Mexican immigrants in urban California: Forging adaptations from familiar and new cultural sources[1]

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> "The process of cultural change is inexorable. Immigrants may preserve their own sense of ethnic identity and may hold on to certain key cultural values and cultural emblems, but this observable culture is significantly modified in the host country nonetheless (p. 135). ... Eventually, only key cultural traits become moral or ethical imperatives and are seen as being of absolute importance (Roosens, 1989, pp. 134-136)."

"The process of cultural change is inexorable" for the *Mexicano* immigrants to California to whom we have been listening and talking for more than a decade. Some changes were anticipated and even embraced: they uprooted themselves and their families in search of better jobs, living conditions, and educational opportunities for their children. However, they have much more mixed reactions about changing their socialization beliefs and practices. For these families immigration to the U.S. set in a motion something more than a simple linear model of acculturation defined as the extent to which they substituted their natal beliefs and practices for U.S. alternatives (Phinney, 1996, p. 921).

Rather than wholesale abandonment of their cultural traditions, or insistence on replicating home country practices on new soil, the goal for most families is forging adaptive *and* acceptable practices by incorporating the new into their familiar model of child rearing and socialization (Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1995). This model which parents refer to as *educación* has its roots in agrarian environments. Its key features of family unity, interdependence of kin, and obedience and respect for elders evolved as adaptive values in contexts in which an entire family works together as an economic unit and where child labor is necessary for survival (LeVine & White, 1986). Although agrarian values evolved in rural economies, they retain value for immigrants given their pre-

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carious lives in urban settings. The agrarian model for newly-arrived immigrants to the U.S. is "a continuous source of meaning and guidance" (LeVine & White, 1986).

But how robust, resilient, and effective are the parents' efforts to forge adaptations from both the new and the familiar? For many in our study sample, there is great uncertainty. One mother of a kindergartner worries he will drop out of school to sell drugs. One family returned to Mexico because the father was shot in an episode of random neighborhood violence. A mother tearfully describes her fourth grade son's preoccupation with gang signs which appear as doodles on his school papers. Another mother wearily discloses her numerous, failed efforts to keep older siblings in school and out of gangs. "One warns them, but it has no effect" (*Uno les previene, pero no tiene efecto*). Some parents complain that the schools in the U.S. are not in alliance with them regarding moral development of children. Some informants are livid, some confused, by a perception that U.S. institutions do not support parental efforts to teach and enforce moral values. Florid tales circulate in the community regarding judicial interference in punishment of children and of children being removed from their homes because some forms of physical punishment used by parents are deemed actionable child abuse by authorities. Some parents worry that the sex and drug education that young people receive in school is beyond their level of understanding and only serves to give them inappropriate ideas. The schools themselves are sometimes described as havens for misconduct and immoral behavior, and as being too permissive about gangs, drugs and sex.

In this chapter, we explore the meaning and implication of these parental concerns using some of Professor Roosens' ideas about immigration, culture change, and group identification. We begin by briefly describing the immigrants' *educación* model of socialization and child development. Next we recount the various child rearing accommodations parents make to conditions in the U.S., including intensification of natal practices, adoption of new ones, and resistance to U.S. practices.

Finally, we turn to an issue to which Professor Roosens (1989) has made significant contributions – ethnogenesis or evolving changes in self-identification. As Professor Roosens has noted, "there is no single, uniform process of ethnogenesis" across the diverse cases studied in North America and Europe. We suggest immigrant *Mexicano* families to California display a pattern of ethnogenesis somewhat distinctive from what Roosens and his colleagues have previously reported. In brief, we argue in the Conclusions that Suárez-Orozco's (1989) "dual frame of reference" affects ethnogenesis in two ways for the Mexican families in our sample. While they may be on the low end of the economic ladder in the U.S., they see themselves as relatively better off than they would have been if they had remained in Mexico. At the same time, they cast themselves in a morally superior position relative to those who succumb to what they perceive as the libertine and corrupting lifestyles in Los Angeles. One reason for this particularity may be the nature and history of the U.S./Mexico border region that includes a pattern of continued migration over many decades to an immigration area that

was once part of Mexico and is home to millions of Mexican-descent people. In this next section, we briefly discuss this history and the contemporary context.

Mexicano immigration to the United States: History and context

A slide presentation at a recent anthropology conference made use of magazine cover illustrations to deftly illustrate the ambiguous sentiments held by Americans regarding immigrants and immigration. On one cover, the Statue of Liberty proudly beckons to newcomers; immigrant faces are framed against a backdrop of the American flag. On another, innumerable peasant-clothed invaders push their way up from Mexico to swarm into a bucolic, under-populated United States (Chavez, 1998). Many Americans express pride in the nation's history of immigration, freedom, and opportunity. Past immigrants are viewed with nostalgia, in particular by their numerous descendants, while current immigrants are viewed with fear and distrust. Researchers and media commentators alike speak of a new wave of immigration to the United States which bears some similarity to the wave of the early part of the century but which differs from past immigration in key ways. Reactions vary enormously around the country, and governmental policies and actions on many levels often seem contradictory. For example, at the same time that California passed legislation attempting to ban access to government services for illegal immigrants, state educational policy required instruction in their native language for any language minority students who needed it.

Immigrants from Mexico are the most numerous group in the new immigration, and cultural transformations along both sides of the 2,000-mile border are profound. Of the estimated 20 million foreign-born residents in the United States, according to 1990 U.S. Census figures, over one-fifth, or close to 4.3 million, are Mexican-born. Currently nationwide, 5.2 million school-age children (ages 5-17) speak a language other than English at home; of these, 3.6 million children (68%) speak Spanish, the largest single group. In California alone, almost one million students – nearly one-fifth of the total school-age population in the state – are limited English-speaking students from Spanish-language backgrounds (Macías, 1995).

Some Mexican immigrants cross the northern border into the United States with government issued "green card" work permits or visas. Others take their chances without required documents: Those who cross the Rio Grande and other rivers are called *mojados* (wetbacks), while those who defeat wire fences are called *alambristas* (wire crossers). With or without documents, all enter an area which is indistinguishable physically and geographically from the great Sonoran desert of northern Mexico and which historically was long under first Spanish and later Mexican domination. Spanish conquest and settlement of the borderlands began in 1580 with the founding of Santa Fe in the region, which was to become the state of New Mexico. Two centuries later, in 1769, settlement of

California began with the overland trek from New Spain by soldiers and Franciscan friars under the command of Gaspar de Portolá and the establishment of the first mission at San Diego.

During the period of Spanish and later Mexican control, settlement of California followed a pattern typical of the border settlements: military forts (*presidios*) were established by the army, missions were established by the Franciscans for the conversion of the Native Americans to Catholicism and to a sedentary agricultural lifestyle, and towns (*pueblos*) were established for settlers. Most of the leading cities of California today – Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, San Jose, Santa Barbara, Monterey – began as Spanish *pueblos* or *presidios*. Spanish place names are such an emblematic part of California history that many more recently established towns, streets, and housing complexes also bear Spanish names and are constructed in faux "mission" style.

The end of the Mexican-American War in 1848 brought California and the rest of the border region, amounting to over one-third of Mexico's territory, under U.S. control. Immediately afterwards, the discovery of gold in northern California resulted in an inundation of the region by outsiders, followed quickly by statehood for California. American economic, demographic, political dominance was quickly established over the native *Californio* population. However, migration from Mexico continued, reaching epic proportions during the Revolution (1910-1920) when it is estimated that close to one-tenth of Mexico's population moved to the United States (Barrera, 1979). Invited to work as *braceros*, or temporary agricultural workers during World War II, Mexican workers continue to enter the workforce mainly as low paid laborers in agricultural, service, construction, and manufacturing industries.

Not only does migration from to the US from Mexico have a long history, it has also been characterized by continual movement back and forth across the border. In their decade-long studies of transnational migration in a range of communities, Massey and his colleagues have found that in towns in Mexico which are experiencing mass migration only 24% of the people stay in the US for over five years. Much more common are shorter trips as temporary sojourners and workers, with 49% of migrants staying in the U.S. for under a year (Massey, Goldring, & Durand, 1994). Writing of growing up with family contacts on both sides of the Arizona border, Vélez-Ibáñez (1996) describes himself as born *con un pie en cada lado* (with a foot on each side).

As a consequence of this history, the families in our study live in an American metropolis, which hosts the third largest Mexican population in the world. They join a Mexican-descent population that includes other recent immigrants, grandchildren of those who fled Mexico during the revolution, and descendants of the original settlers and landowners. They join English-speaking Americans buying Mexican-style fast food at Taco Bell or eating at restaurants featuring cuisine of Mexico and decorated in a style that is indistinguishable from establishments in many parts of Mexico. The watch a second-generation immigrant entertainer perform songs in Spanish at the Super Bowl football championship or see news clips of dignitaries being greeted at the Los Angeles airport by a *mariachi* band. They

reside in a state where the recently elected Lieutenant Governor is a Mexican-American child of immigrants and where a Latina new to national politics defeated a well-entrenched and funded arch-conservative to become her district's representative to the U.S. Congress. They face a future California that some demographers predict will in a generation or two have a plurality of citizens of Latino heritage. Mexican immigrants come to live in an area that was once Mexico and is now "un-Mexico," a region politically separate yet retaining historical and cultural links with their homeland.

Overview of sample and procedures

The families and children to which we refer in this chapter were part of a random sample of over 100 Spanish-speaking kindergartners and their families living in two communities in Southern California. Beginning in 1989, we have carried out numerous interviews and visits with all of the families. For a randomly selected sub-set, we undertook extended interpretive interviews with parents and adolescents, mainly carried out in their homes. The great majority (84%) of the parents in the random sample came to the United States from Mexico; the rest are from Central America. In this chapter we focus exclusively on the immigrant Mexican families and their mostly American-born children.

The *Mexicano* parents in our sample tend to follow an earlier migration pattern identified by Cornelius (1989-1990): 55% of the women and over 60% of the men are from the traditional sending states of Jalisco, Michoacan, and Zacatecas in central Mexico. When the study began in 1989, mothers in the sample averaged 9.9 years of residence (range = 1-27) in the United States; fathers averaged 11.7 years (range = 1-21). The average number of years of formal schooling for mothers and fathers was virtually identical, with an aggregate mean of 7.1 years (range = 1-13). Parents' occupations tend to cluster in the lower levels of occupation within each census category: Service (mothers = 28%; fathers = 35%); Repair (mothers = 3%; fathers = 22%); and Laborer (mothers = 16%; fathers = 41%). Fifty-three per cent of mothers described their work as homemaker. Service occupations represented included cooks, waiters, maids, janitors, bartenders, bus boys, parking attendants, child care and cafeteria workers, teacher's assistants; Repair workers included mechanics, electricians, carpenters, welders, and the Laborer category included construction, assembly, packing, machine operation, and loading. Only 3% of the fathers reported being unemployed in 1989.

In contrast to their parents, who are all immigrants, the majority (75%) of the children was born in the United States, 94% of these in California. Some 22% of the children were born in Mexico; 3% were born in Central America. All began their formal schooling in the U.S., and thus would be regarded as second generation immigrants in conventional reference.

In 1997 Reese visited communities in Mexico from which a subset of our sample families had immigrated to the U.S. and interviewed the parents' siblings

who had remained to live and raise families in Mexico. These families resided in a variety of settings, from rural hamlets to the capital city, and included a wider range of occupations than was observed in the Los Angeles sample. Occupations of parents in Mexico included farmer, plumber, police officer, accountant, secretary, construction worker, maid, and small business owner. All had adolescent children of similar age to the children in the Los Angeles sample, between the ages of 11 and 13 at that time.

Childrearing and socialization: The cultural model of educación

Interviews and observations with the immigrant parents in our study sample centered around the broad topic of their children's education in the United States, exploring the relationship between home and school, the expectations that parents have for their children's educational and post-school attainment, and the things that parents report doing with their children to promote desired outcomes. Schooling and study were situated by parents within broader goals for their children's futures and as part of a more comprehensive model of child rearing.

Parents in our sample see as their principal responsibility the rearing of a moral and responsible child, a child who will become what is often referred to as a *persona de bien*, a good person. This is an agrarian-evolved cultural model of child rearing that the families reference by the term *educación* (Reese et al., 1995). *Educación* encompasses beliefs and practices for rearing a child who is *bien educado*, or "well brought up." By cultural model, we mean shared ways of organizing and understanding the social world and personal experience. Cultural models or schema make sense of the world, how things work, and what is the right and proper course of action. Many features of cultural models are relatively transparent to the individuals who hold them, because they are not just cognitive representations of reality, they are reality. They are the ways things are, the taken-for-granted view of the world (D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992).

In almost every contact we have with the families regarding their children and schooling, the cultural model of *educación* looms large in what they say. For example, one mother claims, "One has to teach them to be good, aside from schooling. Teach them to be correct [in behavior]. Teach them morals, teach them to be good, because they can have studied a lot, but if one hasn't taught them correct behavior, in the end it (study) doesn't help them." (*Tiene uno que enseñarles a ser buenos, aparte del estudio. Enseñarles a ser correctos. Enseñarles moralidad, enseñarles a ser buenos, pues pueden estar muy estudiados y todo, pero si uno no les enseñan a ser correctos de últimas de nada les sirve).*

When another mother was asked what she would like for her son's future occupation, she replied: "I'd like him to study, and above all to be upright, to have good behavior, to become (literally: to arrive at being) a person of respect and to be respectful of others too." Case #91 (*Me gustaría que estudiara, y sobre todo que fuera recto, que tuviera buenas costumbres, que llegara a ser una persona de respeto y que también fuera respetuoso con las personas.*)

Even extended attempts to get parents to distinguish moral and academic competence and to speculate on which is more important to schooling success produced this kind of response: "The two things go hand in hand. One always has to try to walk a straight path. It would be impossible to get to the university if one doesn't have good behavior, if one isn't taught to respect others. One would end up as a gang member otherwise." (*Las dos cosas van de la mano. Uno tiene que estar siempre tratando de caminar un camino recto. Sería imposible llegar a la universidad si no tiene buenos modales, si no se enseñe a respetar a los demás. Llegaría a ser pandillero, si no).*

For the parents in our sample, knowing right from wrong, respect for parents and others, and correct behavior, is the base upon which academic competence is built. It is the definition of a good person, and it is associated with Mexican identity. "We Mexicans come from an old tradition, a tradition of the 'ranchos,' where the father and mother are respected. Regarding siblings, the younger ones respect the older ones." (*Todos nosotros, los mejicanos, venimos de una tradición antigua, de ranchos donde se respeta al padre y a la madre. Tratándose de hermanos, los menores respetan a los mayores).*

Not only do parents feel they must teach children to distinguish between right and wrong, but they must also teach them to act accordingly, in other words, to demonstrate good behavior. Both the knowledge of right and wrong and knowing and practicing the behaviors and manners that are the result of such knowledge are key aspects of the concept of *educación*. One father describes the respect he was taught at home by his parents as a *bonita herencia* (beautiful inheritance), which he was given by his parents and which he is giving his own children. As they educate their children, immigrant parents seek to pass on ethical values and behaviors learned from their own parents.

In talking about their model of child development and education, parents make statements indicating that the cultural model of *educación* is structured metaphorically according to the idea of a road down which children travel under parents' guidance. Parents see their responsibility as that of giving their children the knowledge necessary for them to follow the *el buen camino* – the "good path" – in life. As parents describe the characteristics of *el buen camino*, they place school on the good path and dropping out of school on the bad path. Thus, schooling and academic achievement are imbued with virtue as part of the good life for which one aspires and prepares one's children (Reese et al. 1995).

Parents are clear about their aspirations or hopes for their children. They hope that their children will stay on the good path in life, and they see as their most important responsibility that of orienting the child along this path. Their aspirations are most often expressed, not in specific levels of education, for example university or high school level, but in more general terms. Parents hope that their children will do well (*superarse*), that they will become somebody (*ser alguien*), that they will be able to function well in life (*desenvolverse en la sociedad*), and that they will have a career (*agarrar una carrera*). The actions which they report taking, often in the moral realm, are motivated by these desires.

Although parents work hard in the early years of their children's lives to keep

them on the good path, through counseling and disciplining their children, they realize that there will come the time when the child will decide for himself which of life's paths he or she will take. Parents believe that this crucial period of decision-making takes place between the ages of 12 and 19, and that children are greatly influenced by their peers. While parents believe they can support and motivate children, they cannot predict or say with any degree of assurance what the life outcome will be for their children. They realize that they are not the only influences on their children – that their children live in "multiple worlds" of which Phelan et al. (1998) and others have written. Increasingly, as the children grow and progress in school, the children's peers, their experiences at school, the circumstances of the neighborhood, all play a role in influencing the children's behavior and decisions.

In this sense the families recognize and are concerned about a problem common in many parts of the world, which also troubled prior waves of immigrants to the U.S.A. (e.g., Sennett & Cobb, 1972). They want for their children as much educational and occupational success as possible – they want them to be somebody (*ser alguien*). They also believe that "to be somebody" you must first be a "good" person (*persona de bien*). There is a fundamental contradiction between these two goals: Being a good person means among other things maintaining close ties to the family, respecting the authority of elders, and other manifestations of the traditional values by which most of these parents are guided. Yet in some of the "worlds" their youngsters must succeed – school, for example – there is both opportunity and pressure to live by different principles. These contradictions demand family accommodations, some relatively easy as the following section indicates, and some that are not.

Accommodations to the U.S. Congruent with Mexican cultural models

As families pursue the advantages of economic and educational opportunities in the U.S., they try in many ways to retain the customs and values, which guided their actions and gave meaning to their lives prior to coming to the United States. In neighborhoods throughout the metropolitan Los Angeles area, home country cultural models are continually reproduced and recreated. The following scene is only one example of many such efforts:

> Fresh flowers framed the newly-painted image of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* in the early morning hours of December 12, the feast day of the patron saint of Mexico. A large arch of blue and white balloons swayed above the image and served as a beacon to attract increasing numbers of followers as the procession neared St. Lucy's Church. Three *mariachis*, dressed in traditional suits adorned with silver braid and buttons, serenaded the *Virgen* with a special version of *Las mañanitas* or the birthday song, and a group of middle-aged women in a tight cluster immediately behind the image sang along with them. Bundled in sweatshirts and jackets against the chill, parents held the hands of small children. Teenagers walked

> along with their families, some carrying poinsettia plants to be placed in the church. The group attracted little notice as it moved out onto a major street, passing a Latino grocery store, a Filipino restaurant, two bars and numerous apartment buildings. With a voice raw with emotion, one of the leaders of the event, a short woman in jeans and hooded sweatshirt, exhorted the group to join her in cries of *Viva la Virgen de las Américas* and *Viva México*. One of the women of the church who had helped organize the event commented after the mass, *"El próximo año va a ser mejor. La gente ve lo que se está haciendo y luego quieren colaborar. Cada año es mejor, más grande."* (Next year it will be better. People see what is being done and then they want to help out. Each year is better, bigger.)

Thus, this first generation woman sees the home country religious values and observances as growing in strength and continuing to provide adaptive benefits. However, the process of adapting the agrarian model (*educación*) of child development to Los Angeles is more complex than simply "maintaining" home country values and practices such as this annual ritual. As they confront various challenges, families make a variety of accommodations in socialization practices.

Intensification of home country practices: Protective strategies. Over and over again, in interviews, which cover the period from early childhood to mid-adolescence, parents, expressed fears about the dangerous environments in which they are raising their children. As low-income workers, they often find housing in deteriorating inner city neighborhoods which lack services for children such as safe playgrounds and supervised after school activities. Gangs are ubiquitous, drug sales common, and police a constant presence. Not only the surrounding neighborhood but also the schools themselves are contexts in which children can be led astray by the influences of what parents call *malas amistades,* or bad peers.

A common response by many Latino immigrant families is to severely restrict children's activities and friendships. Children through early adolescence may be confined to the home or areas close to it; friends may come over to play under the parents' supervision, but their own child may not be allowed to play at other people's homes for fear that supervision might not be as strict. Parents accompany children to and from school, and are sometimes reluctant to allow them to participate in school activities, such as outdoor camp, which will take them away from parental monitoring (Kroesen, Reese, & Gallimore, 1998). This response is not unique to Latino immigrants. A similar "lock down" strategy has been described by Jarrett (1994) for African American families raising children in similar neighborhoods.

These protective practices are entirely congruous with home country values, and are observed in Mexican settings, for example, when adolescent girls are expected to meet with their boyfriends on the porch or front curb of the house in close proximity to the parents. However, parents in Mexico do not perceive their neighborhoods to be as dangerous as those of American cities, and they allow their children freedoms that are not seen as appropriate in the U.S. Children as young as 4 or 5 may be sent to run errands at the corner store, and parents are not concerned that they do not know exactly where adolescents are during the day

and evening (Reese, 1999). In the U.S. restrictions intensify because the perceived need is greater to protect children.

Utilization of new practices which serve common goals: Promotional strategies. Not only do parents in Los Angeles restrict activities and limit friendships in order to protect children from bad influences, some also make efforts to foster children's participation in structured activities which will keep children out of trouble. Thus some parents encourage children to sing in the choir, play in band, or join the youth group at church. Others coach their children's soccer team or work with them on a hobbies. Interviews with the families in Mexico revealed few of these or similar promotional strategies on the part of parents (Reese, 1999). With the exception of ensuring that children attended catechism classes at church and permitting children, almost exclusively boys, to play soccer at the local parks, parents did not describe other instances of encouraging children to attend classes at the parks, programs at the nearby library, or play on organized sports teams.

While protective strategies may serve to keep children in school and away from friends who might lead them astray, these accommodations do not seem to be associated with higher levels of performance in school. On the other hand, parents who utilize promotional strategies, actively supporting their children's choices and fostering additional out-of-school activities, are more likely to have children doing well in school (Reese et al., 1998). However, the reason that parents give for engaging in these practices is not to foster improved school performance. Rather, they involve their children in wholesome, supervised activities to keep them out of trouble. There is evidence that the children themselves see parents' efforts in this light and approve of them. Eleven-year-old Carlos stated that when he grows up, he wants to be like his own father, "a sports dad, like put them in sports so they wouldn't get in gangs." Parents are observed to adopt strategies that are not part of their own childhood experiences but which serve to fulfill familiar goals.

Adoption of U.S. practices which are not incongruous with home country values: Reading to children. In the United States, parents are encouraged to conform to school practices with regard to homework and participation in their children's schooling. Parents find some of these expectations, such as making sure the child does his homework and providing assistance when needed and possible, to be identical to expectations they experienced in Mexico. Other expectations, such as the oft-repeated request that they read aloud to their preschool and primary school aged children, are unfamiliar practices. Although the parents' cultural model of literacy does not view reading aloud to young children as critical to the child's development of literacy skills, parents report engaging in this activity once children begin school and the teachers make the request (Reese & Gallimore, 1998). However, when parents discussed why they read to children, the reasons cited rarely included reading aloud with the purpose of promoting their children's literacy development. In fact, they did not see evidence of a direct

link between a child's being read to, and a child's learning how to read himself.

Reading aloud to children was perceived as a positive activity. On one hand, it was necessary because the teacher required it. One mother stated that she read to her daughters *"porque me mandan papelillos de la escuela"* (because they send home little papers from school) as part of homework. On the other hand, it was perceived as a valuable activity. Several mothers talked about reading aloud as an opportunity to discuss right and wrong with children. For example, Manuel's mother said that he enjoyed the story of Jonas and the whale, which she used to teach him about correct behavior. She reported telling her 5-year-old son *"si no se porta bien se va quedar en la panza de la ballena."* (If you don't behave well you're going to end up in the belly of the whale.) Another mother stated that reading to children was a good idea because it promoted family unity.

Reading aloud to children is probably the suggestion made most often by elementary school teachers to parents, and the activity is multiply reinforced in American society. Television advertisements encourage use of the public library, and parent magazines abound with articles about reading and advertisements for book clubs. Some programs encourage reading to the child still in the mother's womb. All of this is done with the purpose of putting the child on solid footing with regard to early and successful literacy development. *Mexicano* parents adopt the practice, but imbue it with the values of *educación* – teaching the child the difference between right and wrong and promoting family unity and respect.

Resisting U.S. practices which undermine home values: Youth Autonomy. There are points at which some common U.S. child rearing values and practices run counter to immigrant *Mexicano* values. One, which emerged with particular salience during the children's elementary school years, was the issue of freedom and autonomy granted to youth in the U.S. The families are distressed that the American culture allows, and even promotes, substantial youth autonomy as part of an emphasis on independence, self-sufficiency, and individualism. Many parents want no part of this style of child rearing: *"Yo no fui criada 'a la moda', ni mi marido tampoco. Nosotros queremos enseñarles [a nuestros hijos] ese camino, como nos criaron a nosotros."* (I was not brought up to follow the new fashion, neither was my husband. We want to teach our children that road, the way we were brought up.)

Many of the *Mexicano* parents believe that Americans make a tragic error by being too permissive and too unwilling to use firm discipline. These opinions arose unprompted in our interviews, and often in the context of outrage that U.S. schools teach children that parental discipline can constitute criminal child abuse. One mother stated clearly her concern that Americans, in the interest of protecting children, were running a major risk of going so far as to jeopardize children's moral welfare. She stated: "They grow up and just like that want to do whatever they want.... that's why they call this country the country of freedom. One cannot tell them anything because 'I'm going to call the cops on you. You can't touch me because I'll call the police.' We Mexicans are not like that. We had to obey and didn't even think of threatening our parents with 'I'm going to do

this, that or the other.' This is one of the customs that I don't want (my children) to learn." She bases her belief on her observation that Mexican families who have educated their children in the same way that the parents had been educated have children who are now good and hard-working. Other children that have been raised in the U.S. do not let their parents say anything to them.

The parents recognize a clear distinction between "fair" and proper punishment and child abuse. They know that child abuse does exist, as this mother noted who believes that parents do have the right, if the child is acting badly, to punish. Mrs. Toledo believes that discipline should be "a fair thing. One shouldn't go on and half kill or hurt them." However, she thinks that it is not fair that simply for punishing their children, parents have their kids taken away from them, except in the case of parents who are "maniacs, who are crazy. That is another thing."

However, many immigrant Mexican parents believe that their different view on youthful autonomy sets them apart from teachers, with whom they long for a partnership. Some blame the teachers and laws, which instead of helping parents, allow children to "get out of control." Mrs. Sanchez recounted how one of her daughters came home from school one day saying that she (the mother) shouldn't hit her because that's wrong. The mother realized that the teachers must have said something about child abuse, so she explained to her children that she spanks them so they will be obedient, because she loves them. She expressed concern, however, that her children would "go down the same path" as children whose parents "don't deserve to have kids." She said some children are allowed too much freedom, especially when both parents work.

For many, resisting what they see as a permissive attitude by schools and other institutions is a matter of great moral consequence for their children. They are determined to find a way to retain what they see as core values and practices that they believe are the only way to keep their children on the "good path."

The second generation children

Our fieldnotes and interviews paint a complex picture of the lives of the children in the immigrant families to whom we have been talking since 1989, when the children themselves were only five years old and entering formal schooling. As late as age 13, most are still tightly tied to their families and homes, and still express commitment to their parents' values and approved activities. They, like their parents, continue to believe that schooling offers them a better future. Although their performance in school since kindergarten ranges from abysmal to outstanding (range = 1st to 95th reading percentile), most – including the lowest achievers – continue to express an interest in school and report future goals consonant with those expressed by their parents. Typical is the case of Adrian.

Adrian is the middle child of three children. Although his mother rated his elementary school performance a 4 (on a scale of 1 to 7), and Adrian said that he's done "pretty good" and rated himself a 5, his teachers had not been as optimistic. Adrian received teacher ratings of 2's and 3's (on the 7 point scale)

throughout elementary school, and in 5th grade his percentile ranking scores in reading and math were 4th and 5th percentile respectively, meaning he scored lower than 95 % of children who took the same test. He describes himself as interested in school, rating himself a 7 out of 7 in interest. In talking about his future, his answers reflect values espoused by his parents. He wants to finish college and believes he will. He wants to work in a bank "because I like working in an office. I want to earn a lot of money so I could help my family, and my kids and my wife. That's if I get one." When asked if he was currently doing anything to help prepare for what he wanted to be, he said yes, "listening in school, paying attention, and that's all."

Although without exception they endorse their parents' view of the relative importance of *educación* and schooling, some youngsters are well aware of "other pathways." For example, another boy, Jorge, reflected on the factors that might, in the future, cause him to drop out of school.

> "I wouldn't be able to keep up, I think that's one. Or something big happens in my family, something like that?... Like if somebody gets sick, if they get really, really sick, I'd drop out. Then after that, when they get better, I think I would go back."... "Mostly drugs, [that's] another thing that I've seen kids drop out of school for. Or they just don't feel good about themselves, I think. They just drop out. They don't think they're going anywhere." [Some drop out] "Cause some people, they just... in high school they just... I don't know, they just drop out. I think they think it's too hard, and they just drop out. Or they don't think it's valuable to... that it's [not] going to help them in their future. That's when they get the right to just drop out, they just do it."

Some youngsters in our sample are experimenting with alternatives their parents would not sanction. One boy talked about the importance of sibling solidarity in case one needs to be bailed out of jail for stealing. One of the girls shaved her eyebrows and carefully drew them in with eye pencil, without asking her mother for the permission that she felt sure would be denied. Another boy, one of the lowest achievers in the sample, is drawn toward a career path as a house painter on his uncle's crew, a pursuit which worries his mother because of the amount of drinking the men do. These and other examples depict children dealing with different worlds that they must navigate between, some more divergent than others, some more risky than others (Kroesen, et al., 1998). The world of home and *educación* is but one world which increasingly competes with peers, the neighborhood, school, work, boyfriends and girlfriends, and the media for the children's allegiance.

Based on prior studies of immigrants' children, one might expect we would have encountered in our young teen sample at least some who were beginning to exhibit alienation, lack of motivation, and a loss of optimism about the benefits of schooling (e.g., Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995). Yet as late as eighth grade, none of the children clearly reject their parents' values and belief in the importance of education, or express strong criticism of schools. Given the low achievement test scores and school performance of some children, it seems apparent that eventually some will drop out or be pushed out of school. When this

process begins, it remains to be seen the extent to which it is accompanied by overt expressions of alienation and rejection of parental values and goals.

Perhaps those students who experienced difficulty and frustration in school will be those who rebel against their parents' dreams of occupational advancement through schooling. Perhaps some of them will choose the alternatives their parents fear so much: dropping out of school, choosing early and out-of-wedlock pregnancy, or participating in a gang life of delinquency and crime. Given the enormous variability in school performance within this sample of youngsters, we suspect a highly differentiated response. All that we have learned to date suggests it to be unwise in the extreme to stereotype second generation Mexican-American children by using "second generation" or some other proxy or social address to describe their pathway. Fully half of the sample at the end of elementary school had standardized reading scores below the 35th percentile. These children, as adults and parents themselves, are not likely to regard education in the same way as the 47% of our sample with average or better achievement at the end of elementary school. We cannot predict from the data in hand whether this second generation will forge significantly different values and practices than their first generation parents. The answer to this question is among the most important we will address in an ongoing study of these now 13-year olds that will continue until they are age 19.

Competing frames for second generation youth

While it is too early to predict the ways in which the second generation children in our sample will construct and reconcile values and identities as adults, we have evidence that as early as elementary school, they are forging new perspectives on core issues. The following excerpt is taken from a transcript of a reading lesson at one of the schools which children in our sample attended, in a small city where many sample families live. In this lesson, fourth grade students (8 and 9 year olds) are discussing a story they read in which the mother does all the housework, laundry, and cooking for her husband and two sons, who take her efforts for granted and never help. In fact, the father and boys seem to think that what mother does is properly women's work and of no concern to males. When the mother leaves one day, the father and sons quickly learn how much work she has been doing and how rapidly their comfortable life deteriorates. The story concludes with the father and sons apologetic and ready to help with housework, while the mother fixes the car. The teacher asks the group of students (three Latino boys, two Latina girls, and one African American girl) what they think of the ending.

> Luis feels the ending is not right: "The ladies doesn't have to fix the car. The man has to."
>
> Carol [African American girl], objects strenuously: "No. Girls could do anything. They could be policemen and army..."
>
> Humberto interrupts: "I know that."
>
> Carol continues: "They could even be car fixers too. My mom fixes the car, so you can't tell me that a woman cannot fix a car."

Lucy chimes in: "Anybody can fix a car."

Later in the discussion, Lucy tells the boys: "You guys could go to be secretaries too. There's lots of men that are secretaries."

Humberto makes a flippant comment laced with sarcasm: "Yeah, I'm going to be a secretary."

Luis contradicts Lucy's statement: "I'm going to get a real man's job."

The teacher objects to this implied gender stereotyping, saying that there are male nurses and teachers.

Carol reiterates: "There is no such thing as a man's job and no such thing as a woman's job."

Humberto takes the conversation in a new and different direction: "Take it to the ranch, teacher. Take the girls to the ranch, and they will do all the cleaning. But here in America there's girls that they don't know how to do nothing. They just are with gangsters like that, and they don't do nothing. And when they take them to the ranch they know how to do everything. Right here they don't wash dishes, nothing. The mom has to wash the dishes."

Luis agrees: "In Mexico every girl knows everything. In Mexico every girl could throw more milk than me. (He gestures milking a cow.) They know how to do everything."

Roberto remembers his experience on the rancho: "I was afraid that one cow, when I was going to..." (He gestures as if he were milking a cow.)

The discussion of gender roles above took an unexpected turn when Humberto made an impassioned speech about how the girls in the U.S., like his female classmates and boys like himself, could not do certain jobs on the *rancho* (small farm) back in Mexico. The three boys in the group seemed to be citing personal experiences from visits to rural Mexico (very likely, since many families do frequently return to home regions), where chores they could not do themselves or were afraid to do, were routinely carried out by girls. Humberto seems to be advancing a fairly sophisticated, if not fully articulated, argument. In essence, he is saying that context matters. Perhaps back in Mexico on a *rancho* one can expect women to share men's jobs, but here in an American city, things are different.

The teacher tried to summarize their comments and asked if they meant that girls in the U.S. are spoiled.

Lidia is incensed: "We're not spoiled."

Lucy challenges the boys with the argument: "When I went to girl scout camp all the way in Big Bear, I rided horses. We cleaned them. We brushed them."

Roberto chided: "The one who was taking care of you is the one who showed you how to ride a horse."

Lucy denied this: "No, they didn't teach us. We had to do it by ourselves."

In contrast to Humberto and the other boys, both Lucy and Lidia have fully adopted an American ideal, expressed by Carol, that there is no such thing as a "woman's job" and that women can do anything that men can do. Carol claims her mother fixes cars, and Lucy describes riding and caring for horses in summer camp. Luis responds, as he might have heard from adult males in his family, saying he wants a "real man's job."

Humberto is attempting to make a more subtle point, however. He is not making a conventional argument that boys should do "men's work." He agrees with the girls that there are many jobs females can do, but his experience leads him to distinguish what they are expected and permitted to do from what they are willing do in U.S. and Mexico respectively. He adds a societal element to the gender and job issue: While girls in the U.S. are *able* to do many things, in Mexico girls actually do them. He says, " Take the girls to the ranch, and they will do all the cleaning. But here in America there's girls that they don't know how to do nothing. They just are with gangsters like that, and they don't do nothing." Something goes wrong in the U.S., Humberto implies, and in this claim we hear the echo of what many parents told us about the dangers of the "libertine" society of America which "spoils" Mexicano immigrants. In this case, Humberto makes a specific claim about dangers facing girls, though from the parents we have heard of dangers to boys as well as well as adult men and women. But Humberto's argument goes well beyond being spoiled by U.S. society, he alludes to something far more serious when he says that girls in the U.S. "just are with gangsters like that, and they don't do nothing." It's not so important that they do not do dishes or know how to milk cows, it is their separation from the values of *educación* that he fears. In this sense, he speaks for all the families who have expressed similar views.

Conclusions

The parents we have been talking with over the last ten years have now spent between 11 and 40 years in the United States. All are first generation immigrants whose identity is tied to their home country nationality. They are first and foremost *Mexicanos*. A source of pride in their ethnic identity as well as of their aspirations for their children lies in the concept of *educación*. To them, the Mexican is a seen as a diligent worker, regardless of the humble status of the job he may have, and for that is deserving of respect. Their view of the U.S. as a permissive and libertine society that does not do enough to keep its children on the *buen camino* underscores *educación* values as becoming a significant ethnic marker. Together, their sense of diligence and morality add a second dynamic to the dual-frame of reference described by Suárez-Orozco (1989).

Suárez-Orozco (1989) described immigrants' penchant for evaluating their circumstances in their host country in terms of the life they knew in their native country as a "dual frame of reference." Although the immigrant family may be living in crowded conditions and the parents working long hours for a minimum wage, and although they may experience discriminatory treatment as newcomers with little control of the English language, they can nonetheless compare their circumstances to what they left in their home country and feel that they are better off in their new land. Parents in our sample provide numerous examples of this dual frame of reference, referring to *el norte* as the "country of opportunity" for jobs for themselves and education for their children. If the first generation parents experience discrimination, for example, they explain it as a fault of their

own lack of home country education and lack of English. *"Por ejemplo si yo solicito trabajo en una fábrica por decir, me dan un trabajo más pesado, por no saber inglés y porque no estudié. El estudio es para progresar."* (For example, if I look for a job in a factory, they'll give me the hardest work, because of not knowing English and because I didn't study. Study is (necessary) to progress).

However, the dual frame of reference operates for these families in a different and complementary way. Although the home country is viewed as a land of economic hardship and closed options, it remains a treasured source of moral values, which sustain the immigrant abroad. The American patriot Patrick Henry is remembered by schoolchildren for his cry, "Give me liberty or give me death!" Yet the highly-touted liberty of the Anglo-Saxon Americans is viewed suspiciously by many immigrant Mexican parents and is referred to, not as liberty, but as *libertinaje* (libertinism) by some. Thus, while seeking access to better jobs and material goods, parents are determined to retain their moral heritage and raise their children with the same values that they themselves were raised with.

The "dual frame of reference" works in two ways for the Mexican immigrant families we have been interviewing. On one hand, they look to their home country as a place where, no matter how hard they worked, they would not be able to earn what they earn in the United States, and where they experienced discrimination, albeit for different causes than they experience in the U.S. On the other hand, they yearn for the healthier, simpler, purer way of life that they left behind. They not only experience nostalgia for the life left behind, but in a profound way experience that nostalgia in moral terms. The two-fold nature of the immigrants' frame of reference, in which the host country exemplifies both material good and moral decay, contributes to their differential adoption of U.S. customs and values.

This battle of the forces of good and evil, of home country values against host country moral decay, is evidenced in the following observation L. J. Reese made in Concepción in the state of Jalisco in western Mexico, the home town of a number of families in our sample. Concepción is located in a semi-rural and densely populated region that has experienced massive migration to the United States beginning in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Durand and Massey (1992), in their studies of US-Mexico migration carried out over the past decade, define a situation of mass migration as a migratory stage in which over 30% of the women and 80% of the men of a Mexican town have been to the US. At this stage, 75% of the town's adults have parents with immigration experience, and 40% have grandparents with immigration experience.

In Concepción, as in other towns in the vicinity, it is the custom that the festival of the patron saint include a mass and pilgrimage by the *hijos ausentes* (literally "absent children"), who are townspeople who no longer reside in town. The great majority of *hijos ausentes* live in the United States. A high point of the festival is a parade of allegorical floats (mobile stages on wheels pulled by trucks or animals) in which costumed people hold statue-like poses in naturalistic settings. A Concepción woman described a scene from the 1996 festival in which one such float was constructed by a group of townspeople residing in the American city of Chicago. This float showed life in Chicago, complete with the

vices of smoking, shooting up drugs and living on the street, in comparison with the idyllic, tranquil, family- and religion-centered life of the home town.

The families in Los Angeles and *Concepción* are not unique in their concerns. On the contrary, the values they espouse are not altogether different from the focus on "family values" of prominent political movements in the U.S., including those who advocate withdrawing from a society they see as immoral and "approaching barbarism" (Los Angeles Times, 1999, p. A4). In not so different a way, immigrant *Mexicanos* see themselves as struggling to maintain children on the *buen camino* amidst considerable pressures for them to succumb to the temptations of life in the morally dangerous and permissive American environment. Many Americans share a similar view that contemporary U.S. society truly is a "garden of good and evil."

The adaptive struggle confronting Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles is played out in moral terms: how does one raise children who surpass their parents economically but do not fall prey to the moral dangers of contemporary American society. To do this, they cannot simply recreate familiar patterns. The settings are too disparate. Nor can they, in good conscience, abandon their children to American ways. The solution lies in a third path, in which accommodations are forged from the familiar and the new in such a way that core moral values continue to give coherence and meaning to everyday life.

In resisting what they see as too much autonomy for youth, and other dangers, their various child rearing accommodations indicate that immigrant Mexican parents are not passive bystanders in the face of perceived threats. They represent themselves as active agents of cultural change and adaptation, deliberately seeking to weave beliefs and practices that help them and their children adapt to urban Los Angeles into their natal agrarian model. One anvil on which they forge the old and new is the everyday routine of family life and the activities in which their children participate. Although constrained by economic and social factors, they like all parents try to shape daily life in accordance with their values. The daily routine they construct is simultaneously, in Gidden's (1987) words, an instantiation of the social order that constrains families, and a medium of human agency.

By forging everyday routines through which they hope to influence children's development and their futures, the families seek to adapt, not abandon, their "agrarian model" of human development. For the families, this arguably agentic process is a struggle to survive in difficult environments. They like millions of earlier immigrants (Sennett & Cobb, 1972) are torn between the lure of the modern, and all its promises, and fear of the social and moral consequences of their choices on the children.

Suro (1998) tells the story of some immigrant *Mexicana* mothers who walk the streets of Los Angeles at night to pacify gang members, known as gangbangers. They are entering into community level politics in ways which previously unknown to them for the purpose of maintaining safe neighborhoods and families. Suro writes, "The *madres* are neither American nor Mexican. They are creating something new in the *barrios* out of the old ways they brought from the south and the tools they discovered on American terrain (p.75)."

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