

Gender differences in the relation between mothering behaviors and the emergence of child behavior problems among Mexican American preschoolers

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Behavior problems in early childhood



- Behavior problems peak at age 2 and generally decline thereafter.
- Behavior problems among boys decline less rapidly than among girls.
- Theories of gender differences
 - Differences in child skills (language, inhibitory control)
 - Differences in parent socialization practices

Behavior problems among Latinos



- Most available data comes from cross-sectional studies.
 - Levels of behavior problems similar
 - Risk factors for behavior problems similar
 - Some unique factors (acculturation, traditional values)
- No longitudinal data available on Latino children regarding emergence of behavior problems during early childhood.

Study questions



- What patterns of change in behavior problems are exhibited among Latino preschoolers?
- Are mothering qualities associated with patterns of change in behavior problems?
- Do these patterns differ by child gender?

Dallas Preschool Readiness Project



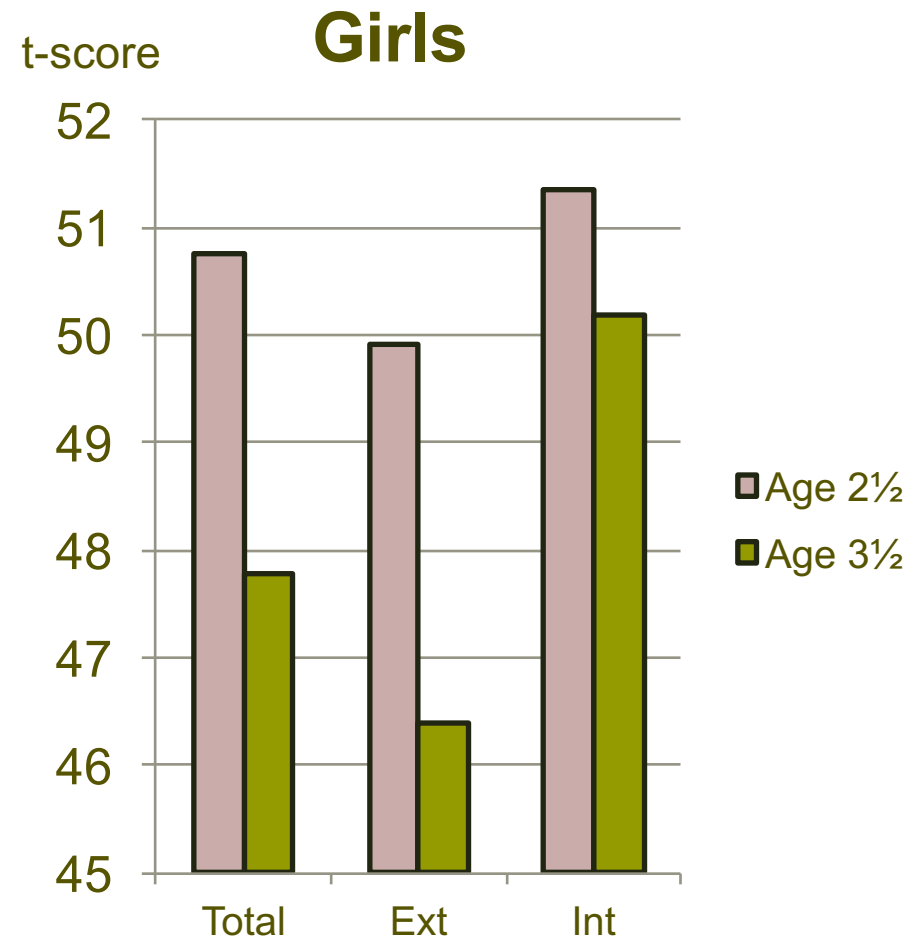
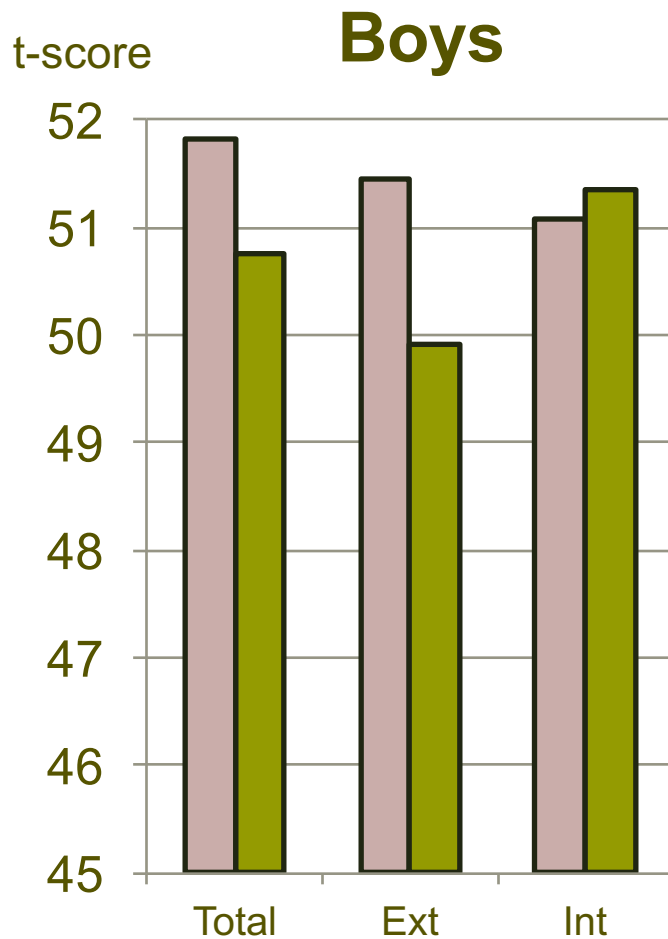
- 224 Latino preschoolers recruited at age 2½
 - 209 had a primary caregiver who was their mother and Latina
 - Visited in their homes twice (ages 2½ and 3½); 93% follow-up rate (n = 195)
- Demographic characteristics
 - Low income (57% below 100% federal poverty level)
 - Most (78%) foreign-born and Spanish-speaking (80%); primarily from Mexico (96%)

Measures



- **CBCL** (parent-reported at both ages)
- **Maternal behavior** (2½ yrs)
(NICHD SECCYD “Three Bags”)
 - Sensitivity
 - Cognitive stimulation
 - Positive regard
 - Negative regard
 - Detachment
 - Intrusiveness
- **Covariates**
 - Maternal education
 - Family income
 - Maternal acculturation
 - Child language skills
 - Child inhibitory control skills
 - Snack delay (both ages)
 - Wrapped gift (both ages)
 - Forbidden toy (age 2½ only)

Levels of problem behaviors at two ages

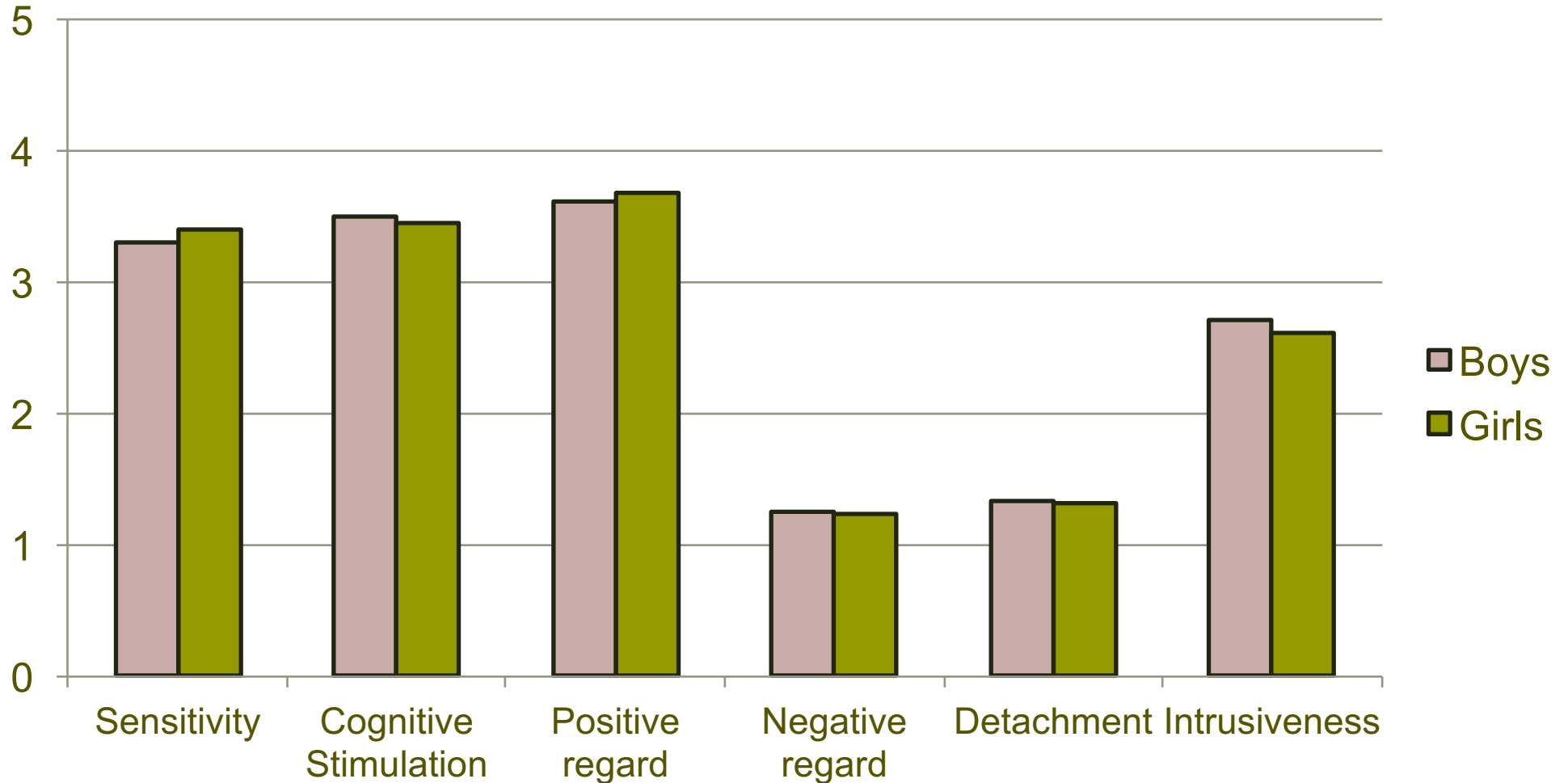


No gender differences at age 2½. Significantly higher externalizing problems among boys at age 3½.

Maternal behavior by child gender

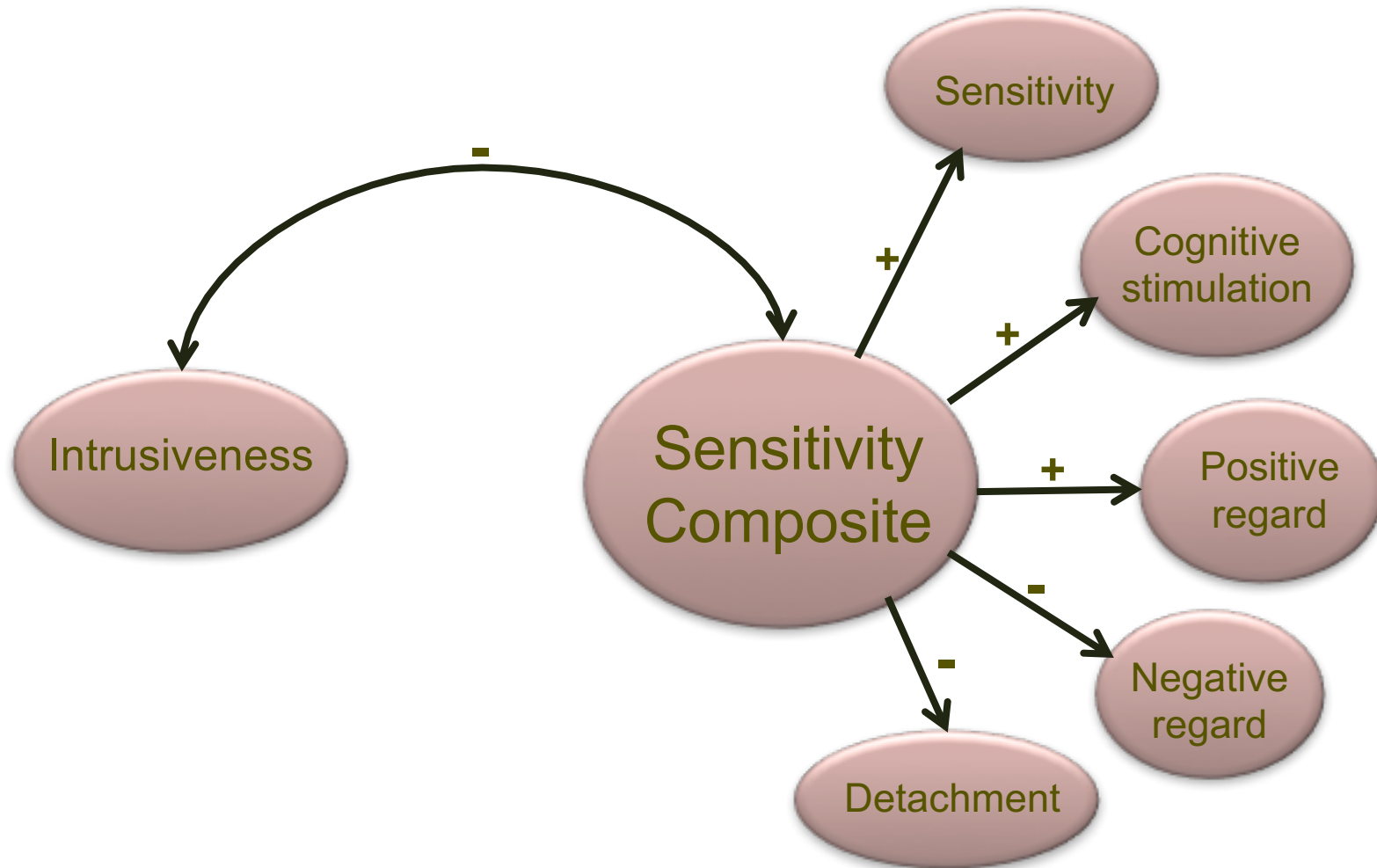


Avg score



No differences in maternal behavior by child gender.

Maternal behavior composite



$\chi^2 (2) = 4.11, p = .13, CFI = 1.0, TLI = 1.0, RMSEA = .07$

Predicting change in behavior problems

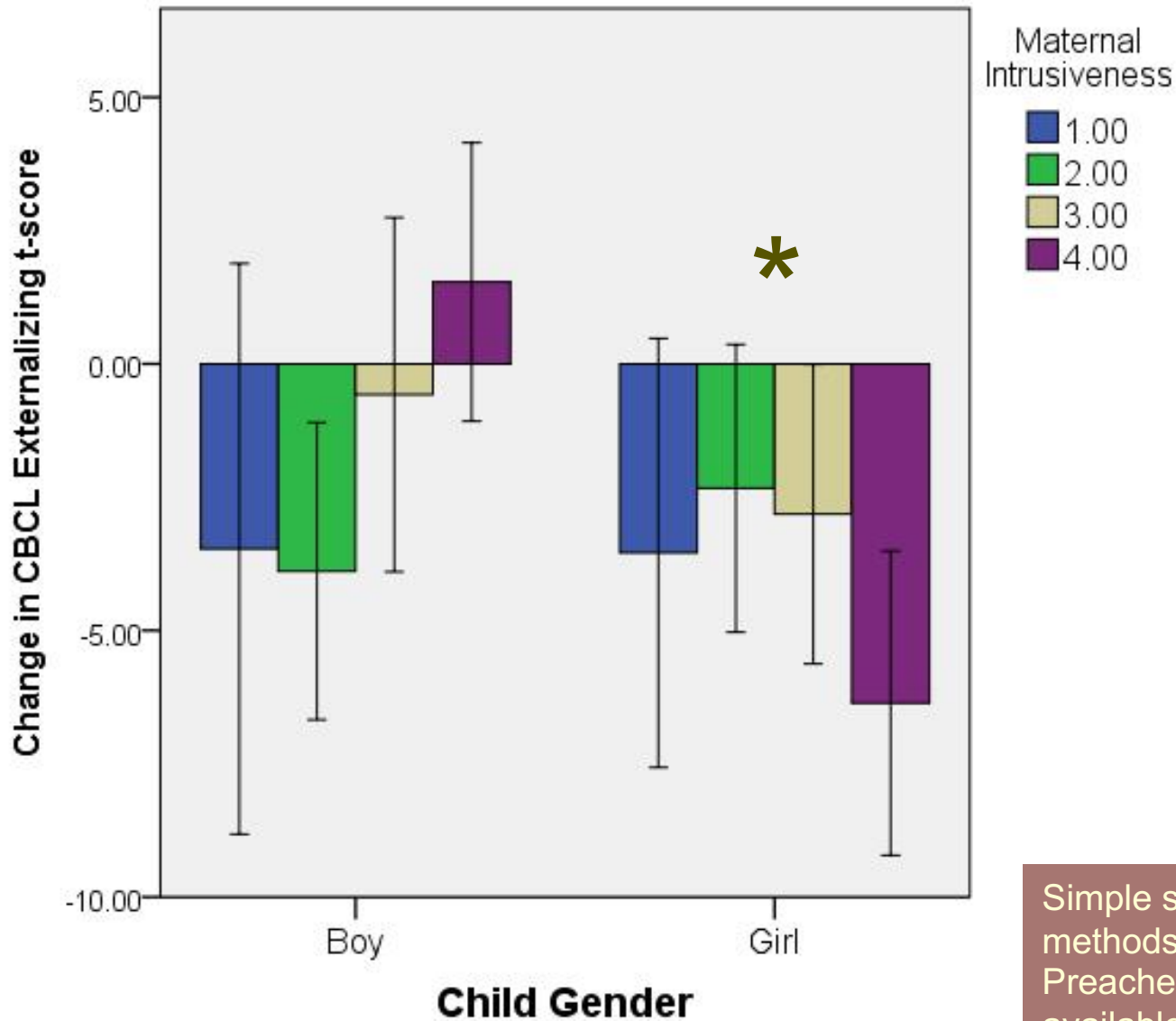


	Total Problems	Externalizing Problems	Internalizing Problems
Child gender (1 = girl)	ns	† (negative)	ns
Problem behavior (age 2½)	*** (positive)	*** (positive)	*** (positive)
Maternal sensitivity composite	ns	ns	ns
Maternal intrusiveness	* (positive)	** (positive)	ns
Sensitivity x gender	ns	ns	ns
Intrusiveness x gender	** (negative)	** (negative)	† (negative)

† $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Covariates: maternal education, family income-to-needs ratio, child receptive language ability, child inhibitory control skills at both ages 2½ and 3½

Maternal intrusiveness and change in externalizing problems



* $p < .05$

Simple slopes estimated using methods recommended by Preacher et al. (2006) and available from www.quantpsy.org.

What explains this?



- Girls vs. boys in high intrusiveness group
 - No differences in maternal behavior
 - No differences in child behavior/characteristics
- Girls vs. boys with high levels of externalizing problems at age 2½
 - Girls: n = 13; Boys: n = 21
 - Girls more likely to experience mod/high maternal intrusiveness (62% vs. 43%)

How is “intrusiveness” defined?

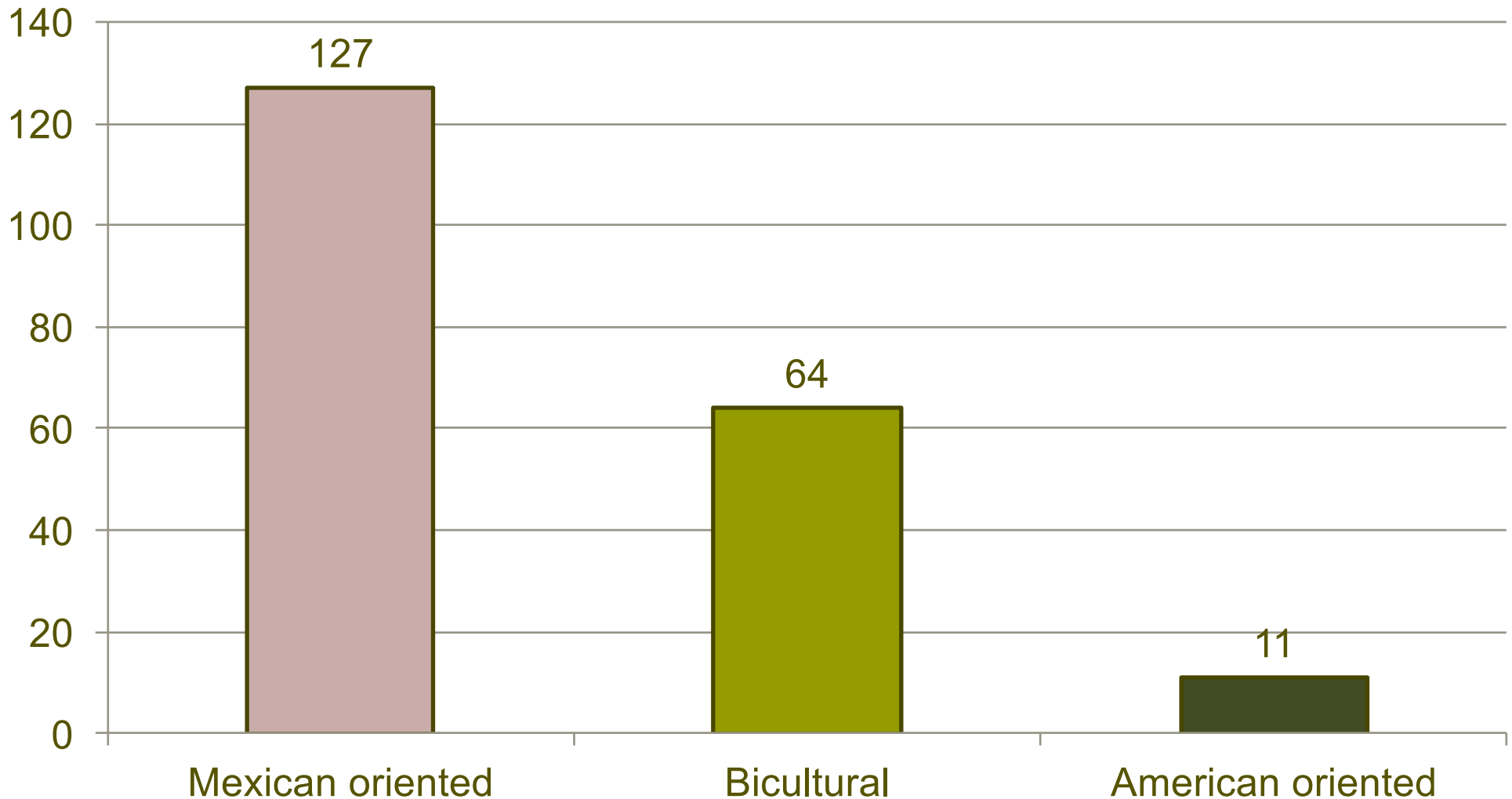


- Adult-centered rather than child-centered
- Markers:
 - Insisting the child do something
 - Not allowing the child to make choices
 - Physically restricting child’s movements
 - Doesn’t modify parental behavior in response to child
- “Directive” parenting more normative in Latino populations (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006)

What about acculturation?



participants



Maternal directiveness and change in problem behaviors

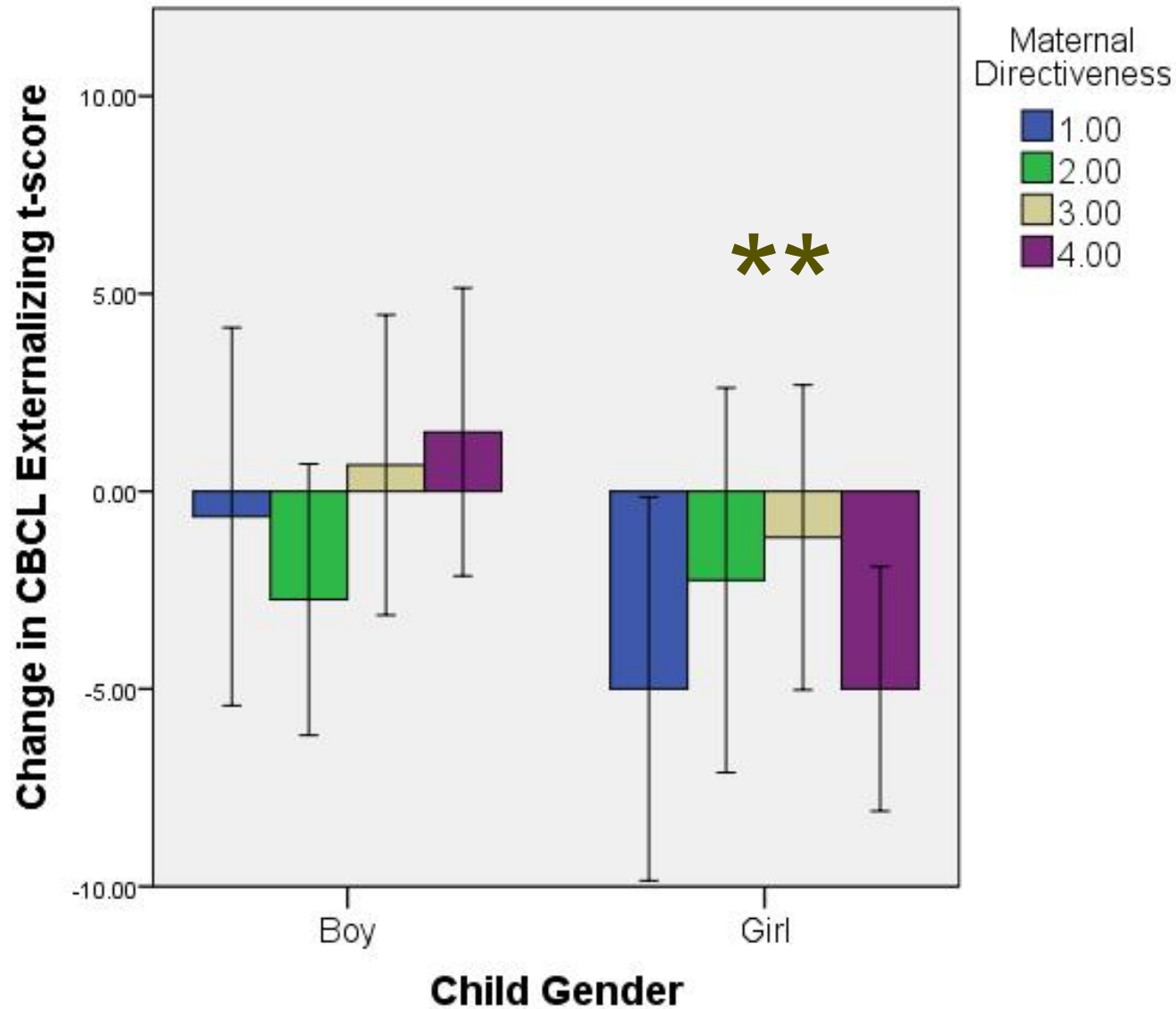


	Mother's Acculturation	
	Mexican-oriented	Bicultural
Boys		*
Girls	**	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

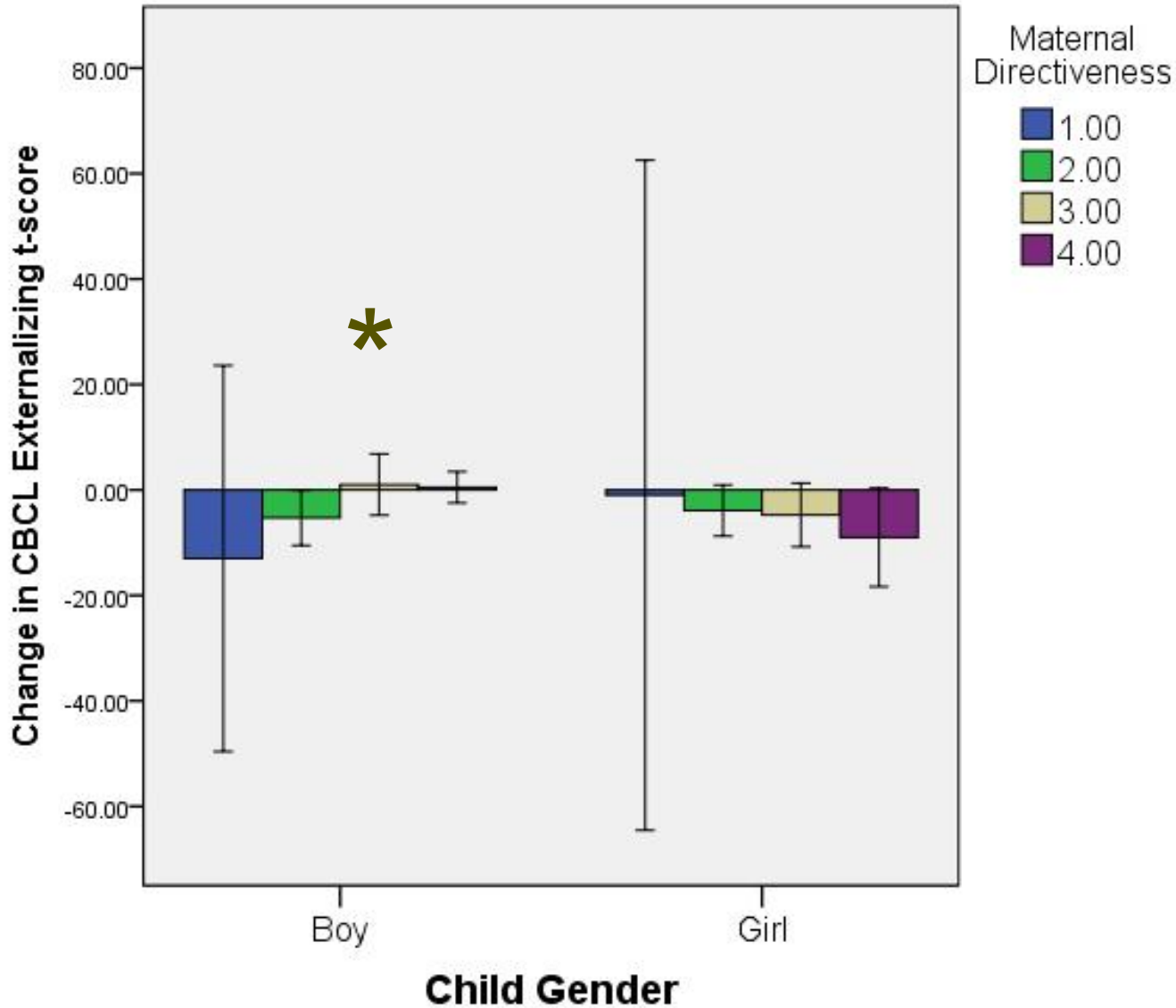
Simple slopes estimated using methods recommended by Preacher et al. (2006) and available from www.quantpsy.org.

Children of Mexican-oriented mothers



** $p < .01$

Children of bicultural mothers



*p < .05

Conclusions and future directions



- Maternal behavior must be interpreted within cultural context
- Maternal directiveness is associated with a greater decline in externalizing problems among girls compared to boys.
 - Reason for this difference is unclear
 - May be moderated by acculturation
- Sample is limited in terms of variability in acculturation
 - Need for future research

Dallas Preschool Readiness Project



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