

# Latino Sibling Relationships: Assertion and Affiliation Language in Latino Sibling Relationships

Sanny Peralta, Genesis Diaz, Alexander Calderon, Natalia Figueroa, Carly Mendoza, Cecibell Montalban, Scarlet Nunez & Ganie B. DeHart.

## Abstract

We explored Latino and Anglo children’s use of assertive and affiliative language in sibling interactions. Differences were found in assertive, affiliative, and mitigated language, reflecting cultural differences in sibling roles and expectations.

## Introduction

Research conducted on Latino children’s family relationships remains limited, despite the fact that the Latino population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States. In previous research, Latino parents have been found to encourage children to identify with prescribed family and community roles, while repressing individual needs, goals, and self-determination. The prescribed roles include concepts of sibling relationships that include greater responsibility for brothers and sisters - particularly younger brothers and sisters - than commonly found within Anglo-American families. Although this set of cultural values has implications for sibling relationships, research on Latino sibling interaction has been particularly rare.

The present study examined Latino children’s use of assertive and affiliative language in sibling interactions. Because of the importance placed on family obligations and harmony in Latino culture, we predicted Latino siblings to use a greater amount of affiliative language than Anglo families. In addition, we expected Latino siblings to use less assertive language and when they did, we anticipated the assertion to be mitigated.

## Method

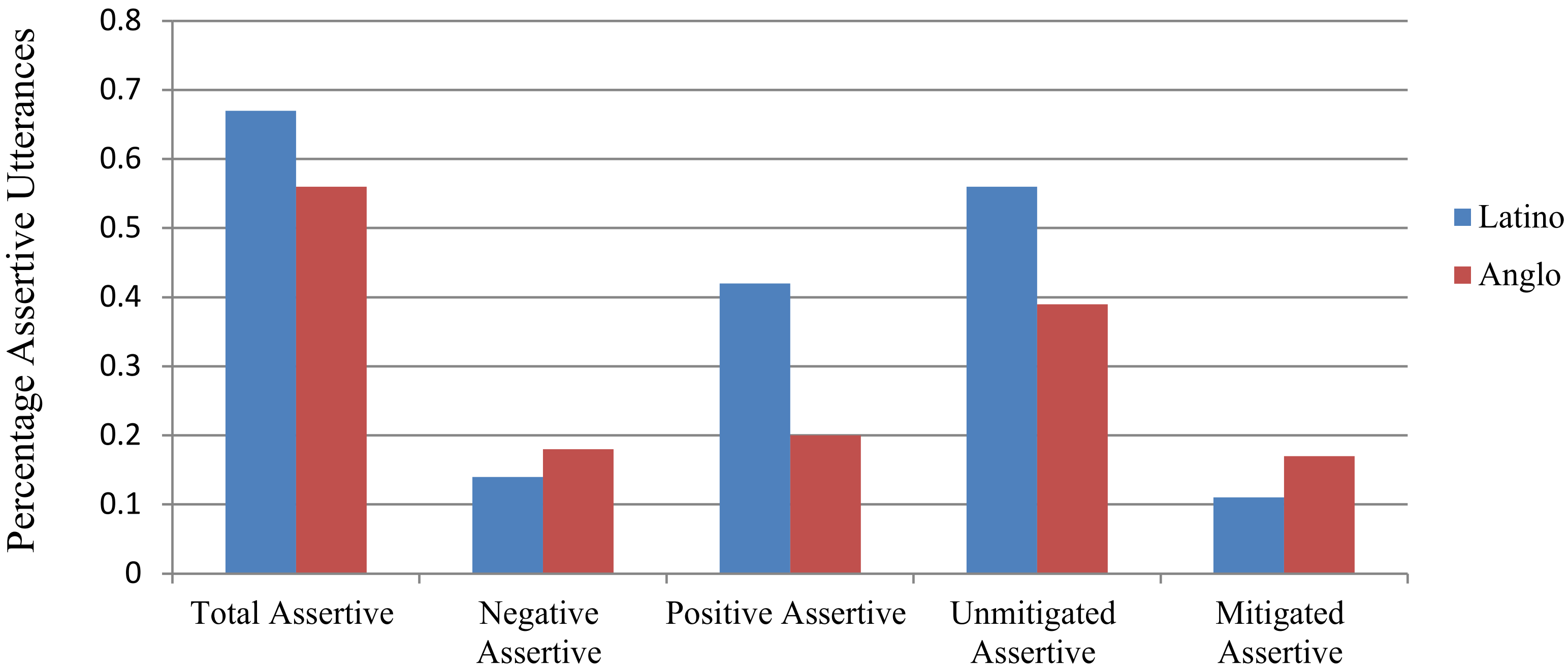
### Participants

- Study participants were 36 middle- and lower-class Latino sibling pairs from the Rochester, NY, and New York City areas.
- Researchers recruited families via social networks, such as Latino community organizations, church groups, daycares, and schools.
- The majority of the sibling pairs were same sex (n=22).
- The sample was fairly heterogeneous in age (siblings ranged from 2 to 10 years old), ethnicity (Chilean, Guatemalan, Dominican, Mexican, and Puerto Rican), and acculturation status (recent immigrants, and first- through third-generation US residents).
- A comparison sample of 36 middle- and lower-class Anglo sibling pairs, matched as closely as possible for target child and sibling ages, were drawn from an ongoing longitudinal study of Anglo children’s sibling relationships.

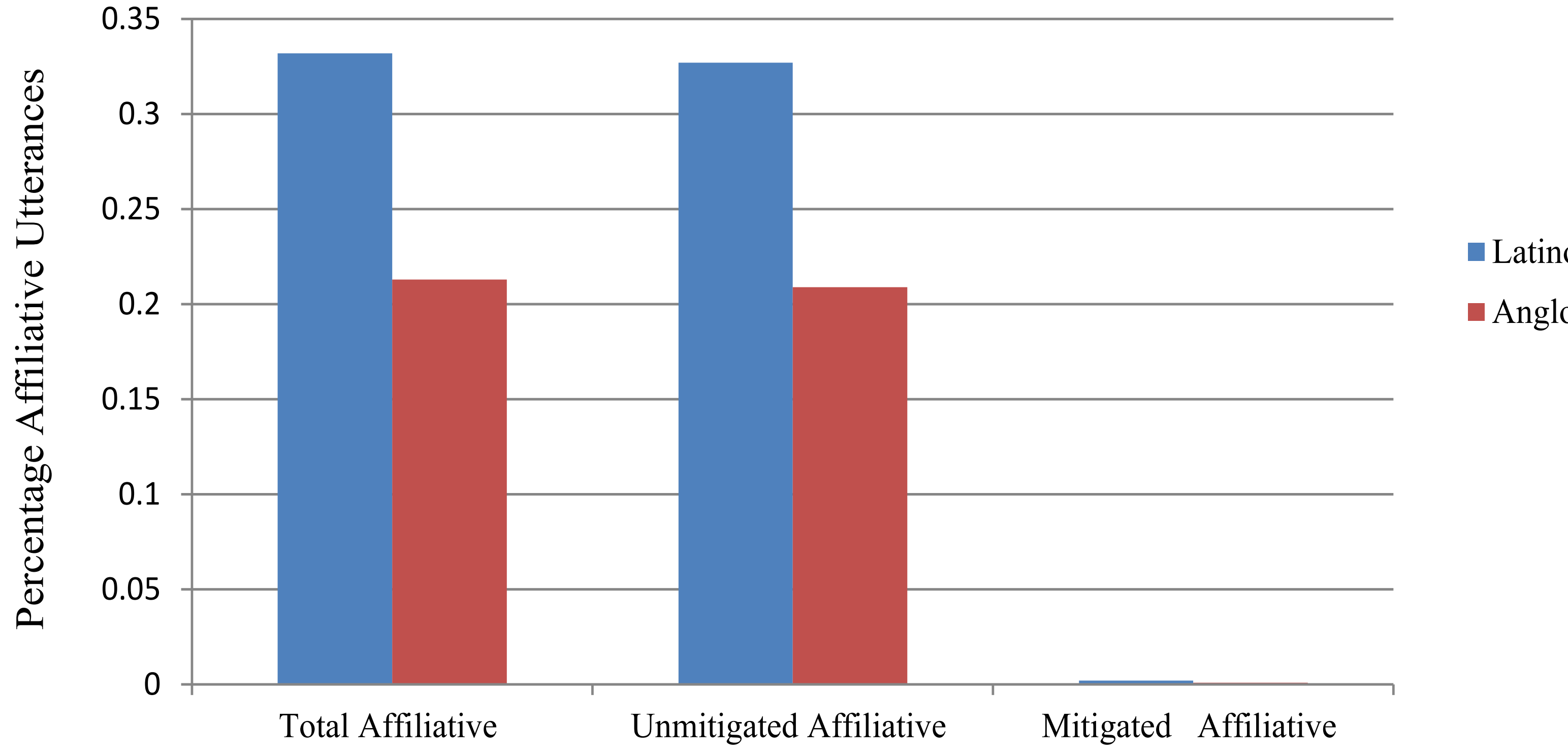
### Procedure:

- Researchers taped the sibling pairs playing in a familiar setting, usually at home, in a location with sufficient play space.

Assertive Utterances by Anglo and Latino Target Children



Affiliative Utterances by Anglo and Latino Target Children



### Method (cont.)

- Each pair participated in a 30-minute session that included a ten-minute construction task, a ten-minute board game session, and a ten-minute free-play session.
- Only the free-play sessions are analyzed in the current study.
- The researchers then transcribed the footage and coded each sibling pair for various forms of assertive and affiliative utterances.
- Assertive utterances were those used primarily to accomplish one’s own goal or objective (e.g., expressing directives, commands, intentions, opinions, or rules).
- Affiliative utterances were those used primarily to establish or maintain social interaction (e.g., showing support, expressing agreement or inclusion, seeking contact or approval).
- Assertive and affiliative utterances were further coded as mitigated (softening the impact of an utterance) or unmitigated and as positive or negative.

### Analyses

Proportions of various types of utterances were analyzed, using 2 (ethnicity) x 2 (target child gender) ANOVAs.

## Results

### Assertive Utterances (Figure 1)

- Overall, Latino children produced a higher percentage of assertive utterances ( $p > .05$ ), positive assertive utterances ( $p = .05$ ), and unmitigated assertive utterances ( $p < .05$ ) than Anglo children did.
- In contrast, Anglo children used a higher percentage of mitigated assertive utterances than Latino children did ( $p = .05$ ).
- Regardless of ethnicity, girls used a higher percentage of negative assertive utterances than boys did ( $p < .05$ ).

### Affiliative Utterances (Figure 2)

- Overall, Latino children used a marginally higher percentage of affiliative utterances than Anglo children did ( $p = .05$ ).
- None of the children in our sample used mitigated affiliative utterances.

## Discussion

Overall, our findings were inconsistent with our expectations. We found that Latino siblings demonstrated higher percentages of both assertive and affiliative language when compared to Anglo siblings. Surprisingly, they were less likely to use mitigation than Anglo siblings were. However, compared to Anglo siblings, Latino siblings were more likely to produce positive assertive utterances. Interestingly, girls, regardless of ethnicity, were more likely than boys to use negative assertive language.

Our results may be attributable to sociocultural differences. Based on our own experience, there may be a tendency for Latino children to use more assertive tones to communicate within their families. In addition, socioeconomic status may have played a role. Although the Anglo and Latino groups are relatively similar in terms of overall income levels, the Anglo sample was primarily from rural and suburban areas in upstate New York, whereas the Latino sample was drawn from more urban neighborhoods, both upstate and downstate. The Latino children in our study may have been exposed to environments that elicit more assertive and directive communication styles. Further research with greater control of socioeconomic and geographic variable will be needed to disentangle the relative influences of culture and other factors.