

# Mothers' Views at the Transition to a New Baby: Variation Across Ethnic Groups

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## SYNOPSIS

**Objective.** The goals of this study were to describe ethnic variation in new mothers' hopes, concerns, and expectations for their families and infants over the upcoming year. We also sought to understand demographic factors that might explain variation in these views. **Design.** We interviewed 369 low-income, urban, African American, Mexican immigrant, Dominican immigrant, and Chinese immigrant mothers in maternity wards hours after the births of their babies. Mothers' views were assessed using open-ended questions, and their responses were coded into four main categories: Child Development, Parenting, Family, and Resources. Mothers also provided basic demographic information, including, education, work status, marital status, and father residency. **Results.** Mothers from the four ethnic groups varied in how much they spoke about Child Development, Family, and Resources, with no differences in emphasis on Parenting. Relative to the other groups, Chinese immigrant mothers talked more about Child Development; African American and Dominican immigrant mothers talked about Resources; and Mexican immigrant mothers spoke most about Family. Child birth order, mothers' education, and father residency related to mothers' views, and ethnicity moderated a number of these associations. **Conclusions.** Mothers from different ethnic groups enter parenthood with different views that reflect both cultural emphases and the broader context of their lives. Parenting views at the transition to a new infant may have implications for later parenting adjustment, and practitioners who work with mothers and families should attend to variation among mothers in what is most salient to them at the birth of their infants.

## INTRODUCTION

Personally meaningful social transitions are periods of heightened reflection, adaptation, and reorganization in individuals' lives (Ruble, 1994). In particular, the birth of a baby is a transformational experience that brings enormous joy and psychological benefits to the family, yet may also incur demands on parents' time, resources, and psychological well-being, and on the mother-father relationship (Cowan & Cowan, 1995; Glade, Bean & Vira, 1995; Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003; Tamis-LeMonda, Yoshikawa, & Kahana-Kalman, in press). It is therefore unsurprising that the birth of a baby is one of the most frequently studied developmental transitions (Elek, Brage Hudson, & Bouffard, 2003).

In this study, we assessed the views of mothers from Mexican, Dominican, Chinese, and African American backgrounds (predominantly low-income) at the birth of their infants (i.e., in postpartum maternity wards) in New York City. What are mothers' hopes, concerns, and expectations for themselves and their families for the upcoming year, and do these vary by ethnic background? How do child, mother, and family characteristics relate to mothers' views? To date, research on mothers' views at the birth of their infants is rare, and little is known about the views of mothers from diverse ethnic

groups and low-income strata, for whom a new baby might pose unique economic and emotional challenges.

### Mothers' Views at the Transition to a New Baby

The first goal of this study was to describe the content of mothers' views about their infants and families at the time of their infants' birth, and to compare and contrast the views of mothers from different ethnic backgrounds. A handful of studies on the transition to parenthood has focused on mothers' views about their infants, parenting, personal well-being (including views on new responsibilities and challenges), and family relationships (e.g., Fox, Bruce, & Combs-Orme, 2000; Harwood, McLean, & Durkin, 2007). However, few investigators have examined mothers' views about resources, including return to work, family income, and childcare (but see Kaitz, 2007), which may be a central theme in the views of mothers who face economic hardship and/or reside in mother-headed households.

To examine variation in mothers' views by ethnicity, we interviewed Chinese immigrants, Mexican immigrants, Dominican immigrants, and African American mothers. These groups are among the most prevalent and rapidly growing minority groups in the United States, and their unique sociocultural histories may shape mothers' views about parenthood. Furthermore, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and China are the top three countries of origin for foreign-born mothers in New York City (New York City Department of Planning, 2002).

Mexican immigrants are the fastest growing group of Latinos in the United States, comprising two thirds (66.9%) of the Latino population of the United States in 2002 (Ramirez & de la Cruz, 2003). In New York City, Mexicans showed higher rates of population growth than any other Latino immigrant group during the 1990s (Hernandez & Rivera-Batiz, 2003; Smith, 2005). Dominicans are the fourth-largest Latino group in the United States (Ramirez, 2004) and have a long history of immigrating to New York City. The Dominican population of New York rose from 332,713 to 554,638 between 1990 and 2000 (Hernandez & Rivera-Batiz, 2003). Chinese Americans comprise the largest Asian American group in New York City and nearly half of Asian American New Yorkers. From 1990 to 2000, the Chinese American population in New York City rose 61%, reaching a total of 357,243. Finally, African Americans, as a native-born group, have the longest history in the United States and in New York. With over 34 million African Americans residing in the United States, they comprise over 12.8% of the U.S. population. In New York City, the proportion of African Americans is even greater, at 26% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

Beyond these demographic statistics, these four ethnic groups are characterized by unique cultural histories, family structures and arrangements, and experiences in the United States that might come to be reflected in mothers' views at infants' births. Dominican and Mexican mothers might be most likely to talk about the larger family unit, based on the strong core value of *familismo* that characterizes Latinos (Contreras, Mangelsdorf, Rhodes, Diener, & Brunson, 1999; Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). They might also emphasize their parenting responsibilities more than mothers from African American and Chinese backgrounds because of the more gendered division of labor in Latino families and the primary responsibilities mothers have for the care of infants and children (Adams, Coltrane, & Parke, 2007; Denner & Dunbar, 2004; Garza, 2001; Gil & Vazquez, 1996; Ybarra, 1982).

In contrast, Chinese mothers might be more likely to talk about infants' learning and development, in light of the Confucian values around child achievement. Both immigrant Chinese mothers and Chinese mothers in China believe that high academic performance is the path to a successful life. They are found to place greater worth on education and intervene more in their children's learning than European American mothers (Chao, 1996). However, whether the Chinese emphasis on child development is already apparent at infants' births remains to be examined.

Finally, African American mothers might be most likely to emphasize resources (e.g., work, childcare, and family income) due to the relatively equitable distribution of childcare responsibilities and overlapping work and parental roles of African American households (Billingsley, 1992; Jarrett, Roy, & Burton, 2002; Eriksen, Yancey, & Eriksen, 1979; McAdoo, 1988; Downer & Mendez, 2005; McAdoo, 1981, 1986; McLanahan & Carlson, 2004; Roopnarine, Fouts, Lamb, & Lewis-Elligan, 2005). Because women in African American households also have relatively high levels of work and financial responsibilities, and are more likely to reside in female-headed households than other minority groups (McLoyd, Cauce, Takeuchi, & Wilson, 2000), these topics might be highly salient to these mothers at the birth of a new baby.

Alternatively, mothers from different ethnic groups might be largely similar in their views at parturition; cultural variation in parenting views might become pronounced only at later points in children's development. The importance of children's learning and achievement in Chinese families has been documented in parents with older children, and descriptions of familismo in Latinos and shared responsibilities in African American families are likewise based on studies of parents with older children. Therefore, whether mothers see the transition to parenthood through similar or different cultural lenses remains to be examined.

### Correlates of Mothers' Views

The second goal was to examine whether mothers' views vary with child characteristics (birth order, gender), mother characteristics (education and work status), and aspects of the mother-father relationship (marital status, father residency), as well as whether ethnicity might moderate these associations.

Mothers of firstborns might talk more about the unfamiliar parenting role and their new infants, whereas mothers of laterborn infants might speak more about family adjustment, for example by emphasizing the assimilation of the new baby into the larger family unit. In addition, Chinese ethnicity might moderate the effects of infant birth order on mothers' views, as the birth of the first child may be more central in the Chinese cultural context than in Western society (Lu, 2001). Confucian philosophy constructs family and filial piety as a central value and the ultimate purpose of marriage is to give birth to a child who will someday carry on the family line (Yeh & Bedford, 2003). Motherhood has been described as the most salient role for women (Lu & Lin, 1998) and as a woman's culturally sanctioned, legitimate occupation (Chen, 1978), exceeding the importance of personal needs (Chong, 1995). Moreover, China's one-child policy might affect the views of even mothers who immigrate to the United States and continue to be concerned about their firstborn children.

Mothers might also express different views for their infant boys than girls, and ethnicity might also moderate gender-based differences in mothers' views. African American mothers of boys might express more concerns in the area of child development,

in light of the risks encountered by African American boys in lower-income neighborhoods (Crooks, 2005; Fitzpatrick & Boldizar, 1993). Chinese mothers of boys might also be more likely to talk about child development because of the heightened value placed on male children in Chinese society (Arnold & Liu, 1986; Shuzhuo, Chuzhu, & Feldman, 2004).

In terms of mothers' education and work status, working mothers and mothers with lower levels of education might be more likely to talk about resources. There is evidence that mothers' work status relates to higher maternal concerns when infants are three months old and that mothers with lower incomes express concerns about having the resources to meet the needs of their infants (e.g., buying food and medicine for baby; finding a place to live; paying for childcare; Kaitz, 2007).

Finally, father residency and marital status might relate to mothers' views. Mothers who are not married and those who do not reside with the fathers of their children might be more likely to emphasize resources and less likely to emphasize the family unit than mothers who live with the fathers of their infants. In contrast, married mothers with resident partners might talk more about parenting and the family. Unmarried women experience lower levels of self-efficacy than married women, the cost of becoming a parent is greater for unmarried women (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2003), and couples who have close marriages are more likely to hold positive attitudes about their parenting roles (Cox, Owen, Lewis, & Henderson, 1989). However, it may also be that African American status moderates links between marital status/father residency and mothers' views, perhaps due to their lower rates of marriage and residency compared to Chinese, Dominican, and Mexican immigrants (Tamis-LeMonda, Kahana Kalman, Yoshikawa, & Niwa, 2008).

### Current Study

To summarize, we report on the views of Mexican immigrant, Dominican immigrant, African American, and Chinese mothers at the birth of their infants. This work advances the parenting literature by describing the content of mothers' views in ethnic and racial groups that have largely been ignored in the literature (Tamis-LeMonda, Way, et al., 2008). We investigate whether mothers' views vary with cultural characterizations of the four groups, or instead, whether mothers express similar views at the transition to a new infant. We also ask whether child and family circumstances, including child gender and birth order, mother work status and education, and marital status and father residency relate to mothers' views, and whether ethnicity moderates certain of these associations.

## METHODS

### Participants

Participants were 380 low-income mothers (56 Chinese, 115 Dominican, 112 African American, and 97 Mexican) of newborn infants balanced for gender (192 boys, 188 girls). Eligibility for participation included mother being over 18 years of age, living in the catchment area of the study, and having a healthy term infant (birth weight over 2,500 grams). Mothers also had to self-identify as Dominican, Mexican, Chinese, or

U.S.-born African American. Chinese mothers were primarily from Fuchou County in China (100% first generation), and the Dominican mothers were mostly from Santo Domingo (79.3% first generation), the capital of the Dominican Republic. Mexican mothers were primarily from the state of Puebla, one of the poorer states of Mexico (97% first generation). On average, Chinese mothers had been in the United States 4.07 years ( $SD = 2.71$ ), with a range of a few months to 15 years; Dominican mothers had been in the United States on average 9.09 years ( $SD = 6.17$ , range 1 to 25 years), and Mexican mothers had been in the United States on average 6.87 years ( $SD = 4.96$ , range less than one year to 24 years). All African American mothers were U.S. born.

Mothers ranged in age from 18 to 46 years ( $M = 26.24$ ,  $SD = 6.20$ ). However, because inclusionary criteria included being at least 18 years of age, there were too few mothers who were teens to warrant analyses by teen status. Over 90% of mothers were between 20 and 40 years at time of their infant's birth. Fathers ranged in age from 18 to 50 years ( $M = 29.80$ ,  $SD = 7.59$ ). There were no ethnic differences in parental age. Across groups families had an average of one other child, and 41% of the infants were firstborn (range 33 to 52% across the four groups). The average earnings in the year prior to giving birth for Chinese families was \$22,501, Dominican families \$23,580, Mexican families \$18,410, and African American families \$20,880.

At the time of the birth interview, mothers had completed 10.55 ( $SD = 3.06$ ) years of education on average, but this varied by ethnicity. Chinese mothers had completed 9.18 years ( $SD = 2.74$ ) on average, with 32% of Chinese mothers having completed high school or more. Mexican mothers had completed 8.00 years ( $SD = 3.42$ ) of education on average, with 45% having completed high school or more. Among Dominican mothers, the average years of schooling was 12.13 years ( $SD = 2.03$ ), with 75% having at least a high school degree. African American mothers averaged 11.91 years ( $SD = 1.67$ ), with 71% having completed high school. The different rates of schooling as well as high school education completion across groups were statistically significant,  $F(3, 367) = 64.98$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\chi^2(3, N = 371) = 25.45$ ,  $p < .001$ . During the year preceding their child's birth, 73% of Chinese mothers, 70% of Dominican mothers, 60% of African American mothers, and 60% of Mexican mothers were employed,  $\chi^2(3, N = 371) = 5.27$ ,  $ns$  (see Table 1 for additional demographic information). Of the 380 mothers interviewed at infants' births, 11 mothers did not complete the open-ended interviews about their views, leaving 369 mothers in the final analyses.

## Procedures

Mothers were recruited from three public hospitals in New York City over a one-year period. Eligible mothers were identified by their physicians, and research

**TABLE 1**  
Participant Demographics

	Dominican	African American	Chinese	Mexican	$\chi^2(3, N = 369)$
Female	50%	46%	48%	53%	.87, $p < .833$
Firstborn	39%	33%	52%	32%	7.26, $p < .064$
Mother worked in past year	70%	60%	73%	60%	5.27, $p < .153$
Mother completed high school	75%	71%	32%	45%	25.35, $p < .001$
Married	33%	9%	59%	34%	46.36, $p < .001$
Father residing with mother	61%	46%	95%	87%	61.58, $p < .001$

personnel were introduced to mothers by hospital staff. Interviewers approached mothers in the postpartum hospital ward and briefly described the study to prospective families. The project was described as a study of the early development of ethnically diverse infants and families living in New York City. Participants were provided with an oral explanation of the consent agreement prior to signing consents (so as to ensure parents with lower literacy levels understood the study requirements).

During a 40-minute interview at the hospital, mothers were asked a set of questions including mothers' and fathers' contact information, educational and occupational background, age, ethnic background, marital status, and father residency. At the end of the interview, mothers were asked three open-ended questions to tap their views: (1) How do you think things will change in your life and your family now that you have a baby? (2) What are your hopes and plans for your child and family over the next year? (3) Do you have any concerns right now about your child or family? Mothers' responses were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim by native speakers for coding. All interviews were conducted in the language of mothers' choice (English, Spanish, or Chinese). The interviews took place in privacy directly at the mothers' bedsides in the hospital maternity ward.

### Coding

Each maternal response to the three questions (based on the verbatim transcripts) was classified into one of four categories: (1) *Child Development*, which included statements that emphasized the infant's health, physical/motor development, cognitive development, language/literacy, and child education; (2) *Parenting*, which included statements about daily routines and responsibilities, the parenting role, mother-child relationship, father-child relationship, and mothers' adjustment to parenting; (3) *Family*, which included statements about interdependence among family members, the affective climate of the family, and general family well-being; and (4) *Resources*, which included statements about economic conditions, work, living conditions, child care, and mothers' and fathers plans for education and schooling (see Table 2).

A codable unit was defined as a statement that emphasized a unique theme within each of the four categories. For example, a mother who said, "I hope I can find child-care," "I want to return to school," and "I think there will be added expenses to the family," received a score of 3 under the category Resources. A mother who said, "I hope my child is healthy" and "I am concerned about him learning English" would receive a score of 2 under the category of Child Development, and so forth. The numbers of different topics raised under each of the four categories served as primary measures in analyses.

Coding of transcripts was conducted by a team of five coders (two bilingual native Chinese speakers, two bilingual native Spanish speakers, one monolingual English speaker). Coders initially worked together in the development of unique codes for mothers' statements, and then independently coded a set of 15 transcripts prior to finalizing the coding system. Once this process was complete, reliabilities were conducted on a random sample of 30% of transcripts from mothers in each ethnic group. These randomly sampled transcripts were then coded independently by two coders. Coders achieved 90% agreement across all categories.

**TABLE 2**  
Themes in Mother's Views

Theme	Definition	Example
Child Development	• Physical and Motor Development (References to physical development or motor development of the baby)	"I hope she learns to walk this year."
	• Child Learning (References to cognitive development or characteristics that are based on the achievement of cognitive skills)	"I want him to be smart. I want him to be able to learn things quickly and easily."
	• Child Language/Literacy (Statements about the baby's language learning or literacy)	"I want him to learn how to speak both Mandarin and English."
	• Child Education/Schooling (Statements about plans, beliefs, values, or hopes regarding the baby's schooling or education)	"I hope that she excels in school in the future. I want her to get a good education."
	• Social/Emotional Development (References to aspects of baby's social-emotional development such as temperament, self-regulation and self-esteem)	"I want him to realize his own goals and dreams, to be patient and happy."
	• Child Health (Statements related to wanting the best for target child)	"I hope he is a healthy baby and does not grow up autistic like his brother."
	• Child Well-being (Any general statements related to wanting the best for family)	"That's he's okay, that he develops well."
Parenting	• Parenting Role (Reflection of being a parent to this new baby. Includes parenting practices, beliefs, values, attitudes, hopes, dreams or concerns related to child rearing)	"I am responsible for another baby and need to ensure that she gets the proper care."
	• Routines & Responsibilities (Any mention of regular schedule or time management in mother's life or family life; added tasks or activities now that baby is born and statements regarding coparenting)	"Now I have to get up earlier so that I can dedicate more time to my child. I won't have as much time for my own things."
	• Mother-Child Relationship (Statements about the relationship between mother and baby)	"My most important goal is to provide love to my child and have good communication."
	• Father-Child Relationship (Statements about the relationship between father and baby)	"I hope that her father will be around more to spend time with her, I want them to love each other."
	• Mother-Father Relationship (Statement about the relationship between mother and father of target child)	"I believe that having this baby will bring my husband and me closer."
Family	• Interdependence Among Family Members (Statements about relationships among family members)	"There will be an addition to the family, this will be the continuation of a new generation . . . we will have to depend on the family more."
	• Affect (Any mention of emotional changes related to mother or family members around the birth of the baby)	"I think I'll be happier now and the family will be more vibrant."
	• Family Well-being (Any general statements related to wanting the best for family)	"That things go well for all of us."

(Continued)

**TABLE 2**  
(Continued)

Theme	Definition	Example
Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult Education/Schooling or Literacy (Any mention of mother or father's plans or desires related to further education)</li> <li>• Child Care (Any mention of child care plans or concerns such as costs, quality, and schedule)</li> <li>• Economic Conditions (Statements about the family's economic well-being or economic pressures)</li> <li>• Work (Statements about parents' job/work, job loss or change, maternity leave, wanting to return to work)</li> <li>• Living Situation/Location (Descriptions, needs, or desires related to housing quality, moves, living arrangements)</li> </ul>	<p>"I want to go back to school and learn English so in the future I can help him with his homework."</p> <p>"I'm worried about having to find a good sitter or a good child care center; I don't know whether I could afford it."</p> <p>"The economic burden will be a bit heavier now that we have another baby."</p> <p>"I need to get back to work as soon as possible."</p> <p>"We want to move to a bigger apartment and to a safer neighborhood."</p>

## RESULTS

Findings are reported first for mothers' views overall and then by ethnicity. These analyses were based on repeated-measures MANOVAs, with category as a within-subjects factor and ethnicity as a between-subjects factor. We then explored variation in mothers' views by child gender and birth order, mother education, mothers' work status, marital status, and father residency in ANOVAs, with demographic measures serving as between-subjects factors and each of the separate view categories serving as a dependent variable. (These analyses enabled us to focus on the two-way interactions between ethnicity and demographic measures without repeating the main effect for view category, main effect for ethnicity, and view Category  $\times$  Ethnicity interaction already examined in the omnibus MANOVA.)

### Mothers' Views Across Ethnic Groups

On average, mothers provided 7.03 responses ( $SD = 3.80$ ), with a range of 0 to 25, which could readily be classified into the four categories of Child Development, Parenting, Family, and Resources.

A 4 (category)  $\times$  4 (ethnic group) MANOVA was conducted to examine whether certain categories were more prevalent than others, as well as whether mothers from the different ethnic backgrounds varied in the number of responses they provided overall and/or in the number of statements made in each of the four categories. In terms of ethnicity, mothers from the four groups did not differ in their number of responses overall (Chinese = 6.75, Mexican = 6.93, African American = 7.09, Dominican = 7.18), which was reflected in the nonsignificant main effect for mothers' ethnicity,  $F(3,368) = 0.19$ , *ns*.

A main effect for category,  $F(3, 1095) = 5.72$ ,  $p < .001$ , indicated that as a group, mothers spoke the most about Family ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ), followed by talking about Resources



**TABLE 3**  
Theme Category by Ethnicity

	Dominican ( <i>n</i> = 112)		African American ( <i>n</i> = 110)		Chinese ( <i>n</i> = 56)		Mexican ( <i>n</i> = 91)		Total ( <i>N</i> = 369)			
	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )	Min	Max	<i>M</i>	( <i>SD</i> )
Child development	1.33	(1.22)	1.49	(1.34)	1.75	(1.48)	1.59	(1.39)	.00	6.00	1.51	(1.34)
Parenting	1.86	(1.55)	1.73	(1.51)	1.80	(1.53)	1.80	(1.54)	.00	8.00	1.80	(1.52)
Family	1.93	(1.29)	1.963	(1.54)	1.73	(1.09)	2.27	(1.62)	.00	8.00	1.99	(1.43)
Resources	2.06	(2.10)	1.95	(1.69)	1.46	(1.55)	1.26	(1.65)	.00	10.00	1.74	(1.82)

and Parenting ( $M = 1.74$  and  $1.80$ , respectively,  $SD = 1.82$  and  $1.52$ ). Surprisingly, mothers spoke least about Child Development ( $M = 1.51$ ,  $SD = 1.34$ ).

Finally, a significant interaction between ethnicity and category,  $F(9, 1095) = 3.44$ ,  $p < .001$ , revealed that mothers differed in their relative emphases on the categories of Child Development, Resources, and Family (see Table 3). (They did not differ in how much they spoke about Parenting.) When MANOVAs were tested with the covariates of child gender, child birth order, mother work status, mother marital status, father residency, and mothers' education level, the Category  $\times$  Ethnicity interaction retained its significance,  $F(9, 993) = 2.93$ ,  $p < .01$ . Thus, ethnic differences in mothers' views were not explained by demographic factors.

Further examination of the Category  $\times$  Ethnicity interaction revealed that Chinese and African American mothers were more likely to talk about Child Development than Mexican and Dominican mothers. Within this overarching category, there was an emphasis on infants' learning and physical/motor development. Mothers spoke about the importance of learning words, numbers, colors, and so forth in early development (e.g., Chinese mother: "He should be cultivated since he is very young. I want to teach him many things, teach him colors, how to count"), as well as children's long-term achievements (e.g., African American mother: "I want to help him to achieve, learn, and go far in life"). They spoke of short- and long-term physical and motor accomplishments as well: "I hope she learns to walk this year" (African American mother) and "I want him to be strong and do well in athletics (Chinese mother). Goals for children's education were also expressed. For example, an African American mother said, "My goal is to instill in her that education is top priority," and a Chinese mother said, "We didn't have chances to receive higher education in China, so we want to let our children be well educated."

Mothers of African American and Dominican backgrounds were more likely to talk about Resources. Within this broad category, both African American and Dominican mothers often spoke about their living situation: "I hope to move out of the city to raise this child in a better environment" and "I want to get our own place" (African American mothers); "We want to move to a bigger apartment and to a safer neighborhood" (Dominican mother). In addition, mothers talked about their own educational aspirations: "I hope to get my education and get to enjoy that."; "I'm going to continue going to school until I finish, I'm doing that for her."; "I hope that everything goes the way I planned it with me finishing school."; "I want everything to work out so that I could get back to my schooling." An exception to the emphasis on Resources by Dominican and African American mothers was the tendency of a number of Mexican mothers to

discuss their living situation in terms of issues surrounding immigration ("I hope we can stay here in this country.").

Finally, Mexican immigrant mothers were most likely to talk about the Family as compared to mothers in the other groups. Statements about Family often reflected the importance of general family well-being and affect ("We have always been a happy family, but now that he is with us we can be even happier."; "I hope his siblings will enjoy the new baby."). Dominican immigrant mothers followed Mexicans in their talk about Family, followed by African American and Chinese mothers, who spoke of Family the least.

### Correlates of Mothers' Views

We next asked whether child birth order, mother characteristics (education, work status prior to infants' births), and the mother-father relationship (e.g., father residency, marital status) would relate to mothers' views, and if so, whether ethnicity would moderate these associations. The role of predictors in mothers' views was tested in a series of univariate ANOVAs conducted for each of the categories and each predictor separately, with ethnicity as a between-subjects factor. By including mothers' ethnicity together with target predictors (e.g., child gender), we were able to examine whether ethnicity interacted with demographic indicators to explain how much mothers spoke about each specific topic. Because child gender, mothers' years in the United States, and marital status did not relate to mothers' views, and their associations to mothers' views were not moderated by ethnicity, these measures were dropped from analyses. In addition, maternal age was not associated with any measures, and thus was not included in analyses.

*Child firstborn status.* Children's firstborn status did not relate to the category of Child Development, nor did it interact with ethnicity, as indicated in nonsignificant main effects for firstborn status and the interaction with ethnicity in a 2 (firstborn status)  $\times$  4 (ethnicity) ANOVA. However, firstborn status was associated with mothers' emphasis on Parenting as well as Family. Mothers of firstborn infants talked more about Parenting ( $M = 2.23$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ) than mothers of laterborns ( $M = 1.52$ ,  $SD = 1.43$ ),  $F(1, 341) = 16.55$ ,  $p < .001$ . In particular, mothers of firstborn infants were more likely to talk about their new parenting roles and responsibilities (e.g., "I will have to get used to waking up very early for the new baby and getting along without any sleep"). In contrast, mothers of laterborn infants talked more about Family ( $M = 2.28$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ) than mothers of firstborn infants ( $M = 1.55$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ),  $F(1, 341) = 18.01$ ,  $p < .001$ . This emphasis on family by mothers of laterborn infants was explained by mothers talking about relationships among family members (e.g., "I hope the baby gets along with his older brother."; "Having another baby in the family . . . we will have to depend on the family more; we need to depend more on my mother taking care of him.").

When this cross-over was analyzed in a 2 (category - parenting vs. family)  $\times$  2 (firstborn status)  $\times$  4 (ethnicity) ANOVA, there was a significant Category  $\times$  Firstborn status interaction,  $F(4, 1388) = 11.197$ ,  $p < .001$ , as well as a significant Ethnicity  $\times$  Firstborn status  $\times$  category three-way interaction,  $F(4, 341) = 12.72$ ,  $p < .001$ . Specifically, although mothers of firstborns in all four ethnic groups emphasized Parenting more than mothers of laterborns, the emphasis on Family by mothers of laterborns was evidenced in the responses of African American, Dominican, and Mexican mothers, but not Chinese

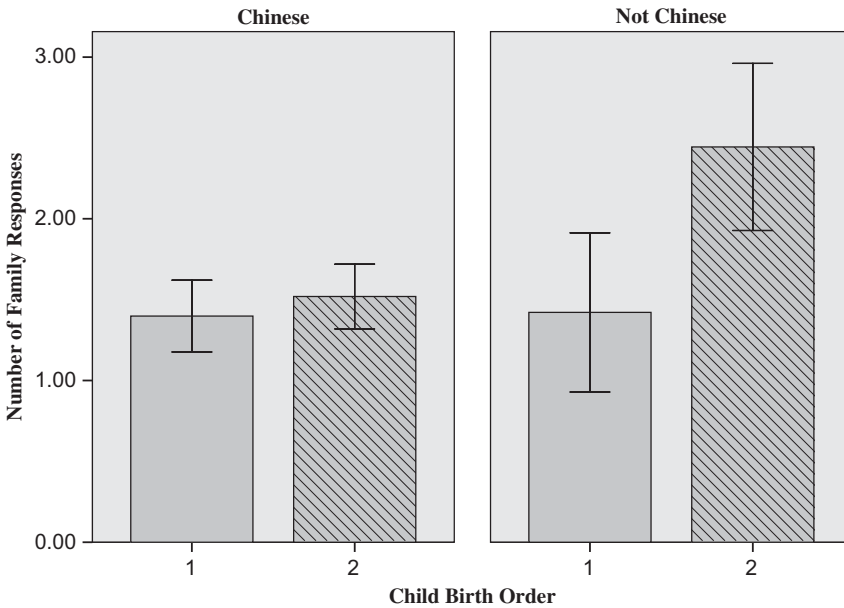
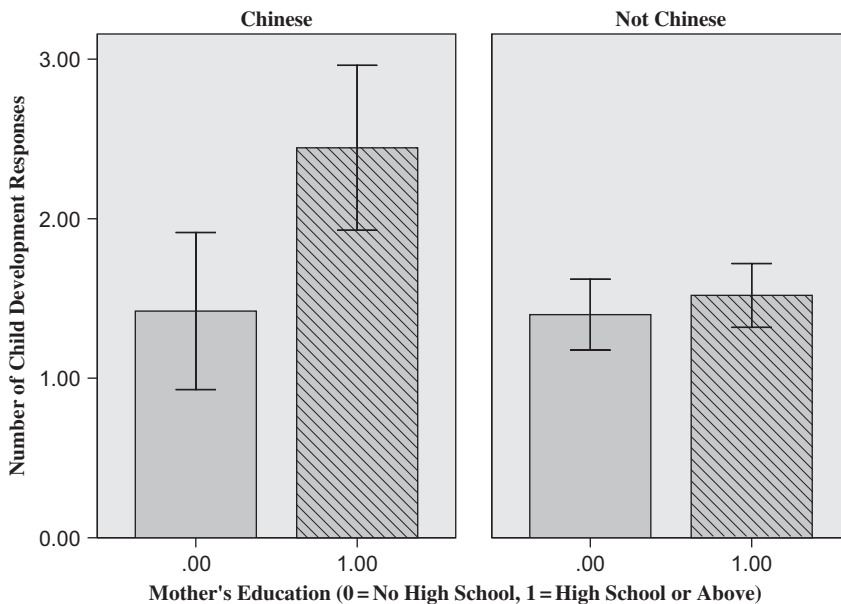


FIGURE 1

Number of statements about Family made by mothers of firstborn versus laterborn infants by Chinese immigrant status.

mothers. Chinese mothers of firstborns were just as likely to talk about Family as Chinese mothers of laterborns (see Figure 1). This effect could not be explained by exceedingly high rates of firstborn children in Chinese families, because 48% of Chinese children were laterborn.

*Mothers' education and work status.* A 2 (mother education status - no high school vs. high school)  $\times$  4 (ethnicity) ANOVA for the category of Child Development revealed a significant main effect for mothers' education,  $F(1, 359) = 7.04, p < .001$ , and a marginally significant Education  $\times$  Ethnicity interaction,  $F(3, 359) = 2.57, p < .06$ . Mothers with a high school education talked about Child Development more than those without a high school education ( $M = 1.60$  and  $1.40, SD = 1.36$  and  $1.32$ , respectively). The Education  $\times$  Ethnicity interaction was explained by the fact that education differences in talk about Child Development were most pronounced in Chinese mothers. When Chinese status was examined as a contrast, the Chinese Status  $\times$  Education interaction was significant,  $F(1, 363) = 4.86, p < .05$ . Chinese mothers with a high school education were more likely to talk about Child Development than those without a high school education ( $M = 2.44, SD = 1.10$  vs.  $M = 1.42, SD = 1.52$ ), respectively,  $t(54) = 2.56, p < .05$ . In contrast, the difference in talk about Child Development between mothers with a high school versus no high school education was not significant in the overall mean of the other groups (overall  $M = 1.51, SD = 1.35$  vs.  $M = 1.40, SD = 1.26$ ),  $t(309) = -.80, ns$  (see Figure 2). These findings were maintained when mothers' education was treated as a continuous variable. Specifically, Chinese mothers with more years of education spoke more about Child Development ( $r = .37, p < .01$ ), whereas this was not the case for Mexican immigrants, Dominican immigrants, or African Americans ( $r = .13, .03$ , and  $.07$ , respectively).



**FIGURE 2**

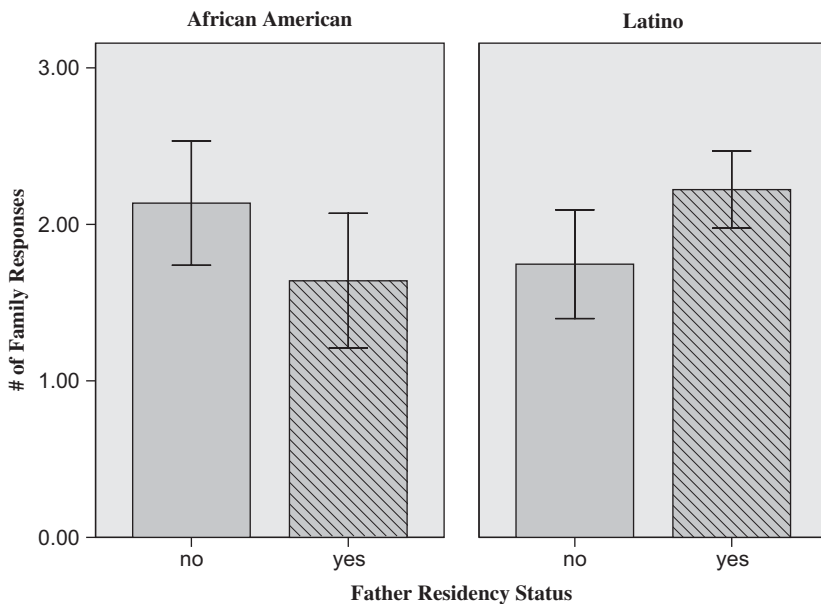
Number of statements about Child Development made by mothers with and without at least a high school education by Chinese immigrant status.

For the category of Resources, mothers with a high school education were more likely to discuss resources ( $M = 1.92$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ) than those without ( $M = 1.49$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ),  $t(365) = 2.23$ ,  $p < .05$ , and there was no interaction of mother education with ethnicity. The association between maternal education and Resources maintained when mothers' education was treated as a continuous variable,  $r = .19$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Finally, the 2 (work status)  $\times$  4 (ethnicity) ANOVA for the dependent measure of Parenting category did not yield any effects for mothers' work status, ethnicity, or the interaction between the two.

*Father residency.* Because all but three Chinese fathers resided with the mothers of their infants, Chinese families were omitted from analyses of father residency. In addition, only 13 Mexican fathers were nonresident. Therefore, analyses of father residency were based on the contrast of Latin American status (grouping Mexicans and Dominicans together), and represented a contrast between Latinos and African Americans. A 2 (father residency status)  $\times$  2 (Latin-African American) ANOVA for the dependent variable of Child Development did not yield any significant differences by father residency, Latino status, or their interaction.

In contrast, for categories of both Family and Parenting, Latino status interacted with father residency to yield contrasting patterns of prediction for the two categories. Specifically, Latina mothers spoke more about Family when they resided with the fathers of their children than when they did not ( $M = 2.22$ ,  $SD = 1.48$  and  $M = 1.74$ ,  $SD = 1.33$ ). This pattern maintained in both Mexican immigrant and Dominican immigrant mothers when they were considered separately. In contrast, African American mothers who did not reside with the fathers of their children spoke more about Family than



**FIGURE 3**

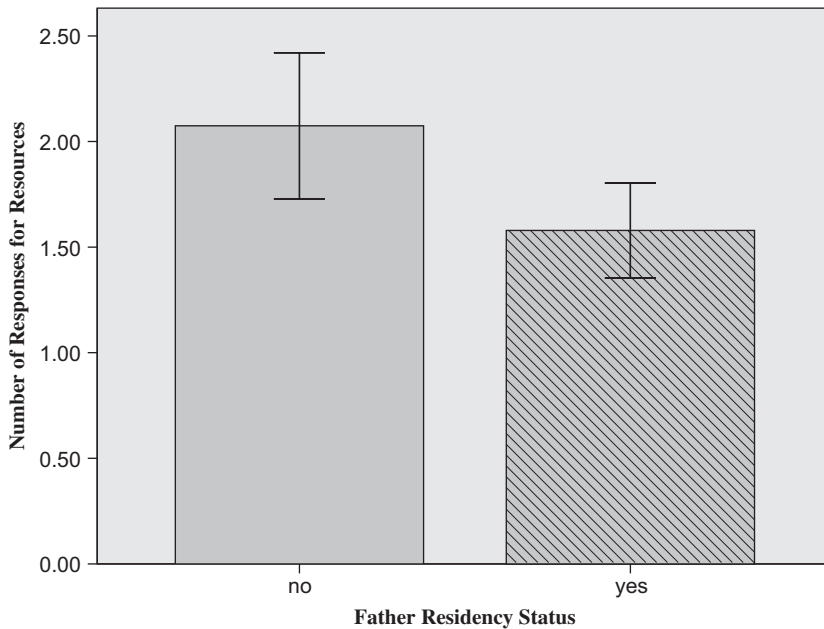
Number of statements about Family made by mothers who do versus do not reside with the fathers of their children by African American and Latin American mothers. (Patterns do not differ for Mexican and Dominican mothers, and therefore these two groups are collapsed; Chinese immigrant mothers virtually all reside with fathers and so are not included.)

those who resided with the fathers of their children ( $M = 2.14$ ,  $SD = 1.52$  and  $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ) (see Figure 3). Rather, African American mothers who resided with the fathers of their children spoke more about Parenting ( $M = 2.30$ ,  $SD = 1.65$ ) than those who did not reside with the fathers of their children ( $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = 1.45$ ), whereas father residency was unrelated to talk about Parenting in Latina mothers ( $M = 1.71$ ,  $SD = 1.69$  for father nonresident;  $M = 1.76$ ,  $SD = 1.29$  for father resident). This crossover was reflected in a significant three-way interaction between Latina status, father residency, and category (Family versus Parenting),  $F(2, 308) = 8.65$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Finally, the ANOVA for Resources yielded a main effect for father residency, such that mothers who did not reside with the fathers of their children were more likely to talk about Resources than those who did not ( $M = 2.07$ ,  $SD = 1.90$  vs.  $M = 1.58$ ,  $SD = 1.76$ ,  $F(1, 308) = 5.34$ ,  $p < .05$ ) (see Figure 4). This pattern did not vary by Latino status, and it was evidenced in both Mexican immigrant and Dominican immigrant mothers when analyzed separately.

## DISCUSSION

Mothers' views at the time surrounding the birth of a new infant are thought to pave the way for later family adjustment, maternal well-being, and mothers' responsiveness at later periods in child development (Heinicke, Diskin, Ramsey-Klee, & Given, 1983; Heinicke & Guthrie, 1992; Van Egeren, 2003). However, research on mothers' views at



**FIGURE 4**

Number of statements about Resources made by mothers who do versus do not reside with the fathers of their children. (Chinese immigrant mothers virtually all reside with fathers and so are not included.)

this important transition has largely ignored the experiences of mothers from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This study addresses this gap by describing the views of Mexican immigrant, Dominican immigrant, Chinese immigrant, and African American mothers who were interviewed hours after the births of their infants.

In many ways, the current sample of relatively low-income, minority mothers spoke about topics that are universally important to all mothers as indicated by prior studies with primarily European American mothers from middle-income backgrounds (e.g., Harwood et al, 2007; Kaitz, 2007): Child Development, Parenting, Family, and Resources. Surprisingly, however, these mothers spoke the least about their infants' development, despite having given birth only hours earlier. Instead, mothers' views appeared to be framed by the broader circumstances of their lives, and their low-income status might be one reason that an emphasis on Resources outweighed an emphasis on Child Development. Alternatively, issues surrounding infant development may not be as central to mothers' views during the newborn period.

In addition, mothers from the four ethnic groups varied in the contents of their views, and ethnicity moderated associations between various demographic measures and mothers' views. Consistent with the literature and as hypothesized, immigrant Chinese mothers were most likely to talk about their infants' development, especially in areas of cognitive development, physical/motor development, and children's future education. This emphasis on education accords with studies of Chinese parents of older children, who place great value on parents' role in the education and training of their children, both academically and in other arenas (Chao, 1996). This research also

extends this work by documenting Chinese mothers' emphasis on child development in the first hours of their new infant's life. African American mothers also spoke of hopes for their infants' development, particularly in terms of education. Others also report high aspirations for and/or value placed on children's educational attainments by African American parents (Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Draper, 2002; Hill, 2001; Suizzo, Robinson, & Pahlke, 2008).

Nonetheless, despite the similar emphases by African American and Chinese mothers on child development, the motivations underlying these hopes may differ. Chinese children are characterized as excelling at school and are often typecast as the ideal student. Chinese mothers consider children's achievements as a reflection on their own success, and Confucian principles of achievement and life success might present a cultural root to such emphases. Moreover, Chinese families often immigrate to the United States to provide their infants with educational opportunities (Qin, *in press*), and these goals are evident from the views expressed by the Chinese immigrant mothers in this study. In contrast, African American children have a long history of being at risk for school performance (e.g., Connell, Spencer, & Aber, 1994), and African American mothers are confronted with the challenges of overcoming obstacles to their children's achievement. The birth of their infants presents a promising starting point for mothers to express hopes for their children's development despite potential barriers to those goals.

Perhaps the risks faced by many African American children may also explain why African American mothers were more likely to talk about Resources than other mothers, with Dominicans following close behind on this topic. African American and Dominican mothers spoke about work, childcare, and aspirations for moving to better communities. In contrast, the more recently arriving immigrant mothers from Mexico and China were less likely to talk about resources, particularly in these areas. It may be that the newer immigrant groups of Mexican and Chinese may not feel the pressures surrounding resources in the same way, as their living situation in the United States offers economic and living conditions that exceed those experienced in their countries of origin. For example, research indicates that despite experiences of poverty, Mexican immigrants perceive opportunities for upward mobility in the United States (e.g., Bullock & Waugh, 2005). Mothers from these groups may also lack the opportunity to further their education when they relocate to the United States. Alternatively, Dominican and African American mothers may express more concerns about their return to school because they are less likely than Mexican and Chinese mothers to reside with other adults and family members who could provide reliable childcare for their infants. A study of labor force participation among 8,000 ethnically diverse families residing in New York City showed that living with coresident adults increased participation of mothers of young children in the labor market (Rosenbaum & Gilbertson, 1995). Similar patterns may also occur with respect to mothers' participation in education programs.

Mexican immigrant mothers spoke about Family more often than mothers of other backgrounds, especially regarding the health and well-being of family members and the integration of the new infant into the family unit. Dominican immigrant mothers also emphasized issues related to the Family. Thus, the Latino value of *familismo* is already reflected in mothers' views at the birth of their infants. Mexican mothers' emphasis on family well-being and health may also be due their recent experience of immigration to a new country and perhaps lack of access to family healthcare (Clark & Redman, 2007).

In addition to ethnicity, a number of demographic measures, including child birth order, mothers' education, and father residency, related to mothers' views. These measures were associated with differential emphases on the four categories, and for many such patterns, ethnicity moderated associations. Specifically, mothers of first- versus laterborn children differed in their views; however, Chinese mothers showed patterns that were distinct from mothers in the other groups. Whereas mothers of firstborn infants were more likely to talk about Parenting, and mothers of laterborn infants were more likely to talk about Family relationships, this cross-over was not evident in the views of Chinese mothers. These patterns might be due to a heightened value placed on the firstborn child by Chinese parents (Lu, 2001).

In terms of education, mothers with a high school diploma were more likely to talk about Child Development than those without, and this emphasis was most pronounced in Chinese immigrant mothers (and least pronounced in African American mothers). One interpretation is that immigrant mothers with a high school education have fewer concerns about resources, and thus are more likely to focus on the development of their new baby. However, this was not the case, as we also found that mothers with high school diplomas were more likely to emphasize Resources than those without. Rather, it appears that immigrant mothers with and without a high school diploma are differentially thinking already about the development of their infants at their infants' births, and whether and how this difference plays out in family life and their subsequent parenting practices remains to be seen.

In terms of father residency, mothers who did not reside with the fathers of their children were more likely to talk about resources than those who did reside with the fathers of their children. Concerns about resources are likely to surface with mothers' increased responsibility to provide for their families economically, which may co-occur with father nonresidency. Father residency also related to mothers' talk about Parenting and Family, and ethnicity moderated these effects. For Latinas (Mexican and Dominican alike), father residency was associated with greater talk about the Family, whereas African American mothers emphasized Family more when fathers did not reside with them. It may be that for Latinas, the birth of a new infant highlights the father-mother relationship and larger family unit, especially in intact families. In contrast, African American mothers might speak of family relationships more when they do not live with the fathers of their new infants out of hopes to keep nonresident fathers invested in the new infant and larger family, or out of concerns about the family with the addition of a new infant.

This descriptive study is the first investigation of mothers' views at infants' birth in a diverse sample of minority and immigrant mothers. Mothers from different ethnic backgrounds, mothers of first- versus laterborn infants, and mothers with different levels of education and different relationships to the fathers of their infants vary in their views at this formative time. To the extent that these first views of parenthood frame parents' motivations and transitions to their new role, more research is needed on parenting processes from the first days of infants' lives, and even well before.

In terms of the practical implications of this work, the transition to parenthood represents an opportunity to support the larger universe of new parents who are highly motivated and receptive to advice (Fox et al., 2000; Helfer, 1987; Schmitt, 1987). Ethnically diverse, low-income families are particularly hard to reach, and it is notably challenging to recruit them into early interventions. In this way, healthcare professionals are in a unique position to connect to these families at the birth of their infants, when



mothers and fathers alike may be especially eager to receive support as new parents. Interventions at the transition to a new baby may help parents learn about and prepare for potential problems (Glade et al., 1995), and pediatricians, nurses, psychologists, and social workers can target parents' concerns across a range of areas (Daro, 1988). Over time, mothers' views and adaptations at the transition to a new baby relate to general family adjustment and mothers' responsiveness to their infants (Heinicke et al., 1983; Heinicke & Guthrie, 1996; Van Egeren, 2003). For example, family relationships and mother and father adaptations at the transition to a new baby predict the quality of parent-infant interactions, parents' effective encouragement of infant autonomy, and infant development during the first year postpartum (e.g., Heinicke et al., 1983; Heinicke & Guthrie, 1992). Moreover, interventions soon after infants' births have greater benefits than interventions later (Cowan & Cowan, 1995; Kermeen, 1995).

These findings also point to the importance of culturally sensitive guidance to new parents. Interventions during early stages of parenting should be responsive to the unique hopes, concerns, and expectations of individuals from different ethnic groups. For some new mothers, concerns about resources might predominate; for others, the transition to a new infant might raise questions about the adjustment of family members and demands on the family system; and for other mothers, thoughts about the development of the new baby might be at the fore. Practitioners who work with parents at the transition to a new baby should be aware of the unique concerns of individual parents, and modify their support and interventions accordingly.

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