

## Dating Behavior Variations in Central American, Cuban, and South American College Students

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## Abstract

To assess the influence of geographical region, generational status, and gender on the dating behaviors of Latino college students, 451 college students from Central America, Cuba, and South America answered questions regarding their geographical region descent, generational status, and dating history. Significant differences were found in dating behaviors. Participants from Central America began dating later than participants from Cuban and South American. Variations in age when parents allowed dating was accounted for by geographic region, gender of the child, and generational status. There was a gendered difference in age at first date in that males went on their first date earlier than females. Age at first date was also predicted by when parents first allowed dating. Age at first sexual encounter was impacted by geographic region, age when parents first allowed dating, and age at first date. Results demonstrate the need to examine Latino immigrants by geographical region instead of grouping immigrants from over 20 different countries under the term 'Latino.'

*Keywords:* dating, sexual activity, Latino, immigrant, parental control

# Dating Behavior Variations in Central American, Cuban, and South American College Students

Adolescence and emerging adulthood is the time when many focus their efforts on forming romantic relationships and selecting partners for long term commitment (Crissey, 2005; Nieder & Seiffge-Krenke, 2001). Research has demonstrated that intimate relationship formation behaviors begin by age 15, with almost half of adolescents having been in a romantic relationship (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003; see also Feiring, 1996). By age 18, when adulthood begins, the majority of emerging adults (70%) have tried their hand at love (Carver, Joyner, & Udry, 2003).

Previous studies have repeatedly documented variations in dating and sexual behaviors of adolescents and young adults based on ethnicity and race. For instance, Anglo/European and African-American adolescents tend to engage in more antecedent sexual behaviors than Latino adolescents (O'Sullivan et al., 2007). This variation in dating behaviors may be explained by differing cultural ideals (Coates, 1999).

Latinos tend to embrace different gender role expectations for males and females. For instance, girls are expected to live up to *marianismo*, that is to maintain their virginity until marriage, to find a boyfriend, plan to marry and have children (O'Sullivan & Meyer-Behlberg, 2003), focus on family caregiving, and be obedient and submissive to males (Baca Zinn, 1982; Pavich, 1986). Latinos also idealize love relationships and shame girls who become sexually active outside of a love relationship (O'Sullivan & Meyer-Behlberg, 2003). Throughout adolescence and emerging adulthood Latino females continue to hold traditional gender role beliefs regarding premarital virginity, the relationship between love and sex, and the importance of childbearing (Padilla & Baird, 1991; Pavich, 1986; Villarruel, Jemmott & Jemmott, 2005). Latino males, however, are not expected to remain virgins until married.

The Latino population is extremely diverse containing few universal characteristics. It has been suggested that the only common feature Latinos share is that they can trace their family heritage to one of the countries in Latin America (Massey, 1993). Other than that, they can be any race, speak English or Spanish (or both), migrate from twenty different countries, and be foreign born or native born to the United States (Driscoll et al., 2001). The term “Latino” was created by the U.S. Census to account for immigrants from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Central America, and South America (Driscoll et al., 2001). For the most part, Latinos reside within the largest and fastest growing cities and states (e.g., Texas, California, New York, Florida) in the United States but are slowly moving into more rural areas (U.S. Census, 2001).

Considering current immigration trends in the United States it is important to examine the dating behaviors of Latino youth and emerging adults. The Latino population is currently the fastest growing immigrant population. There are currently 35.3 million Latinos living in the United States, accounting for 12.5% of the overall population (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001). It has been estimated that by year 2050 the Latino population will make up 51% of the total population (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001), with nearly one-third of the youth (under 19 years of age) population being Latino (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). In addition, despite current declines in the rate of teenage pregnancy in the general population, Latino adolescents are disproportionately more likely to become pregnant and to have children at an early age (Center for Disease Control, 2006; National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001). Latino adolescents have the highest teen pregnancy rate across all ethnic groups in the United States (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2000). Hence, examining the dating behaviors of Latino youth can aid in the development of interventions for this population.

**Dating behaviors**

Previous research has documented that the timing of sexual activity is different between boys and girls with boys having sex at a younger age and having more frequency of sexual activity than girls (Moore et al., 1995). This conclusion holds regardless of racial identification, ethnic background, or immigration status. The same has been explicitly found for Latino youth as well. For the most part, research has concluded that Latino males are more involved in dating behaviors; initiating dating and sexual activity earlier than Latino females (Driscoll et al., 2001), which would agree with the traditional gender roles that are taught among the Latino population as well as the double standard regarding virginity for Latino males and females. It has been reported that adolescent male Latinos have higher rates of sexual intercourse and more sexual partners than females (Raffaelli, 2005).

More specifically, Latino females tend to delay involvement in early forms of dating, such as associating with a dating partners and friends (Raffaelli, 2005). Latino females also participate in unsupervised dating later than Latino males (Raffaelli, 2005). However, both Latino males and females have been found to encounter their first serious relationship at similar ages (Raffaelli, 2005). This could indicate that there is a smaller gap between age at initial dating and age at first sexual activity for Latino females than for Latino males, which may pose an explanation to the elevated risk of early pregnancy and child birth for Latino females (National Campaign, 2001). In addition, previous research has illustrated that 10% of Latino youth become sexually active prior to age 13, compared to only 5% of Anglo/European American adolescents (Center for Disease Control, 2000).

**Geographic Region**

While the majority of research has demonstrated that Latino youth are at an increased risk for early sexual activity, few studies have isolated the different geographic regions from which Latino youth migrate from. This is an important feature of immigration to consider as dating behaviors and sexual activity may differ in each geographic region prior to migration. These behaviors may then migrate with Latino youth as they enter the United States or they may evolve or completely dissipate.

While Latinos are the fastest growing immigrant population in the United States today, the majority of them come from Mexico (U.S. Census, 2011). In recent years, however, there has been an increase in the number of immigrants from Cuba (U.S. Census). Additionally, there are smaller numbers of immigrants from other geographic regions, such as Central and South America (U.S. Census). Even though Central America is currently composed of eight different countries and South America consists of fifteen different countries, due to the small numbers of Latino immigrants from these regions it is difficult to compare the dating behaviors and sexual activities of immigrants from each country. Because of this, researchers tend to collapse these countries into categories of Central America and South America (Harris, 1999).

Nonetheless, different dating behaviors and sexual activities are evident among Latinos from Cuba, Central America, and South America. For instance, according to the World Health Organization (2006), there is a gendered difference between those from Central America and South America in terms of sexual activity before the age of fifteen. More specifically, males and females in South America tend to engage in sexual activity before the age of 15 at a lower rate than those from Central America (WHO, 2006). Additionally, previous research has documented that teenage pregnancy in Central America is rather high, with the rate in South America

somewhat lower (ADS, 2004; INE, 2006; INEC, 2007; MSPAS, 2003; WHO, 2009). A more recent study found that adolescent sexual activity has increased in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, but has remained stable in Guatemala (Samandari & Speizer, 2010).

Once immigrants migrate to the United States, differences based on geographic region remain. For instance, differences have been documented for teenage pregnancy rates (National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 1999) based on geographic region in that Cuban adolescents have a birth rate of 23.5 per 1,000 compared to 69.9 per 1,000 for adolescents from Central and South America (Martin et al., 2003). There are also differences in the number of sexual partners. The World Health Organization (2006) reported that in South America (especially in Brazil) more men than women report having one or more recent sexual partner in all age-groups. Differences based on geographic region have also been documented for rates of HIV/AIDS (Diaz, Buehler, Castro, & Ward, 1993).

Because there are more Latino immigrants from Cuba than other geographic regions, more research has addressed the dating behaviors and sexual activity of Cuban immigrants. For instance, one study that examined the sexual behaviors of female Cuban immigrants found that older, less religious, and US-born Latinos were at an increased chance to be sexually active and to engage in risky sexual behaviors than other Latinos (Raffaelli et al., 2005). Wright (2011) examined the dating behaviors of Cuban male college students and found that the average age at first date was between the ages of 13 and 15 and that first sexual encounter, on average, occurred within three years of having their first girlfriend. Also, while the majority engaged in sexual activity between the ages of 16 and 18, a large percentage engaged in their first sexual activity between the ages of 13 and 15 (Wright). It remains unclear, however, whether these differences based on geographic region vary as a function of generational status or gender.

### **Generational Status**

Previous research has documented that the cultural difference between Anglo/Europeans and Latinos diminishes as successive generations of Latinos adopt Anglo-American behaviors (Knight & Kagan, 1977; Knight, Kagan, Nelson, & Gumbiner, 1978). For instance, previous research has found that dating and sexual behaviors of Latinos change as they become more acculturated to American society, by resembling Anglo/European, non-Latino American behaviors with each successive generation (Afable-Munsuz & Brindis, 2006; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2005; Aneshensel, Fielder, & Becerra, 1989; Flores et al., 1998; Ford & Norris, 1993). It has been suggested that gender differences in dating behaviors and sexual activity reduce with increased acculturation (Ford & Norris, 1993; Marin et al., 1993), suggesting that acculturation moderates the effects of gender on dating and sexual behaviors.

An examination of family generations concluded that Latino cultural norms are the strongest in families where both generations (e.g., parents and children) are less acculturated (Sabogal et al., 1987; Valentine, 2001). This means that with less acculturation comes a less risk of early dating behaviors and early sexual activity. In addition, generational status has been found to be negatively associated with Latino traditional ideas about gender (e.g., *marianismo*) among Puerto Rican women living in the United States (Soto, 1983), possibly increasing the chance of early sexual activity. Previous research has found that acculturated Latinos are more likely than less acculturated Latinos to engage in premarital sexual intercourse and to have multiple partners (Sabogal, Perez-Stable, Otero-Sabogal, & Hitaa, 1995; Carmona, Romero, & Loeb, 1999; Darabi & Ortiz, 1987; Ford & Norris, 1993). More recent studies have linked acculturation-related variables, such as place of birth (Ebin et al., 2001), length of time in America (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2005), and language spoken at home (Ebin et al., 2001) to



sexual timing in adolescent Latino males and females. Other studies have failed to find a relationship between acculturation variables and adolescent Latino dating and sexual behaviors (Flores et al., 2002; Jimenez, 2002; Raffaelli et al., 2005).

### **Parents' Influence**

Parents play an important role in the intimate relationship formation behaviors of their adolescent. Previous research suggests that parental control, monitoring, and supervision of adolescents influence their dating and sexual attitudes and behaviors (Dorn-busch et al., 1985; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985; Miller, McCoy, Olson, & Wallace, 1986). Unfortunately, many parents find this time in their journey of parenthood to be troublesome and difficult (Gray & Steinberg, 1999; Zani, 1993). This time may especially be difficult for Latino parents as they may have difficulty teaching their culture's traditional values to their children as children become more acculturated to American society (Barkley & Mosher, 1995; Espin, 1984). Parents may attempt to postpone their child's dating behaviors by enforcing parental controls on their child, such as when they are allowed to date (Longmore et al., 2009). It can be expected that postponing the timing of initial dating would delay sexual activity.

Previous studies have speculated that Latino parents incorporate American dating behaviors for their adolescent children based on gender of the child (Espin 1984; 1997; Raffaelli & Suarez-al-Adam, 1998). In addition, Latino males are generally free of restraint to explore their own sexuality (Flores, Eyre, & Millstein, 1998), making parents more lax in their rules regarding dating for their male children. Latino parents, however, retain the cautious approach to sexuality for their daughters. For instance, Villaruel (1998) explained that Latino parents attempt to maintain their daughters' premarital virginity through the prohibition of dating (see also Raffaelli & Ontai, 2001). Further support for a gendered difference in the parental

permissiveness of dating behaviors have been documented by Hovell et al. (1994), who explained how parents of Latino females exhibited the strictest rules regarding dating and sex (see also Raffaelli, 2005). More specifically, Latino males would have later curfews and be allowed to interact with members of the opposite sex more than Latino females (Raffaelli & Ontai-Grzebik, 2004).

### **Limitations of Previous Research and Purpose of Study**

Previous research that has examined the dating behaviors of adolescents and emerging adults has focused on the larger, Anglo/European American community. However, with recent immigration trends, it is important to extend this examination to the largest growing immigrant population in the United States today, Latino immigrants (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001). In addition, while teenage pregnancy rates appear to be declining overall in the youth population in the U.S., Latino females are at a disproportionately higher rate of teenage pregnancy and child birth (Center for Disease Control, 2006; National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001).

Parental permissiveness may impact adolescent dating behaviors as they struggle to teach traditional Latino gender roles to their children in the context of American society (Dorn-busch et al., 1985; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985; Miller, McCoy, Olson, & Wallace, 1986). As norms regarding dating vary considerably across cultures, dating behaviors of emerging adults can be expected to diverge as a function of their generational status (Afable-Munsuz & Brindis, 2006; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2005; Aneshensel, Fielder, & Becerra, 1989; Flores et al., 1998; Ford & Norris, 1993). However, the majority of research examining Latino youth and emerging adults use the term Latino to be a hyponym to include immigrants from over 20 different countries (Driscoll et al., 2001). Gender may also play a role, as norms regarding dating and sexual activity vary for males and females (Driscoll et al., 2001; Raffaelli, 2005). It remains unclear, however,

how measures of generational status and geographic region interact together to influence the dating behaviors of Latino adolescents and emerging adults. Thus, indices of generational status, gender, and geographic region were included as predictors of dating behaviors.

To address some of the limitations of previous research, the current study examined the relation between measures of generational status and geographic region on the dating behaviors and sexual activity of immigrant Latino male and female college students. Regression analyses were used to assess the extent to which the predictors were related to dating behaviors, including age when parents allowed dating, age at first attraction, age at first date, and age at first sexual encounter (1 = <10, 5 = >18).

Data analyzed in the current study was derived from an online survey administered at a southeastern public research university with a highly diverse student population. Missing data was handled by using the Full Information Maximum Likelihood (FIML) method to estimate values for missing cases. The estimated values were then imputed into the dataset using the computer program Amelia (King, Honaker, Joseph, & Scheve, 2001). The new data set was used in analyses. The following hypotheses were tested:

**Hypothesis 1:** There will be significant differences in Latino dating and sexual behaviors (age when parents first allowed dating, age at first date, age at first sexual encounter) based on geographic region (Cuba, Central America, South America).

**Hypothesis 2:** There will be significant gendered differences in Latino dating and sexual behaviors (age when parents first allowed dating, age at first date, age at first sexual encounter) in that males would be allowed to date earlier, go on their first date earlier, and engage in their first sexual encounter earlier than Latino females.

**Hypothesis 3:** There will be significant differences in Latino dating and sexual behaviors (age when parents first allowed dating, age at first date, age at first sexual encounter) based on generational status (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>) in that participants who are 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation immigrants would engage in dating behaviors and sexual activity earlier than those who are 1<sup>st</sup> generation immigrants.

**Hypothesis 4:** Age when parents first allowed dating will significantly contribute to age at first date and age at first sexual encounter of Latino participants. Additionally, age at first date will significantly contribute to age at first sexual encounter.

## Method

### Participants

Participants included 451 emerging adult college students of Latino origin from South Florida. Seventy-four percent ( $n = 232$ ) were female and 26% ( $n = 119$ ) were male. The majority of participants, 353 (78%) were between the ages of 18 and 21. Another 77 participants (17%) were between the ages of 22 and 25, and 21 (5%) of participants were over the age of 25. Forty-eight percent ( $n = 216$ ) participants were from Cuba, 27% ( $n = 120$ ) were from South America, and 26% ( $n = 115$ ) were from Central America. Four percent of participants ( $n = 19$ ) were born in the United States with parents who were also born in the United States (i.e., third generation immigrants); 62% ( $n = 279$ ) were born in the United States with parents who were foreign born (i.e., second generation immigrants), and 34% ( $n = 153$ ) were foreign born with parents who were also foreign born (i.e., first generation immigrants).

### Measures

**Demographic questionnaire.** Participants were asked five questions that assessed their (a) age (18-19 to > 25), (b) geographic region, (c) sex, and (d) Latino origin (1 = yes, 2 = no).

The two questions assessing geographic region asked “What is your ethnic background” with *Haitian, Jamaican or other West Indian, Cuban, other Caribbean, Central American, South American, Puerto Rican, Mexican, and none of the above* as response options.

**Generational status.** Three questions were used to assess participants’ generational status. Questions included those with dichotomous (1 = *yes*, 2 = *no*) response options: (1) “Were you born in the United States,” (2) “Was your mother born in the United States,” and (3) “Was your father born in the United States.” Participants who were not born in the United States and whose parents were not born in the United States were considered first generation immigrants. Those participants who were born in the United States but whose parents were not born in the United States were considered second generation immigrants. Participants who were born in the United States and whose parents were also born in the United States were considered third generation immigrants.

**Dating behavior questionnaire.** Participants answered three questions that assessed their dating behavior; “How old were you when your parent(s) allowed you to date,” “How old were you when you went out on your first date,” and “How old were you at the time of your first sexual encounter (for example petting, oral sex, sexual intercourse).” Response options ranged from 1 (< 10) to 5 (>18).

## **Procedure**

All participants were recruited through introduction to psychology courses at an international University and received research credit for participation. All participants were allowed 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire online after agreeing to waive the requirement of written informed consent. Participants were first asked general demographic questions followed by sets of questions regarding their dating history and behaviors.

## Results

### Group Comparisons

As can be seen in Table 1 the groups (Cuban, Central American, and South American) were similar for gender distribution. However, significant differences existed for age; more participants from Cuba were between the ages of 18 and 21 than participants from Central America and South America. There were also differences for generational status, with participants from Cuba having resided in America the longest (2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation) compared to participants from Central America and South America.

\*Table 1 here\*

### Dating Behaviors

A Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine if there were differences in dating behaviors based on geographic region. The MANOVA used age when parents first allowed dating, age at first date, and age at first sexual encounter as outcome variables with geographic region (Cuba, Central America, South America) as the independent variable and controlled for participants age and generational status. The overall MANOVA was marginally significant,  $F(4, 450) = 1.83, p = .09, Wilks' \Lambda = .97$ . Follow-up univariate analyses indicated that geographic region was marginally significant for age when parents first allowed dating,  $F(2, 450) = 2.38, p = .09$ , and significant for age at first date,  $F(2, 450) = 4.29, p = .01$ . Post hoc analyses indicated that South American and Cuban participants were allowed to date at an earlier age than Central American participants; South American and Cuban participants went on their first date earlier than Central American participants. Geographic region, however, was not significant for age at first sexual encounter,  $F(2, 450) = 1.34, p > .05$ . Frequencies of dating behaviors by geographic region can be found in Table 2.

While there were no significant differences for age at first sexual encounter based on geographic region for Latino participants, previous research has been conclusive regarding the early sexual activity among this population. Therefore, further analyses of this variable were conducted.

\*Table 2 here\*

### **Predicting Dating Behaviors**

Three liner multiple-regression analyses were conducted for age when parents first allowed dating, age at first date, and age at first sexual encounter. For age when parents first allowed dating, geographic region (dummy coded as Cuban, South American, Central American), gender (dummy coded 0 = *male*, 1=*female*), generational status (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>), and interaction terms of interest (geographic region X gender, geographic region X generational status) were entered as predictors. For age at first date, geographic region (i.e., Cuba, South America, Central America), gender, generational status (1st, 2nd, 3rd), age when parents first allowed dating, and interaction terms of interest (geographic region X gender, geographic region X generational status, geographic region X age when parents first allowed dating) were entered as predictors. For age at first sexual encounter, geographic region (i.e., Cuba, South America, Central America), gender, generational status (1st, 2nd, 3rd), age when parents first allowed dating, age at first date, and interaction terms of interest (geographic region X gender, geographic region X generational status, geographic region X age when parents first allowed dating, geographic region X age at first date) were entered as predictors. Results can be found in Table 3.

\*Table 3 here\*

For age when parents first allowed dating, the Central American geographic region was a

marginally significant ( $p = .09$ ) predictor and gender was a significant predictor. Participants who were from Central America were allowed to date at a later age than participants who were not from Central America (see Table 2) and males were allowed to date earlier than females (see Figure 1). Results also indicated a significant interaction of the Central American geographic region and generational status, in that those who were third generation immigrants were allowed to date at an earlier age than first and second immigration immigrants ( $b = -.36, p < .05$ ). Results are displayed in Figure 2.

\*Figure 1 here\*

\*Figure 2 here\*

For age at first date, gender and age when parents first allowed dating were significant predictors. Males dated at an earlier age than females (see Figure 1). Also, participants whose parents allowed dating between the ages of ten and twelve began dating between the ages of ten and twelve ( $n = 16, 53.5\%$ ) when compared to participants whose parents allowed dating later.

For age at first sexual encounter, the Central American geographic region and age at first date were significant predictors. Participants who were from Central America reported having their first sexual encounter at a later age than participants who were not from Central America (see Table 2). Participants who went on their first date when they were younger than the age of fifteen reported engaging in their first sexual encounter at an earlier age than participants who went on their first date later. Frequencies for age at first sexual encounter based on age at first date can be found in Table 4. Results also indicated a marginally significant interaction of the Central American geographic region and age when parents first allowed dating and a significant interaction of the Central American geographic region and age at first date. Central American participants whose parents first allowed dating before the age of fifteen reported engaging in a



sexual encounter at an earlier age than participants whose parents first allowed dating at a later age ( $b = .21, p = .07$ ) (see Figure 3). Central American participants who went on their first date between the ages of thirteen and fifteen reported engaging in their first sexual encounter at an earlier age than participants who went on their first date before the age of thirteen and those who went on their first date after the age of fifteen ( $b = -.47, p < .05$ ) (see Figure 4).

\*Table 4 here\*

\*Figure 3 here\*

\*Figure 4 here\*

### Discussion

The current study assessed the association between age when parents first allowed dating, generational status, and geographic region on the dating behaviors of Latino adolescents by questioning Latino emerging adults about their past encounters. While the rate of teenage pregnancy in the United States is steadily declining, Latino females have a disproportionately high rate of teenage pregnancy (Center for Disease Control, 2006; National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001). Sexual activity has been linked to both generational status (Afable-Munsuz & Brindis, 2006; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2005; Aneshensel, Fielder, & Becerra, 1989; Flores et al., 1998; Ford & Norris, 1993) and parental influences (Dorn-busch et al., 1985; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985; Miller, McCoy, Olson, & Wallace, 1986). Previous research, however, has used the term ‘Latino’ as an umbrella term to include immigrants from over 20 different countries (Driscoll et al., 2001). Generalizing findings from these studies to the larger Latino community, though, is not feasible as norms regarding dating vary considerably across cultures.

**Differences in Latino Dating Behaviors**

Results of the current study indicated a significant difference for age when parents first allowed dating and age at first date based on geographic region (Central America, Cuba, South America). South American and Cuban participants were allowed to date at an earlier age and went on their first date at an earlier age than participants from Central America. Results demonstrate the diversity among Latino groups and highlight the importance of taking into consideration the geographic region of the Latino population. Results of the current study also stress that using the term Latino to include all immigrants of Latino American origin (Massey, 1993) who may be any race, speak English or Spanish (or both), who migrate from twenty different countries, and who may be foreign born or native born to the United States (Driscoll et al., 2001) does not accurately portray the disparities and difference that exist among them.

**Parents' Influence**

Results of the current study demonstrate how age when parents first allow dating varies for Central American, Cuban, and South American participants. Parents from South America allowed dating the earliest of all three geographic regions and parents from Central America allowed dating the latest. Additionally, there was an interaction between being of Central American descent and generational status, in that with each successive generation of parents from Central America allowed dating earlier with 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Central Americans allowing dating the earliest. This finding supports that of previous research that has found an association between more acculturation to American society and early dating behaviors (Carmona, Romero, & Loeb, 1999; Darabi & Ortiz, 1987; Ebin et al., 2001; Ford & Norris, 1993; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2005; Sabogal, Perez-Stable, Otero-Sabogal, & Hita, 1995).

In all three geographic regions, parents allowed dating for their sons before their daughters. This agrees with previous research that has documented a gendered difference in Latino parents' permissiveness regarding the dating behaviors of their teens (Espin 1984; 1997; Flores, Eyre, & Millstein, 1998; Raffaelli & Suarez-al-Adam, 1998). In the current study, Latino parents, regardless of geographic region, possibly demonstrated *marianismo* (i.e., double standard for boys and girls) (Espin, 1984; 1997; Raffaelli & Suarez-al-Adam, 1998) by allowing their sons more freedom (Flores, Eyre, & Millstein, 1998) and imposing stricter rules and regulations regarding dating upon their daughters (Hovell et al., 1994; Villaruel, 1998). It may be that Latino parents are attempting to maintain their daughters' premarital virginity through delaying dating initiation (Villaruel, 1998).

### **First Date**

Boys went on their first date earlier than girls. This is in agreement with previous research that has found a gendered difference in the dating behaviors of Latino youth, with boys engaging in these behaviors at an earlier age than girls (Driscoll et al., 2001; Raffaelli, 2005). More specifically, findings of the current study are in agreement with findings of Raffaelli (2005) that found Latino girls delay involvement in early forms of dating. This may be a result of *marianismo* as Latino girls may postpone dating for fear of being shamed for having an interest in a potential romantic partner at an early age (O'Sullivan & Meyer-Behlberg, 2003; Pavich, 1986). Latino females are taught to continue to hold their culture's traditional gender roles regarding premarital virginity, the relationship between love and sex, and the importance of childbearing (Padilla & Baird, 1991; Pavich, 1986; Villarruel, Jemmott & Jemmott, 2005).

Participants from Central America, Cuba, and South America who were allowed to date earlier went on their first date earlier than those whose parents did not allow dating until later.

This too agrees with past research that has documented an influence of parental permissiveness on dating behaviors (Dorn-bush et al., 1985; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985; Miller, McCoy, Olson, & Wallace, 1986).

### **First Sexual Encounter**

First sexual encounter was influenced by geographic region and age at first date.

Participants from Central America engaged in their first sexual encounter at a later age than those from Cuba and South America. Those from Cuba reported engaging in their first sexual encounter the earliest of all three geographic regions. Additionally, those who reported going on their first date prior to the age of fifteen reported engaging in their first sexual encounter earlier than those who postponed dating.

Additionally, there was an interaction between being of Central American descent and age when parents first allowed dating and age at first date. Age when parents first allowed dating was predictive of age at first sexual encounter for Central American participants. For those from Central America, if parents postponed dating they were also successful at postponing dating behaviors and sexual activity. As previous studies have suggested, parental permissiveness influences the dating and sexual attitudes and behaviors of children (Dorn-busch et al., 1985; Hogan & Kitagawa, 1985; Miller, McCoy, Olson, & Wallace, 1986). For the most part, parents from Central America were successful at postponing their child's dating behaviors, and subsequently their sexual activity, by enforcing parental controls on their child (Longmore et al., 2009). More specifically, they were successful at limiting their adolescents' independent choices regarding intimate relationships (Longmore et al., 2009).

**Limitations of Study**

The sample used in this study was a college population, representing a distinct group of Latino emerging adults. Latino students have lower rates of college attendance (Orfield, 2002) compared to native born students, causing problems for generalizing the findings of this study to Latino non-college students and emerging adults. Also, the survey was administered online. This may have interfered with how participants responded to answers. Additionally, the data analyzed in the current study consisted of single-item, retrospective, cross-sectional data. Because of the nature of cross-sectional data there was no control of the independent variables and there was an increased chance of error. Also, the current study could not assess change in participants or establish a cause and effect relationship between variables. Furthermore, the results of the current study are static. Because of the retrospective feature of the data, participants may have had difficulty with accurate recall of their past encounters. The current study attempted to minimize this limitation by providing participants with age ranges as response options, rather than asking participants to report an exact age. Nonetheless, it could still pose an issue for the results of the study. Additionally, since age responses were not reported as continuous variables the comparison of measures of central tendency may be difficult to interpret. Because of this, the current study reported frequencies and percentiles when comparing participants.

**Implications for Future Research**

The current study demonstrates that variation exists for the dating behaviors of Latino immigrants based on geographic region. While the current study documents specific variations among Central American, Cuban, and South American Latino youth, Latino's can migrate from 20 different countries. Further investigation on the variations among those countries is needed as each location has varying customs, norms, and expectations regarding intimate relationships.

Further research is needed on the parental permissiveness measure of Central American parents. In the current study, these parents were able to postpone the dating behaviors and sexual activity of their adolescent by not allowing dating at an early age. Additionally, parents who allowed dating at an early age had adolescents who began dating earlier and had sex earlier than parents who remained firm. It is suggested that these parents may have difficulty passing on the traditional values of their culture to their children and eventually giving up, releasing their parental control over their teens dating. Further investigation of this is needed.

The current study examined the impact of generational status on dating behaviors and sexual activity. Results indicated that generational status influenced the age when parents first allowed dating for Central American participants but not participants from Cuba or South America. Future research should examine acculturation in light of the findings of the current study. For instance, future research should examine gender role attitudes and independence-interdependence and how these aspects of acculturation influence dating behaviors and sexual activity.

Table 1. **Group Comparisons**

	Central American		South American		Cuban		<i>F Ratio</i>
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Age							4.22*
18-19	36	31.3	54	45.0	107	49.5	
20-21	46	40.0	42	35.0	68	38.5	
22-23	19	16.5	15	12.5	26	12.0	
24-25	6	5.2	3	2.5	8	3.7	
>25	8	7.0	6	5.0	7	3.2	
Sex							1.02
Male Referent Group	36	31.3	31	25.8	54	24.1	
Generational Status							29.24*
1 <sup>st</sup>	38	33.0	74	61.7	46	21.3	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	67	58.3	44	36.7	161	74.5	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	10	8.7	2	1.7	9	4.2	

\*  $p < .001$

**Table 2. Dating Behaviors by Geographic Region**

	Parents Allowed Dating		First Date		First Sex	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Cuban						
< 10	15	6.9	1	.5	5	2.3
10-12	8	3.7	9	4.2	8	3.7
13-15	108	50	115	53.2	61	28.2
16-18	79	36.6	76	35.2	103	47.7
>18	6	2.8	15	6.9	39	18.1
South American						
< 10	7	5.8	1	.8	1	.8
10-12	13	10.8	12	10	4	3.3
13-15	54	45	66	55	35	29.2
16-18	38	31.7	33	27.5	54	45
>18	8	6.7	8	6.7	26	21.7
Central American						
<10	5	4.3	0	0	3	2.6
10-12	9	7.8	8	7	2	1.7
13-15	41	35.7	38	33	26	22.6
16-18	44	38.3	56	48.7	54	47
>18	16	13.9	13	11.3	30	26.1



Table 3. **Predicting Dating Behaviors: Regression Coefficients**

	Parents Allowed Dating	First Date	First Sex
Predictors			
SA	-.66	-.41	.24
CA	.80*	-.45	1.33**
Gender	.72	-.23**	.14
Generational Status	.16	-.05	-.16
Parents Allowed Dating	-----	.35***	.02
First Date	-----	-----	.51***
Significant Interactions			
CA X generational status	-.36	-----	-----
CA X parents allowed dating	-----	-----	.21*
CA X first date	-----	-----	-.47****
$R^2$	.19	.20	.20
$F$	12.78***	9.72***	7.80***

\*\*\*\* $p < .001$ ., \*\*\* $p < .01$ , \*\* $p < .05$ . \* $p < .09$  or less.

Note: SA: South American; CA: Central American

Figure 1. Gender and Dating Patterns

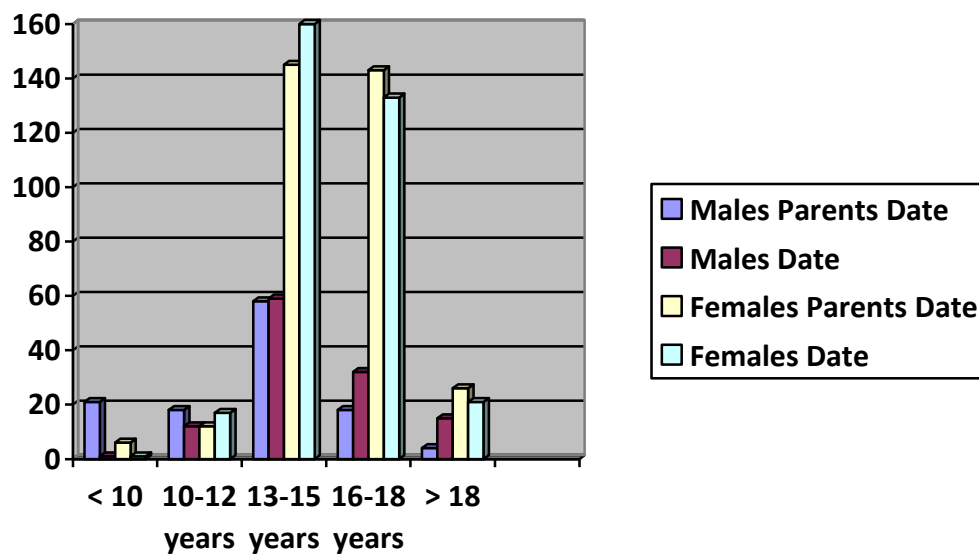
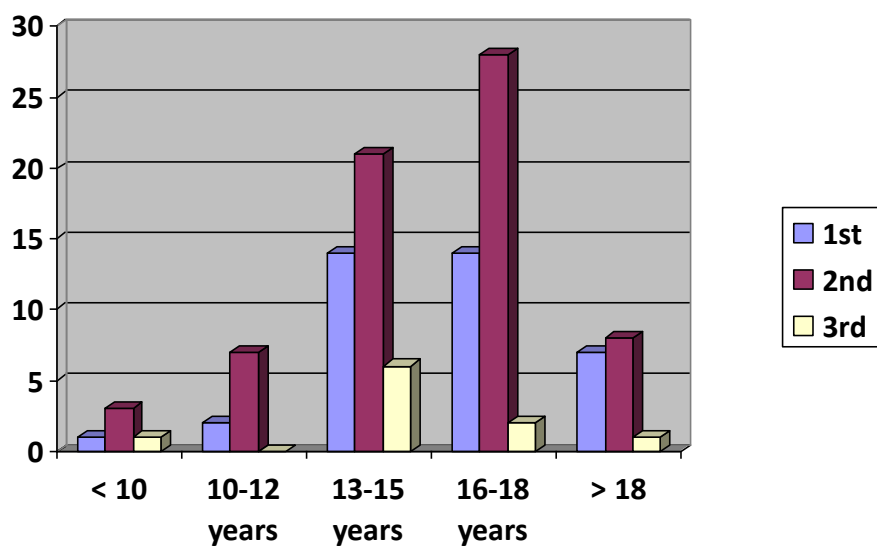


Figure 2. **Generational Status of Central Americans and Age when Parents Allowed Dating**



**Table 4. Age at first Date and First Sexual Encounter**

Age at First Date	< 10 years		10-12 years		13-15 years		16-18 years		> 18 years	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
< 10	1	50	0	0	1	50	0	0	0	0
10-12	0	0	4	13.8	10	34.5	13	44.8	2	6.9
13-15	4	1.8	6	2.7	87	39.7	99	45.2	23	10.5
16-18	2	1.2	4	2.4	22	13.3	97	58.8	40	24.2
> 18	2	5.6	0	0	2	5.6	2	5.6	30	83.3

Figure 3. **Parental Permission to Date and Age at First Sex among Central American Participants**

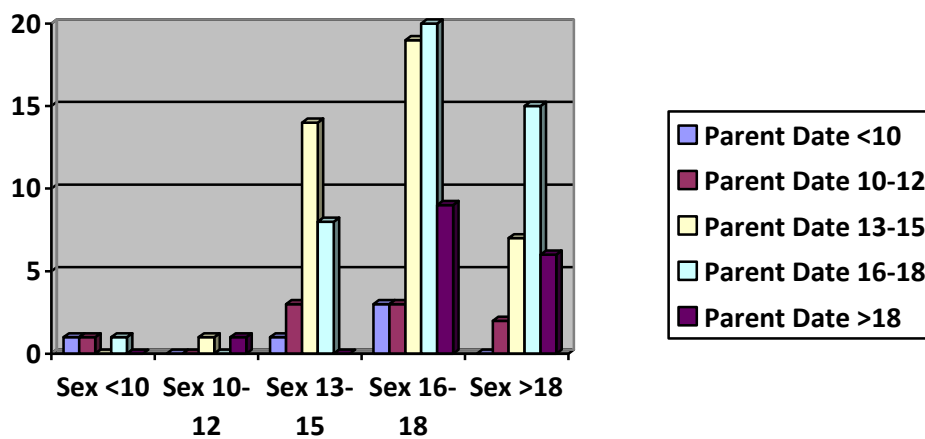
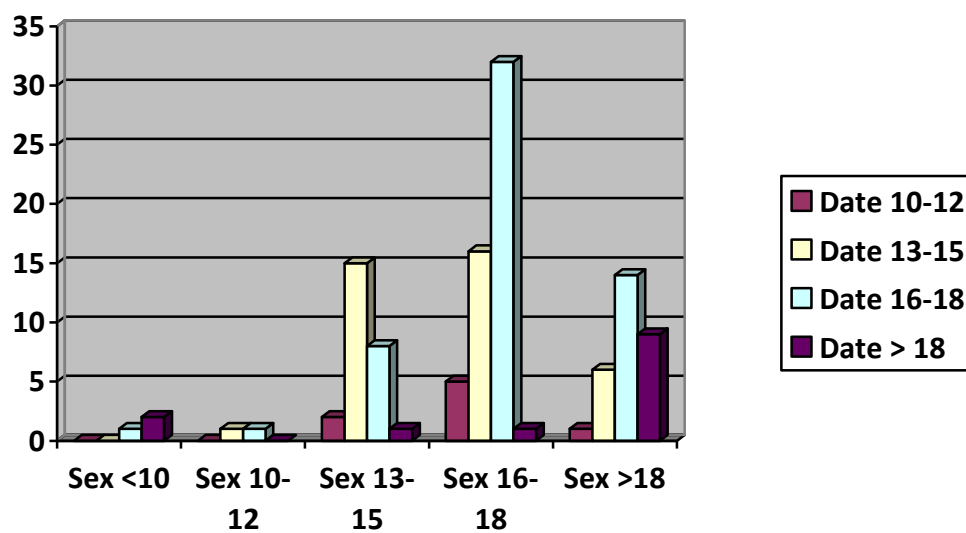


Figure 4. **Age at Date and First Sexual Encounter among Central American Participants**



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