother repeated "Hailey" once more. When Hailey continued, Maricruz raised her voice but calmly directed, "Hailey, look at me." Hailey continued but then looked at Maricruz as she explained, "You don't throw toys; you could hurt someone." Finally, Hailey complied and stopped. As seen with Maria Fernanda, it was not until Maricruz used reasoning as a strategy that Hailey complied with her request.

*High power-assertion practices.* Ana, 34 years of age, is a first-generation mother of six children, ranging between 3 and 17 years of age. Ana had moved from Mexico to Arizona about 12 years prior to entering the study. She worked cleaning rooms part time at a local hotel. Abran, the second youngest, spent his days in the household, mainly watching television or movies with his siblings, playing video games, or running about the courtyard of their apartment complex.

Across 14 episodes that we observed, Ana rarely achieved compliance when Abran misbehaved or ignored her directions (36% of all episodes). Ana typically began by employing low power-assertive practices, issuing commands or nonverbal gestures and at times trying to reason with Abran. But she frequently turned to high power-assertive practices, usually threatening punishment or hitting Abran. Most of these episodes went on for a few minutes, as Ana would switch between various methods, often providing explanations and reasoning but rarely achieving compliance from Abran.

During an interview, Ana tried to quiet Abran, who was eagerly interjecting comments and attracting greater attention. At first Ana simply held a finger to her mouth, prompting Abran to laugh. The mother repeated this shushing attempt, but he continued to disrupt the interview. Ana then looked sternly at Abran, signaling that she

was losing patience; Abran simply laughed again. Ana got up from the couch and proceeded to spank him. She again told him that he needed to wait and not interrupt. He laughed once again. Ana responded, threatening that “*ahorita vas a ver* [you will see].” Abran finally complied. This episode illustrates how some mothers escalated from low-power methods to more aggressive strategies, including hitting their child. In general, mothers who employed a wider range of methods were less effective in achieving compliance.

*Blending low power-assertion and culturally specific practices.* The third set of mothers classified above could not be reliably sorted along the Crockenberg and Litman (1990) dimensions. They tended to deploy a varied set of inductive, low- and high-power practices, as well as culturally specific practices. Take the case of Xenia, a first generation mother, age 35 at entry to the study, after having lived in the U.S. for 5 years. She stayed home to care for her two children, including Paulino, her youngest and the focal child. During the second half of the 14-month period, Xenia began to look for *niñera* [nanny] jobs to help supplement her husband's unsteady income from construction jobs in the Bay Area. Paulino did not attend preschool, but together they attended a monthly school readiness program for 4-year-olds run by a neighborhood agency, as well as art and music classes.

Xenia frequently deployed the strategy of tricking (*engañando*) Paulino into complying, blending this Mexican-heritage practice with low power-assertion methods, typically verbal commands and reasoning, and sometimes high-power techniques, especially doling out shame and guilt associated with misbehavior. This complex mix did result in achieving compliance in four of every five episodes. One illustrative episode unfolded when Xenia and Paulino picked out Slurpee frozen drinks at a local convenience store. Xenia wanted Paulino to get a certain size cup, but Paulino grabbed a larger one than was necessary. The mother said, “*Ese no sirve* [that one does not work].” When Paulino displayed resistance to switching cups, Xenia continued to show Paulino the smaller cups from which she wanted him to choose. She then said, “*Estos sirven* [these work].” Paulino accepted his mother's explanation, apparently concluding that his choice of cup would not work.

We observed a similar episode at home when Paulino did not want to quit playing on the computer. At first Xenia said that the computer had a virus and, “needs to rest for 3 hr.” But Paulino didn't accept this explanation. The mother then explained that the researcher was visiting the house to see him; still, Paulino would have nothing of Xenia's plan. She repeated the claim that the computer needed to rest and then commanded him to come into the living room. Offering an incentive, Xenia suggested that Paulino choose a book to peruse.

Compliance attempts across mothers were often prompted by chores or household responsibilities pressed upon focal children (similar to earlier findings reviewed above, showing that even young children contribute to household chores in many Latino families, compared with other populations). For example, when Rosa, a second-generation mother of three, tried to get her middle daughter, Xilonen, to pick up her toys and move them to her bedroom, she blended humor, encouragement, and finally a stern threat of being spanked. At first Xilonen simply stashed her toys behind the couch, prompting Rosa to start counting, “1, 2, ... 3.” When Xilonen began to walk away, Rosa grabbed her hand and asked, “Do you want me to spank you?” Xilonen quickly gathered and moved her toys, while Rosa cleaned up the living room.

## **Discussion**

These findings replicate earlier research, detailing how compliance strategies invoked by Mexican American mothers infrequently encourage dialogue or reasoning with the child. Two-fifths of all initial compliance attempts involved direct verbal commands by the mother, clarifying the appropriate behavior with no explanation of how the child's misbehavior or failure to complete a task was unacceptable. In just one sixth of all compliance attempts did mothers attempt to reason with, or explain proper behavior to, the child.

At the same time, three elements of social context became relevant in how we interpret this direct form of socialization inside Mexican American homes. First, compliance attempts often occurred within generally supportive activity structures, whether the focal child was playing with the mother or siblings or performing household chores. Firm and direct compliance methods often aimed to correct the child's behavior within the context of a collectively performed task, ensuring that the child learned the normatively expected way to

participate. The push for compliance rarely isolated the child from surrounding actors or alienated the child from a stream of social engagements.

Second, we observed a high proportion of verbal commands by the mother, but these were often followed by a complex mix of compliance strategies. When failing to initially achieve compliance, the median mother employed between two and three different compliance strategies during the complete episode. Such blends of compliance strategies moved beyond direct commands, such as reasoning with the child about why the behavior was inappropriate, or distracting the child to shift into a legitimate form of participation. Still, the deployment of a variety of compliance strategies appears to correspond to low efficacy for some mothers.

Third, very few instances of compliance attempts were delivered loudly or harshly. Just 3% of all compliance attempts involved threatening the child with a punishment, and an even smaller share led to hitting or spanking the child. We typically observed responsive adults and siblings in the home, even when the mother escalated her press on the child to comply (Baumrind, 2005).

These patterns are reminiscent of the young literature on socialization inside Asian American families, where mothers are constantly supervising and often correcting the behavior of their children. Yet neither the affective tone nor the ongoing tenor of children's activities is reportedly negative or punitive (Chao, 1994; Li, Holloway, Bempechat, & Loh, 2008). More work is certainly required to understand the cognitive-developmental effects of such compliance practices within cultural groups. We know that Latino parents read with their young children less frequently than Anglo middle-class parents, on average (Schneider, Martinez, & Owens, 2006). This represents but one social activity that stimulates cognitive growth. Overall, theory development remains rudimentary in understanding the cognitive requirements or exposure to richer language, which may be conditioned by children's daily activity structures and mothers' compliance practices in the home.

Overall, these findings are consistent with ecocultural theory, at least in thickly describing the culturally situated efficacy of mothers' compliance strategies. Becoming socially competent in Mexican American households, following previous work, requires that young children conform more strongly to adult authority, respect parents and peers, and contribute to household tasks, compared with the Anglo middle-class emphasis on children's autonomy and lateral forms of participation. So, we see how Mexican American mothers rely heavily on direct commands, specifying the normative behavior from a position of authority that reinforces respect by the child. In most cases, this allows the young child to engage in play, social exchange, or household tasks in predictable and clearly understood ways (Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil, & Way, 2008). Focal children complied immediately in almost three-quarters of all compliance episodes, reflecting the mother's high level of efficacy, as culturally situated. Whether the socialization script limits the child's social competence in other contexts, for example, when entering preschool, is a pivotal question for future research.

We cannot infer that the warmth and the supportive character of mothers—even in the midst of direct compliance requests—signals authoritative maternal practices (in Baumrind's parlance). First, we observed little lateral communication following a direct command, and this included a scarcity of reasoning about why the child's behavior was inappropriate. Thus, Crockenberg and Lipman (1990) help in illuminating a variety of direct compliance strategies, and we discovered that warmth and support from Mexican American mothers is not necessarily commensurate with lateral, complex communication. Future work might focus on how direct yet contextually supportive compliance strategies is situated in Mexican American norms vis-à-vis the meaning and mechanism of this combination within Anglo middle-class homes.

Our exploratory analysis of between-subgroup differences can only suggest that compliance strategies differ by levels of maternal education and generation, as suggested by psychologists drawing on larger samples (Laosa, 1980; Parke & Buriel, 1998; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). This requires observational studies with larger samples of Mexican American mothers and children, illuminating how the family's social ecology may shift socialization goals and compliance strategies between locales or over time. The child's own development (and changing activity sets) may interact with novel forms of socialization to further alter compliance strategies. Overall, our

findings suggest that maternal socialization practices cannot be viewed as fixed, linked to an easily categorized “style” rooted in the mother’s personality, but instead a variable repertoire of compliance strategies which may vary across ecocultural locations and subgroups.

These results cannot be generalized to Mexican American populations or subgroups, given our small family sample. We do know that Mexican American mothers reported significantly lower levels of harsh discipline with their toddlers, such as spanking, compared with Anglo mothers, according to interviews fielded within a national family sample (Fuller et al., 2007). Observed levels of externalizing and internalizing behavior of Mexican American 5-year-olds are statistically equal to scores for Anglo children, based on data from a second national sample (Crosnoe, 2007). Still, observational studies in home settings with larger samples are required before we can generalize about compliance strategies among Latino subgroups.

Our study is limited to the practices exercised by mothers. Future work should give balanced attention to the socialization practices of fathers. Videotaping compliance practices, if not disruptive within naturalistic home settings, would allow investigators to further learn about mothers’ socialization strategies and children’s responses, as well as how psychological processes likely mediate children’s learning, emotionality, and engagement as a result of compliance episodes.

Future research might also examine the extent to which mothers reason about their compliance strategies, or whether these practices are tacitly reproduced across generations. Prior studies and our analysis suggest that socialization practices, including compliance strategies, differ across generation or vary by maternal education levels, perhaps as immigrant mothers are exposed to novel practices that emanate from preschools, the media, or a widening network of peers. Future work should focus on these dynamics, especially how compliance strategies evolve or become more complex as mothers raise multiple children over time, or how variable family structures condition Latina practices. Finally, the wider empirical frontier is to inquire of mothers regarding how they reason about their socialization practices, be they rooted in heritage culture or stemming from the family’s novel social ecology. And what consequences flow for the mother’s psychological well-being and the child’s motivation at home and in school, as embedded forms of compliance and collective well-being begin to shift with acculturation?

## Footnotes

1. Baumrind’s (1989) framework was partly informed by Lewin, Lippitt, and White’s (1939) earlier work on authoritarian, democratic, and laissez-faire social relations, along with social theorists’ postwar interest in the authoritarian personality (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950).
2. Even Baumrind’s (2008) most recent findings showed no detrimental effects on children’s self-efficacy or cognitive skills as a result of directive parenting, including a strong press for obedience and infrequent reasoning, while affectively harsh socialization practices continued to yield negative effects on young children.
3. We also observed culturally specific maternal behaviors aiming to achieve compliance—some that seem bounded within Mexican communities and are not enumerated in the Crockenberg and Litman (1990) framework. This includes tricking children into conforming to expectations (*engañar*), indirect messaging that involves talking to another child or adult to model behavior, and joking or playfulness.
4. Four mothers were not placed within a group because of their low number of compliance episodes. These mothers generally achieved compliance from the focal child on the first compliance attempt.
5. Interrater reliability, kappa coefficients for coded activities: playing = .61; preparing or eating food = .70; watching television = .80; helping with chores and routines contributing to the household = .00; engaging in learning activities = .35; and engaging other materials and media = .00.
6. Pseudonyms have been used for names of participants.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### Review of Research on Latino Parenting and Socialization Practices

Study	Method and measures	Family sample	Evidence on parenting style or parenting practices
Arcia & Johnson (1998)	Qualitative, including an open-ended interview and Q-Sort of childhood characteristics and parental goals	14 first-generation, Mexican American mothers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexican American mothers described the preference for authoritarian practices.</li> <li>• Obedience was at basis of all desirable characteristic.</li> <li>• Parents most commonly cited the use of verbal instruction, scolding, reprimands, and rebuking as methods for achieving obedience.</li> <li>• Spanking used when deemed necessary.</li> </ul>
Bartz & LeVine (1978)	Quantitative; administered PARS and CPB	160 African American, 152 Mexican American, and 143 Anglo parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Controlling for education erased significant ethnic differences in authoritative parenting behaviors such a encouraging a child's decision making, respecting a child's opinion, and being more supportive of equalitarian relationships.</li> <li>• Therefore, once controlling for education level, Mexican American parents did not differ in these authoritative parenting practices from Anglo parents.</li> </ul>
Buriel (1993)	Quantitative; administered Parent Attitude Research Instrument (Bartz & Levine, 1978) & CPB Description Questionnaire	317 Mexican American mothers and fathers; 186 children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexican American mothers were more authoritarian.</li> <li>• Mothers of first- and second-generation children expected earlier autonomy and more productive use of time. They also reported more strict discipline strategies.</li> <li>• Mothers of third-generation children had style characterized by emotional support and expectation of proper behavior at home and school.</li> </ul>
Dumka et al. (1997)	Quantitative; administered CRPBI (Schaefer, 1965) and parents' version of the CRPBI	121 Mexican American mothers and their children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher levels of maternal acculturation were related to lower levels of inconsistent discipline practices (related to authoritarian practices).</li> </ul>
Durrett et al. (1975)	Quantitative; used Block's Child-Rearing Practices Report and Q-sort	29 Anglo, 30 African American, and 31 Mexican American families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anglo and African American parents reported being more authoritative than Mexican American parents.</li> <li>• Mexican American parents scored lowest on emphasizing individual responsibility and higher on controlling emotions.</li> </ul>
Gamble et al. (2007)	Quantitative; administered PPQ, 62-item self-report survey that has three of Baumrind's (1989) subscales	57 Mexican American families, majority first generation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both mothers and fathers indicated frequently employing strategies associated with the authoritative style of parenting, whereas they were less likely to endorse strategies associated with either of the other two parenting styles.</li> </ul>
Hill et al. (2003)	Quantitative; administered CRPBI (Schaefer, 1965) to children and adapted to use with mothers	177 Mexican American and 167 Anglo mothers and their children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexican American mothers and children reported more hostile control and inconsistent discipline (both consistent with authoritarian parenting) than Anglo mothers and children.</li> <li>• Spanish-speaking Mexican American mothers reported using more hostile control and inconsistent practices than English-speaking Mexican Americans.</li> </ul>
Holloway et al. (1988)	Mixed methods; used adapted scale from Hess (1980) to measure parental developmental expectations, parental strategies; responses from five hypothetical scenarios ranked from 1 to 5 (1 = <i>physical force</i> , 5 = <i>accommodating strategy to child's desires</i> )	36 Mexican mothers; 32 Mexican day care providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexican mothers favor authoritarian style.</li> <li>• Mexican mothers had lower means when compared to day-care providers in their responses to the five hypothetical scenarios, meaning that Mexican mothers prefer using strategies that exercise their authority rather than accommodating to the child's desires.</li> </ul>

## Appendix A (continued)

Study	Method and measures	Family sample	Evidence on parenting style or parenting practices
Ispa et al. (2004)	Mixed methods; all measures (including maternal intrusiveness) were generated from videotaped 10-min mother-child play sessions	579 Anglo, 412 African American, and 241 Mexican American mother-child dyads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexican American mothers, regardless of acculturation level, showed higher levels of intrusiveness (i.e. controlling children's play) when playing with their 14-month-old children than Anglo counterparts.</li> <li>• However, Mexican American mothers' intrusiveness did not predict stress among their children as found among their Anglo counterparts.</li> </ul>
Knight et al. (1994)	Quantitative; administered CRPBI (Schaefer, 1965) and Mother's Reports of Parental Behavior	70 Mexican American and 161 Anglo mothers and their children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexican American mothers reported more authoritarian practices.</li> <li>• Anglo mothers, compared with Mexican American mothers, reported less rejection, inconsistent discipline, control, hostile control, and cohesion.</li> <li>• Anglo children, compared with Mexican American children, reported less rejection, control, and hostile control, and more acceptance and open communication.</li> <li>• More acculturated Mexican American mothers reported less rejection, hostile control, and inconsistent discipline; their children reported less hostile control.</li> </ul>
Laosa (1980)	Mixed methods; observed teaching task using MTOT (Laosa, 1978)	43 Mexican American and 40 Anglo mother-child dyads ( $n = 83$ )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anglo mothers used inquiry and praise more, whereas Mexican American mothers used modeling, visual cues, directives, and negative physical control more frequently.</li> <li>• All cultural differences between the groups disappeared once controlling for mother's level of education.</li> </ul>
Martinez (1988)	Mixed methods; observed teaching task using MTOT (Laosa, 1978) and interviewed parents	47 Mexican American mother-child dyads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parenting styles were equally distributed between authoritative (49%) and authoritarian (47%); 4% permissive.</li> <li>• When controlling for all demographic variables (e.g., SES and generation), no statistical differences between parenting styles.</li> </ul>
Moreno (1997)	Mixed methods; videotaped mothers teaching their children to tie their shoelaces; coded and analyzed data	17 Mexican American and 19 Anglo mother-child dyads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even after statistical controls, Anglo mothers used more controlling and nonverbal teaching strategies (e.g. commands, modeling, physical control) than Mexican American mothers.</li> </ul>
Parke et al. (2004)	Quantitative; administered measure of hostile parenting: Schaefer's (1965) 58-item parental practices questionnaire	111 Anglo and 167 Mexican American families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexican American mothers and fathers reported more authoritarian style.</li> <li>• Mexican American mothers and fathers reported more hostile control, compared with Anglo mothers and fathers.</li> <li>• As maternal acculturation increased, the level of both maternal and paternal hostile parenting decreased, and parents reported greater use of reasoning, love withdrawal, and loss of privileges (less authoritarian, more authoritative practices).</li> </ul>
Rodriguez & Olswang (2003)	Quantitative; administered Parental Modernity Scale (child rearing and education), Rank Order of Parental Values	30 Mexican American, 30 Anglo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexican American mothers used more authoritarian style.</li> <li>• Mexican American mothers' scores were significantly higher than Anglo mothers' scores on Traditional and Authoritarian subscales.</li> </ul>

Appendix A (continued)

Study	Method and measures	Family sample	Evidence on parenting style or parenting practices
Varela et al. (2004)	Quantitative; administered Parental Authority Questionnaire	150 Mexican descent (Mexican, Mexican immigrant, and Mexican American) and Anglo families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexican American mothers reported more authoritarian parenting than Anglo mothers.</li> <li>• Mexican immigrant and Mexican American fathers reported being more authoritarian than Anglo fathers.</li> </ul>

*Note.* PARS = Parental Attitude Research Scale; CPB = Cornell Parent Behavior Inventory; CRPBI = Children's Report of Parenting Behavior Inventory; PPQ = Parenting Practices Questionnaire; MTOT = Maternal Teaching Observation Technique; SES = socioeconomic status.

Appendix B

**Coded Compliance Strategies Exhibited by Mothers**

Parenting practice	Definition
Command	Spoken directive.
Compromise/negotiate	Mother agrees to let the child do something with conditions, finding the middle ground after some discussion.
Incentives/bribing	Mother uses desirable things/privileges to achieve desired behavior.
Indirect command	A directive given without using an infinitive or a directive, conveyed through suggestion or questioning.
Indirect messaging	Talking about desirable/undesirable behavior through a story or indirectly.
Modeling	Mother shows child how to do something using actions.
Nonverbal command	Nonphysical, nontouching action that conveys a directive.
Normative message	Talk about behavior; includes benchmark, general rule that holds over time, assumes same frame of reference.
Permit/ignore	No follow-through after a command has been given or after acknowledging potentially questionable behavior.
Permitting misbehavior	Ignoring generally agreed upon misbehavior (e.g., punching a child, running on a roof).
Physical discipline, negative	Enforcing a command nonverbally with negative physical actions (e.g. grabbing a child, spanking).
Physical discipline, neutral	Enforcing a command nonverbally with neutral physical actions (e.g. tapping a child, placing child on lap).
Praise compliance	Bestowing positive feedback on child for their compliance or proper behavior.
Reasoning	Mother sets a limit and/or explains why a particular behavior or thought is important.
Redirect/distract	Reorient child's behavior or attention, introducing new activities, or assignment to a passive activity.
Reminding	Mother reiterates rules, ways of doing things, or decisions discussed earlier.
Shame/guilt	Verbally demeaning or putting down a child to curb particular behavior.
Teasing/joking	Using laughter and teasing to alter/curb child's behavior.
Threat/consequence	Verbal directive with a consequence.
Threat/negative	Verbal directive with a reference to an authority or a negative consequence (e.g. spank or shame child).
Trick/engañar	Mother tricks the child to alter/curb child's behavior.
Unclear threat	Verbal threat without a clear consequence (e.g., "You will see!").