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Effects of Cohabitation on Children of Latino Americans

Miriam Grace Clark

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Sociology

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ABSTRACT

Effects of Cohabitation on Children of Latino Americans

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The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of cohabitation on children in kindergarten and how this varies by race. Many researchers have shown that children being raised in cohabiting families do not perform as well as children being raised in married parent families (Manning and Seltzer 2009; Artis 2007; Raley et al 2005). Furthermore, demographic trends show that cohabitation among Latinos is very similar to marriage, whereas among whites they are two very different things (Choi and Seltzer 2009). My research combines these two ideas to investigate how cohabitation may affect Latino children differently than it affects white children in terms of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems. I hypothesize that though whites will be negatively affected by cohabitation, Latinos will not have this negative effect. Evidence supports hypotheses and suggests that, indeed, Latino children are not as negatively affected by cohabitation as Whites.

Keywords: cohabitation, marriage, ethnicity, Latino, externalizing problem behaviors, internalizing problem behaviors

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INTRODUCTION

Cohabitation and the acceptance of cohabitation have grown drastically in recent years and is predicted to continue to grow (Thornton and Young-Demarco 2001; Thornton and Young-DeMarco 2001; Scott, Schelar, Manlove and Cui 2009). Despite this general consensus that it is on the rise, researchers find difficulty measuring exactly how much cohabitation exists because of lack of clear cut definitions of when it begins, when it ends, and how couples define it (Manning and Smock 2004). Debates about whether cohabitation is an alternative to marriage or merely a step in mate selection are evident in the literature (Smock 2000). The meaning people attach to cohabitation is likely to vary based on whether children are involved in the union since evidence suggests that children often fare worse academically and behaviorally when being raised by a cohabiting couple (Reed 2006; Raley, Frisco, and Wildsmith 2005; Artis 2007; Manning and Bulanda 2006). Additionally, research shows that there are strong ethnic differences in regards to relationship stability and suggest an examination into other contexts such as cultural backgrounds (Raley and Sweeney 2007).

The Latino population has grown by 43% from 2000 to 2010 and is considered the largest growing demographic in the United States (Passel, Cohn, and Lopez 2011). In order to understand cohabitation on a general level, it is necessary to examine this rising population. Research suggests that the meaning of cohabitation is different for white Americans than it is for Latino Americans (Choi and Seltzer 2009). Many explain that for a Latino American, it is likely a common alternative to marriage, though for the average white American, it may be considered only a step in mate selection (Landale and Fennelly 1992, Choi and Seltzer 2009).

Little research examines differences in ethnicity among children in cohabiting families. In order to understand the relationship between cohabitation and ethnicity, child outcomes

provide a meaningful addition to the literature. Examining demographic characteristics for adults in these relationships provides a picture of the situation, but examining child outcomes provides evidence as to the actual importance of it. Given that research shows that generally children fare worse when growing up in a cohabiting family, and other researchers show that for Latino Americans cohabitation is an acceptable marriage-like situation, I hypothesize that the negative effects of cohabitation are not as evident among Latino Americans (Raley et al 2005; Artis 2007; Manning and Bulanda 2006; Landale and Fennelly 1992, Choi and Seltzer 2009). Using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten (ECLS-K), I analyze how children in cohabiting and non-cohabiting family structures score on two behavioral outcome measures and examine how this may vary between whites and Latinos in the United States.

BACKGROUND

Meaning of Cohabitation

Basic demographic statistics show similar rates of cohabitation among blacks, whites and Latinos, but differing rates of births among these groups (Smock and Manning 2004). Cohabiting Latino women are 70% more likely to have a planned pregnancy, 77% more likely to conceive a child, and two times as likely to remain cohabiting after the birth of the child than cohabiting white women (Manning 2001). When whites do conceive during cohabitation, they move significantly faster into marriage than their Latino counterparts (Smock and Manning 2004). Among cohabiting Mexican-Americans who either were born in the United States or moved here before the age of twelve, fertility is much higher than any other cohabiting groups (Wildsmith and Raley 2006). Additionally, when Puerto Rican women cohabit, if they get pregnant, they have a lower probability of getting married than if they were not cohabiting prior to the pregnancy. This suggests that they feel they are already in a marriage-like situation (Manning

and Landale 1996). Measures of stability show that though Mexican born immigrants have high opinions of the institution of marriage, those who do choose to cohabit are considered more stable than cohabiting couples of different ethnicities as they treat the relationship more closely in line with their ideologies of marriage (Choi and Seltzer 2009). Lastly, comparing premarital cohabiting whites to Latinos, research suggests that premarital cohabitation leads to divorce among whites, but interestingly among Latinos, this correlation does not exist. Among Mexican women, cohabiting prior to marriage is actually positively correlated with marital stability (Phillips and Sweeney 2005). Researchers use these demographic trends to show that though differences may be partly related to socioeconomic status, there may be differences in the ways these groups construct meaning of cohabitation (Smock and Manning 2004). Cohabitation is thought to likely be a viable type of marriage in the Latino community (Choi and Seltzer 2009, Cohen 2008, Wildsmith and Raley 2006, Manning and Landale 1996, Landale and Fennelly 1992).

Further, ethnographic research shows that even the language that is used in Spanish suggests a more stable relationship. The word “esposo” is used both to connote a married spouse or a cohabiting partner whereas in English, there are two words to differentiate these relationships: spouse/boyfriend (Schwede 2003).

Though the literature is clear in showing how cohabitation among Latinos has deeper meaning than it does among whites, one study suggests that it is still starkly different than marriage. Oropesa, Landale and Kenkre (2003) show that among Puerto Rican couples, married men are financially in charge of their families. However, cohabiting men are less likely to have the same responsibility. This difference in responsibility implies that though there may be similarities between cohabitation and marriage, and though the cohabiting unions of Latinos may

be more stable than that of whites, they are still fundamentally different than married unions among Latinos.

Child Outcomes

One way to examine whether marriage and cohabitation have differing effects is to look at its impact on children. This approach has been long used to understand the consequences of partner formation and can help eliminate just how important these ethnic differences can be for children's well-being. Research shows that children growing up in cohabiting families have higher rates of behavioral problems such as earlier age at first sexual intercourse, teenage fertility and high school dropout than children growing up in any other family structure (Manning and Bulanda 2006). Further, children in cohabiting families have lower standardized reading scores and lower grades (Artis 2007; Raley et al 2005). Though many scholars attribute these negative effects to the instability involved in these relationships, other scholars suggest that even when controlling for household stability, children of cohabiters still fare worse (Raley et al 2005; Manning and Bulanda 2006).

Interestingly, little research has looked at how this varies by ethnicity. One study suggests that among children born to white cohabiting couples, there are higher rates of delinquency than among children born to married couples. However, those rate differences are not evident in children born to Latinos (Osborne, Manning and Smock, working paper). Fomby and Estacion (2011) explore specific group differences among Latinos. While children of Caribbean origin cohabiting mothers had no statistical difference in externalizing behavioral problems, children of Puerto Rican or Mexican cohabiting mothers did have externalizing behavioral problems.

Crosnoe and Wildsmith (2011) used the ECLS-K data and compared four ethnic groups (white, black, 3rd plus generation Latino, and Mexican immigrant). They examined what children's family structure was at birth and what it was at kindergarten entry and how this correlated with children's standardized math test scores. Children were placed into three groups depending on their birth status: parents married at birth, parents unmarried at birth, or missing. Depending on their birth status, they were then divided into subcategories for their kindergarten family structure. Those who were in the "parents married at birth" category were divided into these kindergarten groups: married biological, married stepparent, cohabiting stepparent, single parent. Those who were divided into the "parents unmarried at birth" were divided into married biological, cohabiting biological, married stepparent, cohabiting stepparent, and single parent. Overall, there were 9 categories. Parents who were married at birth and continued married through kindergarten were the reference group. They found that the negative effects of non-traditional family structures (including cohabiting, step, and single parents) are more pronounced among whites than they are among the other ethnic groups in terms of childhood math scores.

My research seeks to further understand these findings by focusing on other important outcomes, namely teacher's report of children's internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors. Internalizing problem behaviors refer to if the child demonstrates signs of inward detrimental behaviors such as anxiety, loneliness, self-esteem issues or sadness. Externalizing problem behaviors are present when the child exhibits outward detrimental behaviors such as arguing, fighting, getting angry, acting impulsively, and disturbing ongoing activities (Tourangeau et al 2001). Both types of problem behaviors are important because they are complexly intertwined with a number of other problem behaviors such as cognitive development, childhood obesity, long term school failure, delinquency, violence, arrests, peer rejection and

antisocial personality disorder (Ready et al 2005; Bodovski and Youn 2011; Judge and Jahns 2007; Sprague and Walker 2000; Schaeffer et al 2003). Scholars suggest the importance of delving deeper into understanding causes and predictors of internalizing and externalizing problems in order to implement prevention measures early (Morgan et al 2009).

Some scholars suggest that family structure plays a key role in predicting childhood externalizing and internalizing behaviors (Amato 2010; VanderValk et al 2005). As noted above, Fomby and Estacion (2011) examine how family structure, namely cohabitation, effects Latino children's externalizing problem behaviors. Though beneficial, this research lacks the generalizability of a nationally representative data set. Further understanding how family structure and ethnicity complicate internalizing and externalizing behaviors can better fuel researchers and policy makers on the treatment and prevention of these conducts.

Using the ECLS-K data, I analyze how living in cohabiting families differs by ethnicity in terms of the effect it has on teacher report of child internal and external behavioral problem measures. This adds to the literature by showing: first, whether cohabitation among Latino Americans is similar to marriage; second, showing how children in early childhood education perform on behavioral assessments; third, showing a path new research should follow in order to add to family studies literature.

Because the evidence suggests cohabitation is closer to a marriage-like relationship among Latinos than it is among whites, I expect that Latino children growing up in cohabiting families fare the same as children of Latinos growing up in married families. I also expect, consistent with prior research that white children growing up in cohabiting families fare worse than children growing up in married families. This is outlined in the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. Do children of Latinos living in cohabiting families fare worse on behavioral assessments than children of Latinos living in married parent families?
2. Do children of whites living in cohabiting families fare worse on behavioral assessments than children of whites living in married parent families?
3. Is an interaction effect present between family structure and race (specifically between Latinos and whites)?

Research Hypotheses

H1: Children of Latinos living in biological cohabiting families will fare the same as Latino children living in biological married families on internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors.

H2: Children of Latinos living in non-biological cohabiting families will fare the same as Latinos living in step-parent married families in internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors.

H3: Children of whites living in biological cohabiting families will fare worse than whites living in biological married families on internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors.

H4: Children of whites living in non-biological cohabiting families will fare worse than whites living in step-parent married families in internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors.

METHODS

Sample

The current study uses the ECLS-K data set. This is a nationally representative data set collected during the 1998-1999 school year when children were in kindergarten. For the purposes of this study, I have narrowed the sample to only whites and Latinos living in one of four family structures: two married biological parents, two unmarried biological parents, one biological parent/one step parent, and one biological parent/one cohabiting partner. The total sample contains 11369 participants.

Explanatory Variables

Family Structure

The family structure measure is based on a composite of two variables. First, children are classified into their residential family structure including the following groups: two biological parents, one biological parent and one other parent, single parent, or other family structure (including adoptive parents, foster parents, related guardians, and unrelated guardians). Additionally, parents responded to a question asking their current marital status: currently married, separated, divorced, widowed, and never married. I combined these two variables and, for the purposes of this study, have limited it to four specific family types: two married biological parents, two cohabiting biological parents, one biological parent and one married step parent, one biological parent and one non-biological cohabiting partner. Other family types that do not fit into these categories were omitted from the analysis. Family structure is measured during the child's kindergarten year of school. As most of the cohabitation literature is centered on married versus cohabiting couples, I focus on biological married versus cohabiting and step married versus cohabiting partner (Choi and Seltzer 2009, Cohen 2008, Wildsmith and

Raley 2006, Manning and Landale 1996, Landale and Fennelly 1992). There is some work on the effects of other family structures such as single parents and is an important consideration that warrants analyses but beyond the scope of this study. Other arrangements, such as grandparents, foster and other guardians are simply too small in number to consider but would be important to examine in future work.

Race

This variable is a parent report of the child's race. I have limited it to two racial categories: white and Latino. I have limited it to these two ethnic groups because of the evidence that suggests that there are specific contrasts between these. Future research could explore further contrast between family structure and other ethnic groups.

Outcome Variables

There are two non-cognitive measures: externalizing problem behaviors and internalizing problem behaviors. I chose these outcome variables since these have not been previously explored using national level data. This is meant to further explore potential differences found in child cognitive test scores (Crosnoe 2011). Each variable is a composite of several questions of teacher report of child behavior. Below is a detailed explanation of each of the six variables (Tourangeau et al 2001). I look at each outcome variable at the spring of the child's kindergarten year.

Externalizing Problem Behaviors

Teachers were asked how often children engage in five externalizing behaviors including arguing, fighting, getting angry, acting impulsively, and disturbing ongoing activities. Teachers rated students on a scale from 1 *never* to 4 *very often*. A composite score was made for each student based on their mean of the five variables. Because most teachers rate their students fairly

well, the results are highly skewed. I have taken the natural logarithm of each score in order to normalize the distribution. To account for missing data on this variable, I have conducted two models using listwise deletion and multiple imputations for the regression analysis.

Internalizing Problem Behaviors

Teachers rated children's levels of four internalizing problem behaviors on a scale of 1 *never* to 4 *very often*. They were asked how often each child demonstrated anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem and sadness. A composite score was given based on each child's mean of the four questions. To account for the highly right skewed scores, I have used a natural logarithm data transformation procedure on the variables. To account for missing data on this variable, I have used multiple imputations in the regression analysis.

Control Variables

Gender and socio-economic status are used as control variables in this study. Though often age is used as a control variable in early childhood educational studies, I did not control for age since my outcome variables are non-cognitive. Cognitive skills (such as math and reading test scores) usually increase as the child's age in months increases (i.e. children aged 5.9 would be expected to outperform children aged 5.2). Since both internalizing and externalizing behavior problems do not follow a set systematic trajectory going in either an upward or a downward course for everyone, there is no need to include age in the model (Keiley, Bates, Dodge and Pettit 2000). Additionally, I ran the regression both with and without age and found nearly identical results.

Gender

The gender control variable is measured as the child's sex—either male or female. This was included as past research has shown specific gender differences in behavioral problems in schools (Hemphill, Toumbourou, Catalano, and Mathers 2004).

Socio-economic Status

To measure socio-economic status, the ECLS-K data set includes a continuous composite variable. It takes into account both the mother's and father's education, both the mother's and father's labor force status, both the mother's and father's occupation and household income information. The variable ranges from -4.75 to 2.75 . This control variable was important to include as children of lower socio-economic status have often been shown to score lower on behavioral problem outcome measures (Stanger and Lewis 1993).

Analysis

Descriptive statistics are first used to see general trends in students' averages of teacher report of behavior problems. I show the average score for each race/family structure grouping. This is used to give a general understanding of visible differences between groups on each of the dependent variables.

Next, I use linear regression to further investigate the relationships adding controls into the model with the ability to compare them to each other. Whites with two married biological parents are the reference group.

I then estimate an analysis of covariance to better understand differences between groups. This allows me to run F tests on specific differences between specific racial/family structural groups. For each outcome variable I first test the difference among whites between children in married families versus biological cohabiting and the difference between whites in step families

versus cohabiting partner families. I then do the same for the same family structure groups among Latinos. I then calculate whether the difference between white children in married 2 parent biological families and white children in 2 parent biological cohabiting families is different from the difference between Latinos in both of these family structures. Additionally, I calculate whether the difference between white children in married step families and white children in cohabiting non-biological partner families is different from the difference between Latinos in these two family structures.

There are no missing data on any of the independent or control variables. However, there are missing data on both dependent variables. *Tables 1* and *2* show that the characteristics between those with missing data on each variable and those without missing data is mainly a result of SES. To account for the missing cases on the dependent variable, I use both listwise deletion and marginal long style multiple imputations. I chose this type of multiple imputations as it is memory efficient (StataCorp 2009). Though multiple imputations is often preferred to listwise deletion, results are nearly identical in both regression models. I include both for reference, but have opted to use the listwise deletion model. Using listwise deletion allows me to test the differences between the racial groups with F tests.

RESULTS

Table 3 and *Table 4* show descriptive statistics. *Table 3* shows the mean, range and standard deviation of the two outcome variables and socioeconomic status. *Table 4* breaks this up and shows how each family structure/ethnic group scored on the outcome variables. These raw scores show that white children who live with one non-biological parent typically do worse on externalizing problem behaviors than Latino children who are in the same family structure category. Interestingly, for externalizing problem behaviors, the difference between white

married biological parents and white cohabiting biological parents is 0.8 points. However, the difference between these two family structure groups among Latinos is only 0.3 points. The difference between white step and white cohabiting partner families is 0.3 points. However, the difference between these same family structure groups for Latinos is -0.2 (meaning the cohabiting partner families actually do better than the step families). Similar trends are shown for the internalizing problem behaviors. The difference between white married biological parents and white cohabiting biological parents is 0.10 points. The difference between these same groups among Latinos is 0.01 points. The difference between step parents and cohabiting partner families among whites is 0.04, but among Latinos no difference is shown.

Table 5 and *Table 6* are nearly identical regression models. *Table 5* uses listwise deletion and *Table 6* uses multiple imputations. On the internalizing problem behaviors scale and compared to children in white families with two biological parents, statistically controlling for race and SES, children in white/two cohabiting biological parent families have an expected 0.08 higher score; children in white/one biological parent and one married step parent have an expected 0.07 higher score; children in white/one biological parent and one non-biological cohabiting partner have an expected 0.11 higher score; children in Latino/one biological parent and one married step parent have an expected 0.10 higher score; and children in Latino/one biological parent and one non-biological cohabiting partner family have an expected 0.09 higher score. No other family structure/race group has a statically significant difference from white children in two married biological households. Since one standard deviation is 0.30 points on this scale, these differences represent roughly one third of a standard deviation.

Statistically controlling for race and SES, on the externalizing problem behaviors scale and compared to children in white families with two biological parents, children in white/one

biological parent and one married step parent have an expected 0.12 higher score, children in white/one biological parent and one non-biological cohabiting partner have an expected 0.14 higher score and children in Latino/one biological parent and one married step parent have an expected 0.10 higher score. No other family structure/race group has a statically significant difference from white children in two married biological households. Findings suggest that there are differences by race or family structure. On externalizing problem behaviors, one standard deviation is 0.35 points on the scale. Again, these differences are representative of approximately one third of a standard deviation. As mentioned above, these are likely representative of larger differences later on in life.

Analysis of variance was used to test whether these differences by race or family structure are statistically significantly different from each other. First F tests were run to test the differences within each race by family structure. Children in biological cohabiting white families scored statistically significantly worse than biological married whites on both outcome variables. Cohabiting partner families scored statistically worse than whites in married step families on externalizing problem behaviors but not on internalizing problem behaviors. Among Latinos, children in biological cohabiting families scored statistically significantly worse than children in married families on externalizing problem behaviors but not on internalizing problem behaviors. Interestingly, Latino children in non-biological cohabiting families actually scored statistically better on both internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors than Latino children in married step families.

Next, F tests were run to test whether these differences by family structure are significantly different by race. For externalizing problem behaviors, the difference between whites in married families versus whites in biological cohabiting families is not significantly

different from Latinos in married families versus Latinos in biological cohabiting families. The difference between whites in step families and whites in cohabiting partner families is statistically significantly different from the difference between Latinos in married families versus Latinos in biological cohabiting families. This suggests that when a child is living with both biological parents, the effects of cohabitation are nearly identical for both Latinos and whites on externalizing problem behaviors. However, when a child is living with one non-biological partner of their parent, for whites it is more important that they are married than it is for Latinos. These results are shown pictorially in *Figure 1*.

For internalizing problem behaviors, results are opposite those of externalizing problem behaviors. The difference between whites in married families versus whites in biological cohabiting families is significantly different from Latinos in married families versus Latinos in biological cohabiting families. The difference between whites in step families and whites in cohabiting partner families is not statistically significantly different from the difference between Latinos in married families versus Latinos in biological cohabiting families. This suggests that the effects of marriage for white children living with their biological parents are different than the effects that cohabitation has on Latinos. However, when one biological parent lives with an unrelated partner compared to a step parent, there are similar effects on both whites and Latinos. A bar graph identifying these results is shown in *Figure 2*.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of cohabitation on children in kindergarten and how this varies by race. It has long been studied that children growing up in cohabiting families typically do not perform as well as those children growing up in married families (Manning and Seltzer 2009; Artis 2007; Raley et al 2005). Additionally, the

cohabitation literature shows how demographic trends explain that cohabitation is more closely related to marriage among Latinos than it is among whites (Choi and Seltzer 2009). My research combines these two ideas to show that cohabitation affects Latino children differently than it affects white children.

Hypothesis 1 stated that Latino children living in biological cohabiting families will fare the same as Latino children living in biological married families. This hypothesis was partially supported. On internalizing problem behaviors, there were no differences shown in children by family structure. However, on externalizing problem behaviors, Latino children in cohabiting families performed worse than children in married families.

Hypothesis 2 stated that Latino children living in non-biological cohabiting families will fare the same as Latinos living in step-parent married families. Contrary to expectation, children in cohabiting families actually scored better than children in married families on both externalizing and internalizing problem behaviors.

Hypothesis 3 stated that white children living in biological cohabiting families will fare worse than whites living in biological married families. This was supported for both internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors.

Hypothesis 4 states that children of whites living in non-biological cohabiting families will fare worse than whites living in step-parent married families. This was supported for externalizing problem behaviors only. There were no differences among children in cohabiting families from those in married families.

Results of the ANOVA F tests showed there are significant differences from whites and Latinos in two cases. For externalizing problem behaviors the contrast between whites in step families versus cohabiting partner families is more severe from the contrast between Latinos in

step families versus cohabiting partner families. For externalizing problem behaviors, the contrast between whites in biological married families versus whites in cohabiting biological families is more severe from the contrast between Latinos in biological married families versus Latinos in cohabiting biological families.

It is clear that cohabitation affects Latino children differently than it affects white children. In many circumstances, Latinos are less affected by cohabitation than whites are. Overall, this data supports the literature that states that cohabitation is roughly equal to marriage among Latino families (Landale and Fennelly 1992, Choi and Seltzer 2009). Most prior research that examines this phenomenon focuses primarily on marital outcomes (such as fertility, stability, financial resources, etc.). This research shows that cohabitation affects Latino children differently than it affects white children. This is likely due to the cultural expectations placed on Latino cohabiters versus white cohabiters. If among Latino cohabiters there are cultural expectations to treat the relationship with the stability of marriage, it makes sense that these children will do as well as children in married families. If whites do not have these same cultural expectations for cohabiting relationships, then it makes sense that children in these situations will not fare equal to the children in married families. In most cases among Latinos, cohabitation has no negative effects on children.

However, mixed results signify that though cohabitation is different among Latinos, there were some cases when it followed the same patterns as whites. In the cases where Latinos in cohabiting families did fare worse than Latinos in married families, this data adds to the literature that suggests that there are small differences between cohabitation and marriage even among Latino Americans (Oropesa, Landale and Kenkre 2003). Though marriage and

cohabitation may have similar results in some aspects of Latino life, there are still differences between children of these relationships.

These mixed findings may be a result of the diversity of Latinos in the sample. Some of these Latinos are first generation immigrants who have strong cultural ideologies consistent with their home countries'. For them, cohabitation and marriage may be very similar entities (Oropesa, Landale, and Kenkre 2003). However, segmented assimilation theory shows that each generation in the United States becomes more and more assimilated into an American lifestyle—even if this involves a negative trajectory. Assimilation has been historically looked at as a benefit to children, but researchers also show that it can be negative as immigrants adopt negative American behavior (Rumbaut 1999). Yetman (1998) explains how the American melting pot (that all can come to the United States with their own cultural backgrounds and add to the cultural diversity here) actually is an “Anglo-Conformity/Transmuting Pot.” He explains that there is a subtle existing policy that in order to be successful, all minority groups must essentially mirror the majority. This results in second generation immigrants often tossing aside their parent’s cultures and trying to turn “white”.

Rumbaut (1999) sheds additional light on this theory by showing that as immigrants assimilate, becoming more and more “American”, they often accept the negative aspects of American culture. Health diminishes, relationships fail, educational aspirations fall, and the grand “American dream” may become a nightmare. Though cultural ideologies among Latinos are in favor of very stable cohabiting relationships, with each generation in the United States, Latinos are likely to act less and less in line with the ideology. As time continues to pass, it would be expected that the negative effects of cohabitation among whites would become just as negative among Latinos. Therefore, the Latinos in the study who are not first generation

immigrants likely act the way, or very similar to, whites in the United States. To them, cohabitation may just be a process in mate selection that does not have the stability of marriage. Future research could explore these findings by immigration status.

Another possible reason for the mixed findings could be the diversity of cultures among Latinos. This analysis groups all Latinos into one category though they come from many different cultural backgrounds. Some research suggests that even among Latinos there are differences between marriage and cohabitation for some ethnic groups but not all (Fomby and Estacion 2011). Future research should make comparisons at a national level based on country of origin or self-identified cultural group.

A fourth possible explanation may be the possible under-report of Latino cohabitation. As the literature shows, among Latinos cohabitation is a union very similar to marriage. In many cases Latinos may define their cohabitation as marriage and therefore fail to report that they are in fact cohabiting. Since this research looks at just those who report their cohabitation, results are likely only a conservative estimate of the reality. Future research could qualitatively explore this phenomenon by allowing participants to openly talk about their relationship status.

Overall, hypotheses were supported as it is clear that cohabitation has differing effects on children depending on their ethnicity. Whites are more negatively affected by cohabitation than Latinos. In some cases, cohabitation may actually have positive affects for Latino children. Living in a cohabiting biological family has less effect on the internalizing behaviors of Latino than white children.

These findings are critical because of the significance of growth among both the cohabiting population and the Latino American population. Few studies have previously

examined differences in ethnicity between whites and Latinos among children in cohabiting families.

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Table 1. Means (or Proportions) Comparison of Those That Are Missing and Not Missing on Externalizing Problem Behaviors by Key Background Variables

| | <i>Not Missing</i> | <i>Missing</i> |
|--|--------------------|----------------|
| SES | 0.18 | -0.01*** |
| GENDER | 0.49 | 0.47 |
| White 2 married biological parents | 0.70 | 0.59*** |
| White 2 cohabiting biological parents | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| White 1 biological parent/1 married step parent | 0.056 | 0.063* |
| White 1 biological parent/1 cohabiting partner | 0.03 | 0.05* |
| Latino 2 married biological parents | 0.17 | 0.22*** |
| Latino 2 cohabiting biological parents | 0.02 | 0.03*** |
| Latino 1 biological parent/1 married step parent | 0.01 | 0.03*** |
| Latino 1 biological parent/1 cohabiting partner | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Sample Size (<i>N</i>) | 10617 | 752 |

Notes: When a participant is missing or not missing on the “externalizing problem behaviors” variable, this table shows the average score they received on SES or the likelihood that each of the other variable categories. Though there are some differences between the groups of missing and non-missing, when all variables are run together in a logistic regression model, SES is the variable that matters most since all family structure variables are highly correlated with SES.

* $P \leq .05$ ** $P \leq 0.01$ *** $P \leq 0.001$ (two-tailed tests)

Table 2. Means (or Proportions) Comparison of Those That Are Missing and Not Missing on Internalizing Problem Behaviors by Key Background Variables

| | <i>Not Missing</i> | <i>Missing</i> |
|--|--------------------|----------------|
| SES | 0.18 | -0.03*** |
| GENDER | 0.49 | 0.46 |
| White 2 married biological parents | 0.70 | 0.57*** |
| White 2 cohabiting biological parents | 0.009 | 0.011* |
| White 1 biological parent/1 married step parent | 0.06 | 0.06 |
| White 1 biological parent/1 cohabiting partner | 0.03 | 0.04* |
| Latino 2 married biological parents | 0.17 | 0.23*** |
| Latino 2 cohabiting biological parents | 0.02 | 0.04*** |
| Latino 1 biological parent/1 married step parent | 0.01 | 0.03*** |
| Latino 1 biological parent/1 cohabiting partner | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Sample Size (<i>N</i>) | 10587 | 782 |

Notes: When a participant is missing or not missing on the “internalizing problem behaviors” variable, this table shows the average score they received on SES or the likelihood that each of the other variable categories. Though there are some differences between the groups of missing and non-missing, when all variables are run together in a logistic regression model, SES is the variable that matters most since all family structure variables are highly correlated with SES.

* $P \leq .05$ ** $P \leq 0.01$ *** $P \leq 0.001$ (two-tailed tests)

Table 3. Means, Ranges and Standard Deviations of the Variables Used in the Analysis

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>Range</i> | <i>Standard Deviation</i> |
|---------------------------------|-------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| SES | 0.10 | -3.75, 2.75 | 0.76 |
| Externalizing Problem Behaviors | 0.41 | -0.80, 1.68 | 0.35 |
| Internalizing Problem Behaviors | 0.39 | -0.85, 1.53 | 0.30 |

Table 4. Mean Score Each Child Received at Kindergarten by Family Structure/Ethnic Group

| | <i>n</i> | <i>Externalizing</i> | <i>Internalizing</i> |
|--|----------|----------------------|----------------------|
| White 2 married biological parents | 7858 | 0.39 | 0.37 |
| White 2 cohabiting biological parents | 105 | 0.47 | 0.47 |
| White 1 biological parent/1 married step parent | 643 | 0.52 | 0.45 |
| White 1 biological parent/1 cohabiting partner | 355 | 0.55 | 0.49 |
| Latino 2 married biological parents | 1939 | 0.41 | 0.39 |
| Latino 2 cohabiting biological parents | 191 | 0.44 | 0.40 |
| Latino 1 biological parent/1 married step parent | 165 | 0.50 | 0.48 |
| Latino 1 biological parent/1 cohabiting partner | 113 | 0.48 | 0.48 |

Table 5. Regression Results Using Listwise Deletion

| | <i>Internalizing</i> | <i>Externalizing</i> |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|
| Intercept | 0.38 | 0.47 |
| SES | -0.02*** | -0.02*** |
| Gender (reference = female) | -0.02** | -0.14*** |
| <i>Race by Family Structure (reference=White/two married biological parents)</i> | | |
| White/two cohabiting biological parents | 0.08** | 0.05 |
| White/one biological parent and one married step parent | 0.07*** | 0.12*** |
| White/one biological parent and one non-biological cohabiting partner | 0.11*** | 0.14*** |
| Latino/two married biological parents | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Latino/two cohabiting biological parents | 0.01 | 0.03 |
| Latino/one biological parent and one married step parent | 0.10*** | 0.10*** |
| Latino/one biological parent and one non-biological cohabiting partner | 0.09** | 0.06 |
| Adjusted R ² | 0.02 | 0.06 |

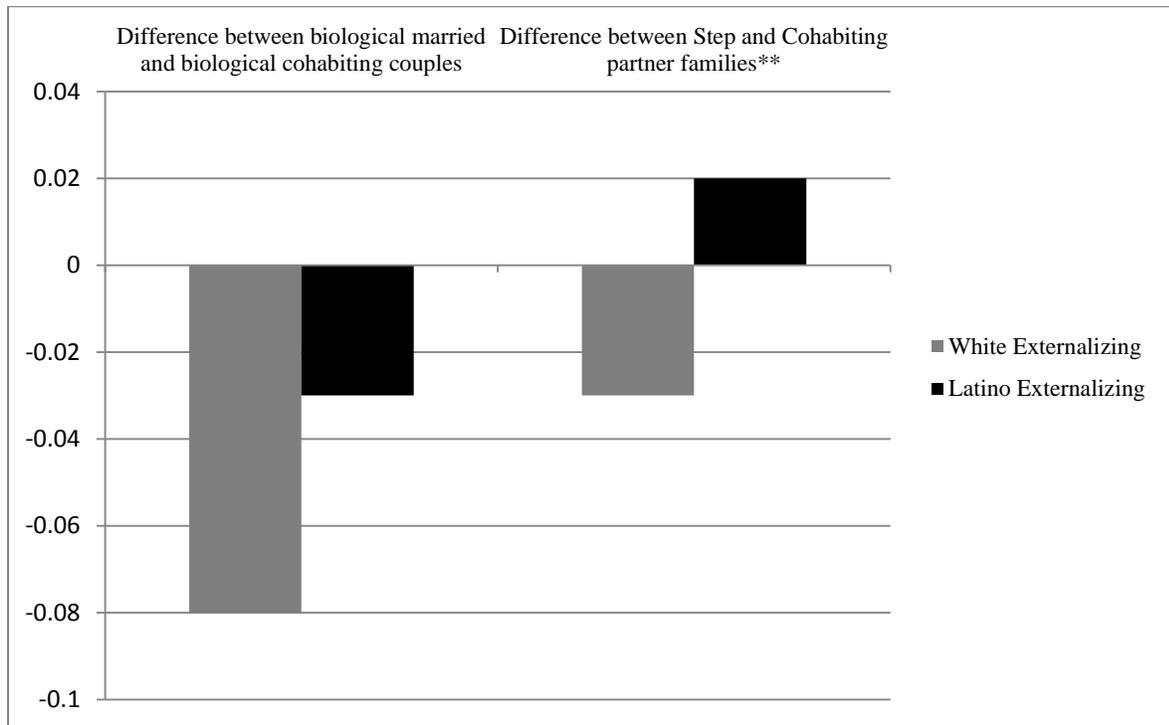
Notes: *P ≤ .05 **P ≤ 0.01 ***P ≤ 0.001 (two-tailed tests)

Table 6. Regression Results Using Multiple Imputations

| | <i>Internalizing</i> | <i>Externalizing</i> |
|--|----------------------|----------------------|
| Intercept | 0.38 | 0.47 |
| SES | -0.02*** | -0.02*** |
| Gender (reference = female) | -0.02** | -0.14*** |
| <i>Race by Family Structure (reference=White/two married biological parents)</i> | | |
| White/two cohabiting biological parents | 0.08** | 0.05 |
| White/one biological parent and one married step parent | 0.07*** | 0.12*** |
| White/one biological parent and one non-biological cohabiting partner | 0.10*** | 0.14*** |
| Latino/two married biological parents | 0.01 | 0.01 |
| Latino/two cohabiting biological parents | 0.01 | 0.03 |
| Latino/one biological parent and one married step parent | 0.10*** | 0.10*** |
| Latino/one biological parent and one non-biological cohabiting partner | 0.09** | 0.06 |

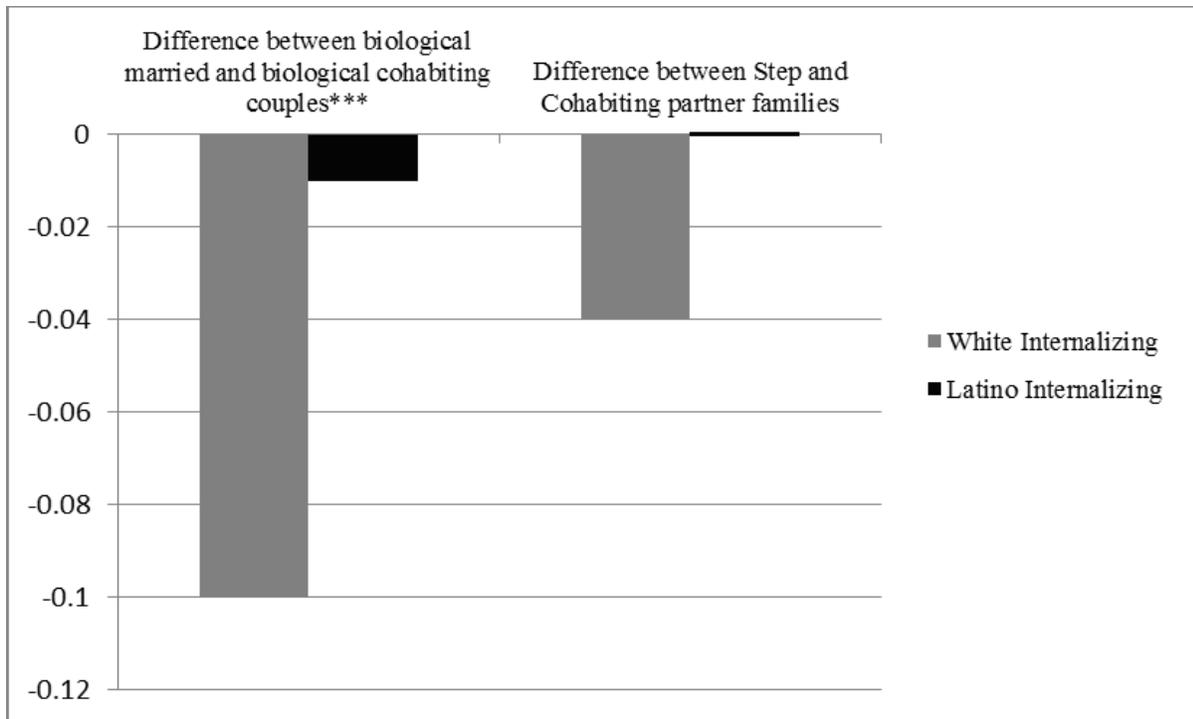
Notes: *P ≤ .05 **P ≤ 0.01 ***P ≤ 0.001 (two-tailed tests)

Figure 1: Raw Score Differences on Externalizing Problem Behaviors Between Family Structure Groups by Race



Notes: * $P \leq .05$ ** $P \leq 0.01$ *** $P \leq 0.001$ (two-tailed tests)

Figure 2: Raw Score Differences on Internalizing Problem Behaviors Between Family Structure Groups by Race



Notes: * $P \leq .05$ ** $P \leq 0.01$ *** $P \leq 0.001$ (two-tailed tests)