

# Historical, Socio-Cultural, and Conceptual Issues to Consider When Researching Mexican American Children and Families, and other Latino Subgroups\*

## Factores Históricos, Socio-Culturales y Conceptuales a Tener en Cuenta en la Investigación con Niños y Familias Mexicano-Estadounidenses y de otros Subgrupos Latinos

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**Abstract.** In order for the field of psychology in the United States to maintain its relevance and validity, it must become more inclusive in its theory and research of Latinos, who are now the largest “minority” group in the nation. In particular, due to immigration and birth rates, Mexican Americans are the largest and fastest growing segment of the Latino population. This paper addresses some of the most significant historical and socio-cultural factors contributing to the psychological nature and wellbeing of Mexican Americans. These factors should be understood and used to guide research and theory in order to make the discipline of psychology relevant for Mexican Americans. The concept of *mestizaje* is used to explain the biological and cultural mixing constituting the diverse origins of the Mexican people. Immigration to the U.S. is described in terms of selective socio-cultural variables giving rise to a diverse Mexican American culture that is resistant to complete assimilation. Within a U.S. context, the constructs of generational status, acculturation, and biculturalism are used to explain the socio-cultural adaptation of Mexican Americans. The special role of children in immigrant families as language and cultural brokers are also discussed, and used to explain the adjustment of Mexican American families.

**Keywords:** emic developmental issues, immigration, mestizaje, generation.

**Resumen.** Para que el campo de la Psicología en los Estados Unidos siga manteniendo su relevancia y validez, debe incluir en mayor medida, tanto en su teoría como en la investigación práctica, a las poblaciones hispanas, grupo que en la actualidad compone la “minoría” más numerosa de la nación. En concreto, debido a la inmigración y las tasas de natalidad, los mexicano-estadounidenses son el segmento más amplio y de mayor crecimiento dentro de la población hispana. El presente artículo aborda algunos de los factores históricos y socio-culturales más significativos en la naturaleza y bienestar psicológico de los mexicano-estadounidenses. Estos factores deben ser comprendidos y utilizados como guía en la investigación y el desarrollo teórico para que la disciplina de psicología incluya a la población mexicano-estadounidense. Se emplea el concepto de *mestizaje* para explicar la mezcla biológica y cultural que da pie a la diversidad de orígenes de la población mejicana. Se describe la inmigración a los EEUU en base a variables socio-culturales selectivas que conforman una cultura mexicano-estadounidense diversa que se resiste a una total asimilación. Dentro del contexto norteamericano, los constructos de estatus generacional, aculturación y bi-culturalismo son utilizados para explicar la adaptación socio-cultural de los mexicano-estadounidenses. También se aborda el papel especial que desempeñan los niños de familias inmigrantes en cuanto al idioma y la cultura y su importancia en el proceso de adaptación de las familias mexicano-estadounidenses.

**Palabras clave:** componentes énicos del desarrollo, generación, inmigración, mestizaje.

In order for the psychological study of children and families in the United States to be representative and timely, theory and research must be inclusive of the rapidly growing Latino population. Presently, Latinos make up 16 % of the total U.S. population, and are

expected to grow to 30% of the nation’s population by the year 2050 (Passel & Cohn, 2008). By that same year, Latino children will outnumber non-Latino white children, and represent the largest group of children in the nation. Presently, Latino children make up 21.3% of all U.S. children (18 years and younger), and a quarter of all pre-school age (5 years and younger) children. The majority of U.S. born children are the offspring of immigrant parents (Fry & Passel, 2009), and come from homes where Spanish is spoken. Persons of

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Mexican ancestry constitute the largest (63%) and fastest growing Latino subgroup, with Mexican American children representing 71% of all Latino children (Martinez, 2011).

Psychological research with Mexican Americans and other Latino populations has been guided by three approaches. The first, and most common, is to explore ethnic differences between Euro American and Mexican Americans, usually on some measure developed with Euro Americans. These “two-group studies” often mistakenly equate ethnicity with culture by concluding that differences between the two groups are cultural in nature. The convenience of cultural explanations ignores the cultural diversity within the Mexican American population, as well as other variables such as social class, community, and regional factors, which can account for between group differences. A second approach has to do with testing the validity for Mexican Americans of theories, models and findings generated initially with Euro American samples. The goal here is not so much to explore between group differences on measures, as much as it is to examine the pattern of relationships between measures and variables within the Mexican American population. For example, one of the significant and consistent findings of the past decades is the negative impact of economic problems on parents and their children (Conger, Rueter, & Conger, 2000). This model was originally developed with a rural, Euro American population. The Center for Family Studies at UC Riverside, has conducted longitudinal research with Mexican American families and found that mothers’ level of acculturation can alter the expected findings (Parke, Coltrane, Duffy, Buriel, Dennis, Powers, French, & Widaman, 2004). When informed with culturally sound explanations, the results of such studies can meaningfully extend developmental theories to Latino populations. A third reason for doing research with Mexican Americans has to do with an emerging interest in identifying emic or unique aspects of this group’s behavior that have not been considered in traditional developmental theories or models. The diverse and complex culture of Mexican descent people, coupled with the developmental challenges arising from immigration and adaptation, give rise to behavioral roles and frames of reference that are not part of the developmental experiences of most Euro American families. For example, research on children who serve as interpreters and translators for their immigrant parents, known as “Language Brokers”, is beginning to identify both stressors and empowering outcomes associated with this unique role (Buriel, Love, & Villanueva, 2011).

In order to make valid contributions to the field, and produce theories, measures, and findings that are relevant and useful to Mexican Americans, future research must take into account this group’s history, and extensive within group diversity. Indigenous roots in the

Americas, Spanish conquest and miscegenation, colonization, immigration, and cultural adaptation characterize the history of Mexicans and Mexican Americans. These different historical circumstances have created developmental challenges, leading to adaptive strategies and socialization goals to promote the survival and wellbeing of the community. The remainder of this paper attempts to briefly shed light on that history and within-group diversity, and consider some of their implications for research with Mexican American children and families.

### *Socio-Historical Context and Identity*

The inscription on the famous Plaza de Las Tres Culturas in Mexico City declares what it is to be a *Mestizo* today. On this ancient Aztec ceremonial site there is a monument on which is found this message:

On this site on the night of August 13, 1521, heroically taken by Cortez, valiantly defended by Cuahutemoc, it was neither defeat nor victory, but the painful birth of the Mexican people. Ni la derrota, ni la victoria, sino el doloroso parto del pueblo Mexicano (Elizondo, 1975, p. 123).

This inscription gives us a key to understanding Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Less than 500 years ago, there were no Mexicans or Mexican Americans on planet earth. Mexicans are a predominantly *Mestizo* or hybrid population made up of the “interminable blending of Indian and Spaniard” (Ruiz, 1992) that began 1519 when Hernan Cortes set foot on Mexico. Although various American Indian peoples inhabited present day Mexico before the arrival of the Spaniards, the vast majority were wiped-out due to diseases introduced to the Americas by the Europeans. For example, it is estimated that there were 24 millions Indians living in Mexico when Cortes arrived in 1519. By the end of the century, in 1600, it is estimated that only 2 million Indians survived in all of Mexico (Todorov, 1984). The *mestizaje* or biological blending that created the mestizo population also provided greater biological protection against deadly European diseases, especially measles. Gradually, the mestizo population replaced the Indian population as the numerically dominant group in Mexico. According to Ruiz (1992) relatively few Spaniards came to Mexico during the three centuries of Spanish colonial rule, and biologically most of them were absorbed into the Indian and mestizo populations. *Mestizaje* in Mexico, as in other parts of Latin America, also included a percentage of African slaves who were brought to replace a vanishing Indian labor pool.

The biological diversity characterizing the Mexican population is not limited to American Indian, Spaniard, and African. On the American Indian side, it also includes an Asian heritage. Asians crossing the Bearing Strait were the first human

occupants of the Americas and over centuries evolved into hundreds of American Indian groups. Spain, in turn, was until 1492, occupied for 800 years by Middle Eastern peoples that resulted in miscegenation between Spanish, Arab, and Jewish peoples. Although many of the Spaniards who came to the Americas claimed “pure” Spanish ancestry, their family lines included Arab and Jewish ancestries. Thus, the *mestizaje* that took place in Mexico included elements of all of the major so called “racial” groups of the world. This broad racial diversity prompted the Mexican philosopher, Jose Vasconcellos, to proclaim that Mexicans were “La Raza Cosmica”, a new race of people made up of all the major peoples of the cosmos. Ironically, today in the U.S., Latinos are considered an “ethnic group” rather than a unique group of “mixed race” people.

The notion that Mexicans and Latinos are a distinct “race” is overlooked here in the U.S. where they are considered primarily an “ethnic” group that is racially “white” for census purposes. Their “whiteness” presumably derives from a privileging of the Spanish part of their ancestry, while completely ignoring the Indian part of their ancestry. The ethnic label, Hispanic, is a derivative of this way of thinking as it literally means “of Spain”. In Mexico and other Latin American countries, the concept of race is more fluid and flexible and has more to do with a sense of “peoplehood” and a shared historical experience. Thus, Mexicans often refer to themselves as “La Raza”, or the race, during patriotic celebrations or as a shorthand way of referring to people of Mexican descent. Latin American countries also celebrate October 12 as “El Dia de La Raza”, instead of as Columbus Day, as it is here in the U.S. where Columbus is seen as bringing European civilization to American shores. In Latin America, Columbus’ arrival is considered the beginning of the destruction of American Indian peoples and the start of the *mestizaje* process, giving rise to a new race of people never before inhabiting the earth. Using the concepts of biological and cultural *mestizaje*, Ramirez (1983), has proposed a new “Psychology of the Americas”, based on “a belief in the importance of synthesizing and amalgamating diversity to arrive at multicultural identities, perspectives on life, and new approaches to the solution of problems” (pp. xiii).

It is worth noting that in the 2000 census, respondents were for the first time allowed to check more than a single racial category to identify their ancestry. Of those who self identified their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino, 47.9% chose only “white” to identify their racial background. However, 42.2% of self identified Hispanics or Latinos passed over “white” and the other four racial categories in the census and chose only “some other race” to describe their racial background. Respondents selecting “some other race” were asked to write-in their race. Most of these respondents wrote in their ancestral nationality as their race. This write-in

data indicated that many people do not consider themselves white or one of the other standard racial backgrounds. Therefore, many respondents of Mexican descent wrote-in either Mexican(o) or *mestizo*. In the 2010 census, only 35% of Hispanics/Latinos identified as white. The choice of a non-white racial label may also be related to a person’s phenotype. Due to *mestizaje*, the range of Mexican phenotypes goes from very dark to very light with varying degrees of indigenous American Indian physical features (Gomez, 2000). Research with Mexican Americans should take into account phenotype when examining such areas as ethnic/racial identity, social acceptance, depression, and perceptions of prejudice and discrimination. Outcomes in these areas may vary for Mexican Americans according to their phenotype due to the value and social privilege placed on light skin color in society. There is research, for example, showing that Mexican Americans with whiter phenotypes earn more money, have more schooling, and report less discrimination than their darker skinned counterparts (Arce, Murguia, & Frisbie, 1987; Murguia & Tellez, 1996; Tellez & Murguia, 1990). In addition, Codina and Montalvo (1994), found that U.S. born Mexican American men with darker and more Indian phenotypes reported higher rates of depression regardless of education, family income, and English proficiency. However, darker skin color was related to better mental health among foreign-born Mexican American females. More recent work (Telzer & Garcia, 2009), with Latinas indicates that a positive ethnic identity and a racial socialization focused on the potentially harmful effects of living in a discriminatory environment can serve as protective factors leading to better self-esteem among Latinas with darker skin.

Although Spaniards were biologically absorbed into the *mestizo* population, the cultural imprint of Spain on Mexico is profound. This is most evident in the areas of language and religion. Spanish replaced the many indigenous languages, although today many Indian words punctuate Mexican Spanish, which is used in Mexico and by Spanish speaking Mexican Americans. Nevertheless, some indigenous language exist, such as Zapotec, which is spoken extensively in the Mexican state of Oaxaca, and parts of southern California in the U.S.. Once in the U.S., Mexican Spanish undergoes further linguistic modification as it adapts to the regional styles and experiences of different Mexican American sub-groups. For example, in Mexico and among first generation Mexican Americans, *barrio* is the commonly used word for neighborhood. However, by the second and subsequent generations, the term *barrio* carries a negative connotation due to the U.S. media’s association of this word with *barrio* gangs. It has been our experience that some later generation Mexican Americans are offended by the use of the word *barrio* to refer to their neighborhood in research interviews.

Under penalty of death, Spanish Catholicism was imposed on the Indians of Mexico and their mestizo descendents. Due to the middle eastern occupation of Spain for 800 years, Spanish Catholicism was influenced by Islam, making it very different from other forms of Catholicism in Europe. In Mexico, Spanish Catholicism, as practiced by Indian converts and mestizos was infused with many indigenous practices and symbols, making it very different from mainstream Catholicism in the U.S. The leader of Mexico's War of Independence, a priest, Miguel Hidalgo, used the Mexican Catholic icon of the Virgin of Guadalupe, to rally support for the insurrection. According to Hidalgo, *Mexicanidad*, or being a true Mexican meant embracing the Virgin of Guadalupe as the symbol of Mexican identity. Since then, Mexican Catholic Ideology has been for many an important component of Mexican identity in Mexico and the U.S. Sensitivity to religion, whether Catholic or other, should therefore be an important consideration for research with Mexican Americans. Questions that are deemed to be critical of religion or clergy can discourage some early generation Mexican Americans from participating in research. For example, in light of the current Church sexual abuse scandal, surveys show more Latinos rallying behind priests while more Euro American Catholics are critical of priests and leaving the Church. Clergy can be very influential, particularly among Mexican immigrants, in publicizing social services, and the importance of research projects and recruiting participants. Researchers should also bear in mind to include clergy as mental health and social support resources. Due to the inter-connectedness of culture and religion, many Latinos seek the support and guidance of clergy instead of mainstream sources such as psychologists, counselors and other lay professionals. This extends into child development issues having to do with advice about children's moral conduct and appropriate disciplinary practices.

An important area where indigenous cultures have perhaps had a stronger influence than Spanish culture is the area of childrearing. The unions producing mestizo children where typically made up of Spanish fathers and Indian mothers. The rigid class system of Colonial Mexico also led to mestizos intermarrying with mestizos. Hence, there was a preponderant Indian influence in childrearing as that was the role typically ascribed to women by both Spanish and Indian societies. Spanish customs probably trickled down to childrearing due to the influence of the Catholic Church, which supported the submissiveness of women and the unquestioned authority of the father, especially if he was Spanish. However, the day-to-day routine of childrearing was in the hands of Indian and mestizo women who relied on beliefs and practices handed down from mothers, grandmothers, and aunts. An overriding developmental goal was, and still is, to raise children to be *bien educados*. Literally translated *bien educado* means well edu-

cated. However, it extends the usual meaning of education to include social behavior as well, especially being respectful and polite toward adults in order to bring honor to the family. Although many of these beliefs and practices have changed over time due to the effects of education and industrialization, they are still evident in such areas as health care practices and parent-child communication styles, particularly among Spanish speaking Mexican immigrant parents and their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Valdez, 1996). We will say more about this later in the paper.

Mexicans appeared less than 500 years ago, but Mexican Americans have been around for only roughly a century and a half. Mexican Americans are typically defined as persons of Mexican descent living in the U.S.. Mexican Americans first appeared as a result of military conquest, this time at the hands of the U.S. government. In 1848, Mexico lost the Mexican-American War and was forced to cede one half of its territories to the U.S., which included 9 present day southwestern states. The Mexican residents of these states automatically became U.S. residents and the first Mexican Americans. Particularly in states such as New Mexico and Texas, many of these new Mexican Americans traced their ancestry to this country since before the arrival of the pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. Many New Mexicans were partial to their Spanish ancestry, and to this day many still refer to themselves as Spanish. In Texas, many were partial to their state and still refer to themselves as Tejanos or Tex Mex. Most of those calling themselves Mexican American are immigrants from Mexico and their descendents who came to the U.S. after 1848. However, most immigration to the U.S. from Mexico began in 1910 with the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution. Since then, there has been a more or less steady stream of immigration from Mexico due to poor economic conditions in that country and the need for cheap labor in the U.S.. At the beginning of the last century, the destinations of many Mexican immigrants were agricultural jobs in Texas and California. However, many also worked on the railroads, traveling cross-country and ending up in Illinois, which has the third largest Mexican American population of any state.

The steady stream of immigration from Mexico means that in areas of high concentration, such as California, Texas, and Illinois, there are perennial first-second- and third generation subgroups that make up the Mexican American population. The generational status of parents and children contribute to variations in the sociocultural ecologies of families that have implications for childrearing. Within group diversity due to generation also means that it is difficult to make reliable generalizations about Mexican Americans as a cultural group. It is worth briefly examining the most salient sociocultural characteristics of each generation in order to appreciate how they contribute to within group diversity in the Mexican American population.

### ***Immigration and Generational Differences in Family Ecologies***

The first generation includes those persons born in Mexico who later in life decide to immigrate to the United States. Mexican immigrants generally come to the U.S. in their late teens or early 20's. A growing body of literature indicates that immigrants represent a very positive, self-selected segment of the general Mexican population. Mexican immigrants, whether documented or not, have more years of schooling than the national average, and represent an occupationally middling group with high social mobility aspirations (Buriel, 2012). They are also among the healthiest with respect to their physical and psychological wellbeing. Some argue that these positive self-selected characteristics of immigrant parents are passed on to their children, and account for what is known as the "Immigrant Paradox". This refers to the unexpected finding that the U.S. born children of immigrants are healthier at birth (in terms of birth weight and lower infant mortality rates) than children of other ethnic/racial group in the U.S. (Callister, L. C., & Birkhead, A. (2002); Campos, Schetter, Abdou, Hobel, Glynn, & Sandman, 2008)). In addition, the children of immigrants often academically outperform their peers of native born Mexican American parents, and engage less in risky behaviors (Garcia Coll & Marks, 2012).

Typically, Mexicans come to the U.S. as single young adults or as single married men who later bring their spouses to the U.S., and in fewer cases, as married couples with children. However, is not uncommon for parents to immigrate with only some of their children, leaving the other children in Mexico under the care of relatives. As the parents' economic condition improves, children in Mexico are brought to the United States. Under these circumstances, children often experience multiple socializing influences in both Mexico and the U.S. This transnational socialization experience may also give rise to a dual-frame of reference for these children. At the time of immigration, young adults have usually already completed the extent of their lifetime formal education in Mexico, 9 years on average (Suro, 2005), which is three years over compulsory education in Mexico. As the average years of schooling has increased in Mexico, so has the average years of education of Mexican immigrants, whose education continues to outpace that of their compatriots in their country. School age immigrant children have usually begun their schooling in Mexico and then continue it in this country after immigration. Research indicates that children with prior schooling in Mexico often achieve higher in U.S. schools relative native-born Mexican Americans (Padilla & Gonzalez, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Pre-school age immigrant children begin and complete their schooling in the United States. Since these children's formative years are spent in the U.S., they are often referred to as the 1.5 generation. Because

some of these children were brought to the U.S. without documentation, they face hardships, such as fear of separation from parents due to deportation (Cervantes, Mejia, & Mena, 2010), and denial of access to many social service programs intended to aid children's development (Yoshikawa & Kalil, 2011). It is estimated that 7% of all Latino children are unauthorized immigrants (Fry & Passel, 2009). Although undocumented children can legally attend public school in grades k through 12, they are not allowed to receive public grants and scholarships to attend college (except in California which has adopted its own Dream Act). Even after graduating from college, and in some cases receiving professional degrees, they cannot legally obtain employment because they are denied social security cards. Despite these obstacles, many of these students develop extraordinary resilience and remain optimistic about their futures (Perez & Cortes, 2011).

Family income is typically low in the first generation due to parents' lower education and limited knowledge of English. Nevertheless, incomes are higher for immigrants in the U.S. compared to their peers in Mexico. In the first 6 to 8 years after immigration, it is not uncommon for immigrants to live with families of relatives or friends (Blank, 1993; Chavez, 1990) who assist parents with child care. After 8 years, the rate of immigrant families living in single family households is about 75%, which is the same as for U.S. Mexican Americans (Blank, 1993). First generation children are socialized in home environments influenced by immigrant Mexican culture which includes elements of Mexican culture as well as the adaptive strategies of parents associated with the immigrant experience that parents convert into socialization goals (Buriel, 1993a; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Keefe & Padilla, 1987). Elements of Mexican cultural socialization include familism, respect for adults and interdependence among family and ethnic group members (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974; Rueschenberg & Buriel, 1989; Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, VanOss Marin, & Perez, 1987). Socialization goals related to the immigrant experience are self-reliance, productive use of time (Buriel, 1993a), and biculturalism (Buriel, 1993b). Immigrant parents and their children both prefer a "Mexican" ethnic identity (Buriel & Cardoza, 1993) and use Spanish as their primary home language. The parents and other family members' exposure to English often come through children's participation in the U.S. schooling system. As a result, many immigrant children serve as interpreters and translators for their parents, which means they are often given adult like responsibility when acting as the family's representative to the outside English-speaking world. A growing body of literature refers to these children as "language brokers". Since these children interpret both the language and culture of the larger society, they are also sometimes referred to as "cultural brokers" (DeMent, Buriel, & Villa-

nueva, 2005). Children language brokers play an important role in helping immigrant families adapt and survive in a new environment. There are, however, extraordinary pressures and developmental challenges associated with the role of being a child language broker. For this reason, language brokers will be discussed in more detail in another part of this paper.

Generally speaking, the second generation represents the U.S. born children of immigrant parents. The family environments of second generation children are in many ways similar to those of their first generation peers owing to the foreign born status of their parents. There are, however, some important differences between the two generations that are reflected in the sociocultural characteristics of the family. For example, in some cases the immigrant parents of second generation children came to the United States as single young adults who later became partners in generationally endogamous marriages (Murguía, 1982). As a result they have lived longer in the United States. In those cases where these parents came from Mexico as young children as 1.5 generation, they may have attended U.S. schools for some or all of their education. For these reasons the family incomes of second generation children are higher than their peers in the preceding generation. Cultural synergisms are most apparent in the families of second generation children. Thus, while Spanish is usually the native language of second generation children, English becomes their dominant language after the onset of schooling. However, Spanish continues as the primary language of parents which creates a strong motivation for the development of bilingualism. Parents encourage the learning of English but also stress the retention of Spanish as that is the language used to demonstrate respect to adults. Retention of Spanish may therefore serve to help preserve parental authority during the more rapid acculturation of children. Socialization of second generation children is similar to that of the first generation, although the outcomes are attenuated by prolonged exposure to Euro American culture (Buriel, 1993a). For example, the longer families live in the United States, the more socialization practices and child behavior shift in an individualistic direction, particularly in the area of critical thinking (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). In the area of ethnic identity, foreign-born parents prefer a "Mexican" identity while their second generation children prefer either a "Mexican American" or "Chicano" identity (Buriel & Cardoza, 1993). Chicano is a term with uncertain origins. In Mexico, it is used as a slang to refer to Mexican Americans lacking in Mexican culture. In the U.S., however, the term was embraced by activists of Mexican descent during the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1960' and early 1970's, and used as a label of ethnic pride. Self-identified Chicanos/as were outspoken in demanding social justice for all Mexican Americans, and created their own movement known as

the Chicano Movement or *El Movimiento*. The legacy of the Chicano Movement continues today on many college and university campuses where there are Chicano/a Studies departments and programs that include courses in "Chicano/a Psychology".

To summarize, first and second generation children come from homes where parents are foreign-born, and where Spanish is the first language, and English may not be spoken at all at home, at least with parents. They come from homes where parents have not attended U.S. schools, unless they are 1.5 generation, and where parental schooling is on average at the 9th grade level. They come from homes where individual and family identity is "Mexican" and not "American". They come from homes where parents are usually not U.S. citizens, and may even be undocumented and therefore risk deportation and separation from the family on a daily basis. In addition, many older children often have responsibility for the care of younger siblings, and for interpreting for their parents.

The third generation refers collectively to all persons of Mexican descent whose parents were born in the United States. This includes persons in the fourth and subsequent generations whose grandparents and great grandparents were born in this country. Due to immigration and birth rate differences between generations, third generation children are in the minority within the Mexican American population and are expected to remain in that position for the next half century (Edmonston & Passel, 1994; Fry & Passel, 2009). The third generation is distinguished from the two previous generations by the absence of any direct parental links to Mexico involving immigration. Consequently, socialization goals derived from immigrant adaptation strategies are not a direct part of the socialization experiences of third generation children (Buriel, 1993a). Nevertheless, since many members of the third generation continue living in ethnic neighborhoods (barrios) heavily populated by immigrants, socialization practices still retain some immigrant influences. For example, familism, or the expectation of support from family members, continues as a socialization goal into later generations (Keefe & Padilla, 1987) even after controlling for socioeconomic status (Sabogal et al., 1987). Persons in the third generation are also socialized in homes where all family members are United States citizens, where English is the primary language of parents and children (Lopez, 1982), where parental schooling has taken place exclusively in the United States, and where children and parents express a "Mexican American" ethnic identity (Buriel & Cardoza, 1993). Laosa (1982) theorizes that U.S. schooling alters the childrearing practices of Mexican American parents. Mothers with less education, who are likely to be immigrants, use more modeling to instruct children, whereas mothers with more schooling, who are likely to be native-born, use more inquiry and praise to instruct children. According to Laosa

(1982) this shift in maternal teaching style occurs because more highly schooled mothers increasingly take on the teaching style of the school, which emphasizes inquiry and praise. Buriel (1993a) also found that among parents of third generation children, parental schooling was associated with a childrearing style involving more support, control and equality. Divorce is more common among parents of third generation children, which has implications child socialization (Buriel, 1993a; Oropesa & Landale, 1995). Teacher ratings of Mexican American children indicate more school maladjustment in boys from single parent (mothers only) homes than in boys from two parent homes or in girls of either family type (LeCorgne & Laosa, 1976). Father absence may be more deleterious for boys in third generation families because it represents the loss of a disciplinarian at a time when boys are most susceptible to negative peer pressures such as gangs. Although family incomes are higher in the third generation, schooling outcomes are lower than in the previous generation. Second generation children complete more years of schooling and have higher educational aspirations than their third generation peers (Bean, Chapa, Berg, & Sowards, 1994; Buriel, 1987; 1994; Valenzuela, 1999). Kao and Tienda (1995) have also documented lower educational achievement in third generation Asian Americans relative to their first- and second generation peers.

It is apparent that generational status introduces sociocultural variations into family ecologies, which have important implications for the socialization of children and developmental outcomes. Studies have documented generational differences among Mexican Americans in areas such as children's cognitive styles, children's ethnic labels, children's biculturalism, adolescents' educational expectations and levels of academic performance, adolescents' rates of delinquency, maternal reinforcement styles, and mothers' child care preferences. Given the significant within group diversity in the Mexican American population due to immigration and generation, it is essential to describe in detail sample demographics regarding these distinguishing characteristics. It matters whether a sample is representative in terms of generation or restricted to one generation, as in the case of immigrant families, for explaining the findings, and generalizing them to the Mexican American population.

### ***The Role of Acculturation***

Researchers have focused on acculturation in an effort to un-package the cultural components of generational status that account for within group diversity. Acculturation is the process of learning a new culture, and is typically measured in terms of increasing English proficiency, English media preferences, and Euro American friendships (Cuellar, Arnold, &

Maldonado, 1995). The measurement of acculturation has also begun to take into account culturally related values, attitudes, and identity, in acknowledgement of the multidimensional nature of this construct (Felix-Ortiz de la Garza, Newcomb, & Meyers, 1995). Multidimensional measures of acculturation can provide information about the cultural processes associated with behavioral changes in Mexican Americans across and within generations, as well as at the level of the individual. The relative predictive power of generation and acculturation may vary depending on the nature of the constructs under investigation. For example, in parts of the country where there are long standing Mexican American communities spanning many generations, acculturation may be a better predictor of ethnic identity than generation (Cuellar, Nyberg, Maldonado, & Roberts, 1997).

Given the within group diversity of Mexican Americans due to constant immigration and adaptation, it is imperative for researchers to take into account both generation and acculturation when conducting research on this population. When samples include mostly members of one generation, say immigrants, it is still necessary to measure acculturation as there are within group differences related to length of U.S. residence, and regional factors. In some parts of the country, such as the U.S.-Mexico border, where there are large and long standing Mexican American communities, there are ecological pressures to maintain traditional Mexican cultural values and practices. Therefore, even when samples have good generational representation, it is still important to assess acculturation since the strength of this construct may not vary in a linear manner with generation due to ecological pressures to maintain Mexican American culture.

### ***Biculturalism***

The Civil Rights Movement gave rise to a national discourse on Multiculturalism as a legitimate expression of American democracy. The "Melting Pot" philosophy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century pressured European immigrants to abandon their ancestral cultures and assimilate into an Anglo Saxon American culture. This philosophy was motivated on the presumed superiority of Anglo Saxon culture, and the inferiority of immigrant cultures (Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974). Other people of color in the U.S. (American Indians, African Americans, and Latinos) were often denied civil rights based on the presumed inferiority of their cultures, which gave rise to their popular portrayal in the behavioral science literature as being "culturally disadvantaged". However, the psycho-cultural legitimacy of peoples of color began to get attention with the research of scholars such as Manuel Ramirez III and Alfredo Castaneda (1974). They argued that the values of different cultures give rise to distinct parental socialization

practices, which in turn, result in unique, culturally conditioned learning styles. When the cultural values and teaching styles associated with children's learning styles are represented in the classroom, there is "cultural democracy in education". If not, children are denied the opportunity to learn in their culturally preferred learning style, which amounts to a form of discrimination, and unequal educational opportunity, which violates their civil rights. Ramirez and Castaneda proposed that children should be allowed to begin their educations using their culturally preferred learning styles, and then gradually become introduced to the learning style of the Euro American majority. Both learning styles would continue to be reinforced throughout children's primary education. In addition, Euro American children would have the same classroom experience, and become familiar with the values and learning styles of other cultural groups, such as Latinos. Hence, the ultimate educational goal was for all children to become bilingual, bicultural, and bicognitive.

Since this early work, psychological research has focused on biculturalism as a cultural adaptation strategy among persons of immigrant backgrounds (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton (1993). Biculturalism refers to the simultaneous adoption of two sets of cultural competencies in the same person (Ramirez, 1983). Just as many Mexican Americans become bilingual in order to communicate with Spanish and English speakers in their daily environment, so too many develop cultural competencies pertaining to both Mexican and Euro American cultures. For many Mexican Americans and Latinos living in multicultural communities, biculturalism provides an optimum "person-environment" fit to the "dual cultural demands" of their environment. A growing body of research reports advantageous academic (Buriel, 2012; Feliciano, 2001), and mental health outcomes for bicultural individuals relative to those who are either less acculturated, or acculturated in an exclusively Euro American direction (Buriel, 2012; Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991; LaFrombois, et al., 1993). In addition, biculturalism in Mexican American mothers is associated with more sophisticated childrearing beliefs (Gutierrez & Sameroff, 1990). Ramirez and Castaneda (1974) also posit that children's biculturalism promotes greater cognitive flexibility and sensitivity to cultural differences. Biculturalism is an adaptive strategy (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990; LaFrambois et al., 1993; Buriel, Perez, DeMent, Chavez, & Moran, 1998) arising from the developmental challenges faced by Mexican American children as they navigate the two cultural worlds that make up their daily environment. Biculturalism is especially adaptive among children of immigrant families who must maintain culturally competent communication with their parents as they simultaneously acculturate to mainstream society (Buriel, 1993b). Due to the "dual cultural demands" they experience at home and at

school, first- and second generation children are more likely to develop bicultural competencies than their later generation peers (Buriel, 1993b). Since bicultural Mexican Americans are more optimally suited to meet the often-competing expectations of their multicultural ecologies, they may experience less psychological strain, which results in better social, academic, and mental health outcomes. Therefore, research with Mexican Americans, and other Latino and immigrant groups, should take biculturalism into consideration, along with generation and acculturation.

### *Emic Developmental Research Issues*

Mexican American immigrants and their children face many sociocultural adaptation challenges that have implications for parenting and child development. Mainstream developmental psychology's interest in Mexican Americans has generally been two-fold. First, to explore cross-cultural differences in constructs developed on Euro American populations. Second, to extend theories and models, also developed on Euro Americans, to Mexican Americans. In both instances, Mexican Americans serve as "test cases" for constructs, theories and models developed on a cultural group whose historical and sociocultural experience is at variance with their own. Mainstream psychology is so embedded in its own western Eurocentric cultural context that it is generally blinded to the experiences of other groups, many of which have profound developmental consequences for families and children. These experiences have remained largely outside the realm of mainstream psychology for two reasons. First, these experiences are so distinct and far removed from the daily experiences of most Euro Americans as to make them almost invisible. Second, when these experiences do come to the attention of Euro American lay people and behavioral scientist, they are often perceived as pathological behaviors for being so outside the realm of Euro American normative behavior. Consequently, behaviors common to immigrant families and children are either invisible or deemed so extreme as to be dismissed as non-normative and therefore not worthy of further investigation, except perhaps as case-studies of pathology (Baptiste, 1993). Although these behaviors are common, and adaptive, they are not the focus of developmental research. In order for developmental research to be inclusive and relevant to language minority immigrant families, researchers must search for developmental experiences unique to the sociocultural situations of these groups. This is especially important today as language minority immigrant groups represent a growing proportion of the U.S. population. These groups bring with them categories of behavior, or constructs, that have not been considered by developmental researchers. In addition, the immigrant adaptation experience in the U.S. gives rise to



behavioral roles and sets of cognitions typically not considered within the field of development. In short, the unique experiences of Mexican Americans and other language minority groups, arising from the adaptation challenges they face, must be recognized, understood, and studied within the field of developmental psychology as normative behaviors. Three experiences common to Mexican immigrant families and children include language and cultural brokering, children family workers, and dual-frames of reference.

### *Children as Language and Cultural Brokers*

It is estimated that approximately one in every five children in the U.S. come from homes where at least one parent is foreign-born (Passel & Cohn, 2008). Most of these children are also the first members of their families to learn English and attend U.S. schools. As a result, these children of language minority immigrant families are often delegated adult-like responsibilities by their parents for making decisions with English speaking agents that affect the whole family. Children who act as interpreters for their non-English speaking parents are referred to as "Language Brokers". Because these children of immigrants represent the link between their parents' culture and Euro American society, they can also be considered "Cultural Brokers". With responsibility as interpreters of the new culture and language, immigrant children are often in a position with no one to translate or interpret for them. Traditional intergenerational authority relationships change and the child also becomes very involved in the worries and concerns of the family, such as hassles with landlords, arranging for medical care, and dealing with the legal system" (Olsen & Chen, 1988). Language and cultural brokering represent a naturally occurring experiment produced by immigration, which has a lifespan of only one generation. Yet, the altered parent-child role relationships occurring in this short developmental period can shed light not only on family dynamics in immigrant groups, but also on how children manage developmentally off-time challenges (Parke, 2004).

The unique situation of children as language and cultural brokers has only recently received attention. This is due to the fact that acculturation research has focused on adults, and overlooked the important role of children in assisting in the family's transition into a new culture. Language brokers not only interpret for family members but also neighbors, teachers, fellow students, (Buriel, et al., 2011), safety officials, and airline attendants, just to name a few. Children language and cultural brokers are unique because in addition to the stress related to their own acculturation, they experience additional stressors arising from their role as mediators between their parents and U.S. society. In public, children cultural brokers act with adult author-

ity figures on behalf of their parents, but at home they are expected to behave as children and show deference and respect to parents. Some have speculated that the conflicting expectations and responsibilities associated with language brokering represent a potential form of role strain (Pearlin, 1983), which may lower children's general well-being. However, language brokering must be viewed in the cultural context in which it takes place because different cultures have different expectations regarding parent-child relationships. In Mexican culture, where children are socialized to show *respeto* to parents, and family obligation, language brokering may represent an avenue for children to fulfill their parents' desire for them to be "*bien educados*". That is, children view language brokering as a way to fulfill their expected role as good sons and daughters, which is perceived to please parents, and, in turn, enhance the emotional relationship between parents and children. Our research with Latino samples, ranging from childhood to young adulthood, shows that feeling good about language brokering is related to a stronger parent-child bond (Buriel et al., 2011). A strong parent-child bond, in addition, is associated with lower levels of depression among frequent language brokers (Buriel, Love, & DeMent, 2006). There is also evidence with Latino adolescents showing that the experience of language and cultural brokering contributes positively to feelings of social self-efficacy, biculturalism, and academic performance (Buriel, et al., 1998).

Children who language broker not only represent their parents to adults outside the family, they also transmit the messages of those outsiders to their parents. In brokering situations, children act as "surrogate adults" in interactions with their parents, which often gives rise to role-reversals involving the transmission of information. That is, children cultural brokers must sometimes "teach" parents things about the new culture while still demonstrating deference and respect consistent with their status as children. Thus, children language brokers must assume a higher status teaching role without causing parents to lose face in public or in the family. The instructional demands inherent in brokering are therefore likely to promote instructional strategies by children that achieve the transmission of information to adults without causing embarrassment to parents. Based on research with simulated language brokering situations, Valdez (2003), concludes that Latino parents and children develop impression management skills intended to present themselves as a team, with the goal of evoking a desired positive response from the adult English speaking interlocutors. She notes, however, that the parent is the "director" of the team who manages the language broker. Her examination of the complex language used by language brokers to bilingually transmit messages in real time, in situations involving asymmetries of power, leads her to conclude that these children should be considered "gifted".

### *Children Family Workers*

Family obligation is a paramount cultural value among Mexican Americans (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). The operationalization of this value often takes the form of young children routinely devoting many hours assisting parents in their occupations. This assistance, however, is viewed not so much as helping parents with their work as much as it is seen as contributing to the welfare of the entire family. In addition to household chores, children in immigrant families often assume adult-like responsibilities as workers whose labor is beneficial, and sometimes essential, to the financial wellbeing of the family (Orellana, 2001). In families owning small business, children serving as language brokers frequently assist in preparing purchase orders and contracts in English, creating and maintaining business websites, and negotiating business transactions with English speaking customers (Esquivel, 2011). Adults often view their children's contributions as opportunities to promote their maturity, responsibility, and appreciation for family aspirations and values (Valenzuela, 1999; Weisner, 2001). Given the limited education of Mexican immigrant adults, most work in manual and service labor occupations where it is not unusual to "bring children along" to help out with the work and make extra money for the family. In the past, when Mexican immigrants were involved mostly in agricultural labor, it was common for children to work in the fields along with their parents. This situation still exists today but at a lesser scale due to child labor laws aimed at rural agricultural labor. More typical today, however, is the situation of children working with parents in service and manual labor sectors of urban settings. It is common to see children working with parents in jobs such as masonry, gardening and landscaping, painting, construction, house cleaning and office cleaning, restaurants, street vending, auto shops, trucking, and many cottage industries pertaining to garment work and food preparation. The following sketch illustrates my own childhood experience as the son of gardener:

When I was about 8 or 9, my father began to take my brother and me to work with him after school, and on Saturdays and during summer vacation we would work with my father all day.

As children we did not receive pay for our work because we were expected to contribute to the support of the family.

My father would always come home from work to have lunch and so during the summer months our family would all have lunch together.

Sometimes when we were pressed for time, my mother would prepare lunch and bring it to us where we were working.

Many times, especially when we had a lot of extra work, my mother would leave her own work at home and come out to help us so that on several

occasions our whole family became involved with my father's work.

My brother and I continued to work with our father through elementary and high school and even into the first years of college; and even now that my father is semi-retired, I continue to help him from time to time (Ramirez & Castaneda, 1974; pp. 48-49).

The constructs of family cohesion and parent-child bonding are typically investigated by psychologists in the context of domestic activities and recreational experiences. However, for many Mexican immigrant families, economic survival creates roles for children that may contribute to family cohesion and parent-child bonding in work related settings. The roles of children family workers may also contribute to the development of personal responsibility, autonomy, and self-efficacy. This is an area arising from the immigrant experience that deserves attention.

### *Dual-Frames of Reference*

In addition to new behavioral roles, the immigrant adaptation experience may give rise to a dual-frame of reference that allows immigrant children to compare their socioeconomic and cultural status in the U.S. to their past situation in Mexico. Many first generation children spend some part of their childhood or adolescence in Mexico, and receive schooling in that country, before coming to the U.S. with their parents. A dual-frame of reference has been discussed in various ways as an enabling quality that gives foreign-born children higher expectations and feelings of positive self-worth relative to their native-born counterparts (Buriel, 1984, 2012; Ogbu, 1991; Matute-Bianchi, 1991; Suarez-Orozco, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999). Although economically poor by U.S. standards, the families of immigrant children experience an immediate increase in their socioeconomic status upon arriving in this country, leading to a relative interpretation of their deprivation. This can bolster the family's sense of optimism and expectations for the future. There is a prevailing sense in the first generation that anything is possible with hard work, which leads to optimism (Wiley, Deaux, & Hagelskamp, 2012). Immigrant children are frequently exhorted by their parents to take advantage of the opportunities in this country, including education (Buriel, 1984; 1987; Valenzuela, 1999), and constantly remind them of the hard economic conditions they left behind in Mexico. A dual-frame of reference may also buffer children against the psychologically damaging effects of societal prejudice and discrimination against Mexican Americans. By having been raised in a culturally supportive environment in Mexico, and knowing professionals who are Mexican, immigrant children have a frame of reference to counter the negative stereotypes ascribed to Mexican Americans in this country (Buriel & Vasquez, 1982). A dual-frame of ref-

erence, therefore, represents a useful psychological mechanism for understanding generational differences in school achievement, motivation, and feelings of personal self-worth.

An awareness and understanding of the emic factors impacting on Mexican Americans' development usually comes from having lived that experience as a member of the group. For that reason it is useful for non-Latino researchers to include Latino assistants and Latino researchers in their research teams. These Latinos should be fluent Spanish speakers familiar with the idioms of research participants. They should also have familiarity with the unique circumstances of immigrant families and feel comfortable working with them. Being able to sincerely express the cultural relationship values of *personalismo* and *respeto* (Marin & Marin, 1991) is essential to recruiting immigrants research participants, sustaining them in the research project, and showing them proper dignity as research participants. Finally, all researchers should contextualize their work by reading the current anthropological studies on Mexican American families. These works give rich and insightful accounts of family life and interpersonal processes that are useful for understanding and appreciating the behavior of Mexican Americans. In addition, they can lead to the identification of emic behaviors that have not received attention in developmental research.

The rapid growth of the Mexican American population due to birth rates and immigration, and their low median age, means that this population will face many issues dealing with families and children for many years to come. It is necessary, therefore, for researchers to understand the complex origins of this group, and the factors contributing to sociocultural change and diversity in the lives of Mexican Americans.

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