

Article

# Immigrant family socialization: Perspectives from adult children of Mexican origin and their parents in the United States

by

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**Abstract**

Using convenient and purposive sampling augmented with snowball sampling, this study examines the perceptions of family socialization between two cultures, using in-depth interviews of 15 pairs of adult child-parent dyads (n=30) of Mexican origin in the United States. In sum, despite variations in the pace of acculturation, our study shows that both adult children and their parents proactively adopted compromising strategies (e.g. mutual respect, acceptance, openness, and realistic expectations) to bridge the differences in acculturation and reach common ground in family communication. Several core values and family practices, such as respect to family authority, family interdependence, retention/preservation of cultural heritage (e.g. language, customs, and identity), a strong work ethic, patriarchal gender norms, Mexican versus American parenting styles, and adult children striving for more freedom from traditional customs (e.g. conventional gender roles and living arrangements), were emphasized in Mexican immigrant family socialization in our study. Despite their differences in belief systems and ideologies, our study shows that family communication between the adult child-parent dyads was built on a set of implicit expectations that focus on minimizing family conflicts, yet providing a 'culturally instrumental' and supportive/caring context. In contrast to the postulation of the acculturation gap-distress model, our study found that discrepancies in acculturation between immigrant parents and their children were not necessarily associated with poorer family functioning and adjustment.

*Keywords*

immigrant family, socialization, communication, acculturation, parent-child dyads, Mexican origin family

## **Introduction**

The postulation that migration brings diversity and heterogeneity to the American cultural landscape is generally uncontested (Cilluffo & Cohn, 2019; Cohn, 2015; Perez & Hirschman, 2009). Historically known as a nation of immigrants (Migration Policy Institute [MPI], n.d.), the United States (U.S.) currently houses over 40 million foreign-born residents, representing approximately one-fifth of the world migrants in 2017 and 13.6% of the U.S population today (Radford, 2019). With immigrant children (i.e. children with at least one foreign-born parent) accounting for one-quarter of all U.S. children (Child Trends, 2018), immigrant family socialization continues to play a critical process in shaping identity formation in today's children's developmental milestones (Martinez, McClure, Eddy, & Wilson, 2011; Paat, 2013). Children of Mexican immigrants, who account for 42% of the second generation immigrant children having at least one Mexico-born parent, constitute one of the fastest growing segments of the U.S. population (Child Trends, 2018; Landale, Thomas, & Van Hook, 2011). Acculturation is an adaptive process that entails social adjustment, psychological coping, and cultural changes following immigrants' intercultural contact with the receiving society, through which immigrants may acquire a new language, develop a new identity, and establish new life goals (e.g. Lui, 2019; Samnani, Boekhorst, & Harrison, 2013; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Yet, the effects on immigrant family socialization and intergenerational communication, resulting from the discrepant pace in acculturation and preservation of heritage culture in immigrant families, are inconclusive (Aumann & Tizmann, 2018).

To delve into the growing diversity and complexity of American families driven by rapid changes in immigration, this study examines adult children of Mexican origin and their parents' perspectives on immigrant family socialization in the U.S., an attempt to understand the two-way communication patterns that are relatively uncommon among most studies that independently measure cultural orientation from the lens of both the children and their parents (Telzer, Yuen, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2016). Using qualitative methods through interviews of participants from varied developmental life stages and different generational cohorts can help shed light on the cognitive processing, emotional reasoning, and extent of discordance both adult children and their parents face that are difficult to be examined in quantitative studies. More specifically, this study asked the following research questions: 1) What

were the intergenerational and cultural differences between adult children of Mexican immigrant families and their parents in the U.S.?, and 2) How did these two generational cohorts resolve and adjust to their differences in acculturation and socialization in two cultural worlds? Given that migration is a worldwide phenomenon, the value of understanding immigrant families' interactive dynamics and communication patterns goes beyond the contribution of this study's migration context (i.e. Mexican immigrant families in the U.S.). From a clinical perspective, the maladjustment of children from immigrant families has been linked to a host of social repercussions, such as substance use, signs of poor mental health (e.g. depression and anxiety), school disengagement, and delinquency (Jiang & Peguero, 2017; Kim, Schwartz, Perreira, & Juang, 2018; Perreira et al., 2019; Pong & Zeiser, 2012). Thus, a better understanding of the risk and resilience factors that shape immigrant family adjustment may help mitigate the risks of poor mental health, enhance their general well-being, and facilitate the successful adaptation of immigrant families.

### *Immigrant Children's Acculturation*

The process of acculturation takes place when immigrants are exposed to the new culture of the receiving society, during which they must select customs to adopt and an identity congruent with the norms, values and lifestyles of their ethnic origin and the mainstream standard to retain (Schwartz, Unger, Zamboanga, & Szapocznik, 2010; Ward & Geeraert, 2016). Immigrant children in the U.S. have been referred as a 'transitional generation' because they have to learn to navigate in both their parents' culture and the host country's culture to bridge the gap between the two social worlds, while confronting insurmountable structural barriers (e.g. changing social-political forces, a growing bifurcation of the American economy, ethnic network/resource availability, social pressure, and stigma) to attain upward mobility (Haller, Portes, & Lynch, 2011; Portes, Fernández-Kelly, & Haller, 2005, 2009; Zhou, 2001). Through cultural contacts, immigrants learn to negotiate their cultural identities and make important decisions (e.g. mainstream culture adoption, heritage culture maintenance, and selective acculturation) (Berry, 1997; Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). In the immigrant literature, peer interaction and normative pressure (e.g. acceptance) are pivotal in shaping acculturative attitudes and outcomes (Dipietro, & McGloin, 2012; Kumi-Yeboah, Brobbey, & Smith, 2020). Empirically, strong ties to one's heritage culture have been linked to successful adaptation,

greater scholastic performance, and general well-being (Chow, 2018; Telzer, Yuen, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2016). While family represents a critical socialization agent for immigrant children (Paat, 2013), adulthood is a critical marker for growth and an increasing autonomy, in which they learn to be independent without receiving directives from parents (Arnett, 2000; Szewedo, Hessel, Loeb, Hafen, & Allen, 2017). Acculturative conflicts on autonomy may create tension, whereby immigrant children may engage in less self-disclosure with their parents (Aumann & Titzmann, 2018). In the meantime, immigrant children may serve as cultural brokers for their parents not proficient in English, helping them with understanding the translation of documents and appointments (Kim et al., 2018; Sim, Kim, Zhang, & Shen, 2019).

### *Immigrant Parents' Acculturation*

Migration is a stressful life event for both immigrant children and their parents alike (Bhugra, 2004; Bhugra & Jones, 2001). Resettlement can bring challenges for immigrant parents in a number of ways. First, language mastery may be more time and energy draining for adults without a similar brain plasticity and capacity for learning as quickly as children in speech and language acquisition (e.g. Brown 2000; Janacsek, Fiser, & Nemeth, 2012). In addition to losing familial ties and social networks in their birth country, the pressure to gain proficiency in a new language and fulfill work/educational demands can possibly add significant tension to their strained schedule (Grzywacz, Quandt, Arcury, & Marín, 2005; Grzywacz et al., 2007). Immigrant parents accustomed to upholding traditional gender ideologies and patriarchal family practices may experience changing gender roles that stress the egalitarian division of household labour in the U.S. According to Vasquez (2014), the Mexican highly patriarchal cultural view on gender norms (e.g. *'machismo'*) may clash with American norms that strive for gender equality. A greater pressure to adhere to gender expectations inconsistent with traditional customs can lead to increased stress levels that interfere with effective parenting (Chuang & Tamis-LeMonda, 2009; Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006; Su & Hynie, 2011). There is evidence that immigrants from racial-minority ethnic backgrounds in the U.S. face more discriminatory and unfair treatments that precipitate a fear for integration and an increase in health disparities (Almeida, Biello, Pedraza, Wintner, & Viruell-Fuentes, 2016; Brown & Chu, 2012).

### *Family Acculturation Gap*

Immigrant children's faster pace of acculturation (given their socialization through U.S. schools) and cultural orientation (e.g. language, lifestyles, clothing, and values), which assumes the adoption of American practices without a plan to preserve traditional customs, may concern their immigrant parents who were born and raised outside of the U.S. (Lats, Kim, & Diekema, 2016; Telzer, 2011; Telzer, Yuen, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2016). The acculturation gap-distress hypothesis posited that family members' varying paces of adaptation can exert a strain on pre-migration family dynamics and the parent-child relationship (Choi, He, & Harachi, 2008; Lui, 2019). In particular, family maladjustment can widen a family's emotional distance, precipitate interpersonal challenges (e.g. increase alienation), and adversely affect household functioning (e.g. Telzer, 2011; Telzer, Yuen, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2016). There is evidence that communication challenges can threaten parental authority, in part because it reduces family closeness (e.g. bonding, warmth, and support) and attenuates parental involvement (e.g. Francisco, Loios, & Pedro, 2016; Telzer, 2011; Weymouth, Buehler, Zhou, & Henson, 2016). The acculturation gap has also been shown to threaten family cohesion and familism perceived to be important in families of Mexican origin (e.g. Bostean & Gillespie, 2018). Studies in the past indicate that acculturative stress has been connected to elevated risks for social behavioural issues, poor mental health, and reduced subjective well-being (Khan, 2014). It has also been implicated in the cause of youth substance use behaviours (e.g. binge drinking and drunkenness), cigarette smoking, and high-risk sexual behaviours (Nair, Roche, & White, 2018; Schwartz et al., 2012).

## **Methods**

### *Data Collection*

Using convenient and purposive sampling augmented with snowball sampling and a study protocol approved by the university's Institutional Review Board, 15 pairs of adult child-parent dyads (n=30) were recruited in 2018 to participate in a research study to understand their perceptions of immigrant family socialization, and how they navigate the two cultural worlds (i.e. the parents' culture of origin and U.S. culture). With the exception of two dyads, each dyad consisted of a second or 1.5 generation adult child of Mexican immigrants and one of their parents (of which almost all were first generation immigrants). Drawing insights from Portes and Rumbaut (2001) and

Rumbaut (2004), the first generation, in this study, is defined as those who arrived in the U.S. after they had attained adulthood; the 1.5 generation refers to those arriving in the U.S. during or prior to their early adolescence, while the second generation is operationalized as those who were born in the U.S. with at least one immigrant parent. The remaining two dyads each consisted of a U.S.-born adult child and their Mexico-raised parents.

Upon obtaining informed consent of participation, interviews, which lasted approximately 15 to 50 minutes, were conducted in the participants' language of preference (Spanish or English) at a community location jointly selected by the interviewer (i.e. the second author) and each participant in the City of El Paso located in the State of Texas in the U.S. In the event that the participants were not available in person, interviews were conducted by phone at a selected time convenient for the participants. During the interviews, the participants were asked questions related to their family relationships, upbringing, generational/cultural clashes, familiarity with the American and Mexican cultures, future aspirations and perceptions of American life. No participant incentives were offered in the study, but participants were reminded that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or skip any questions that made them uncomfortable.

### *Data Analyses*

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Spanish interviews were translated to English and proofread by two bilingual student research assistants. Qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo, was used to code and analyse our study findings. Using grounded theory method, transcripts were examined line by line to explore significant themes that emerged, and develop a coding schema prior to coding and categorizing the data (e.g. sentences, phrases, paragraphs, examples, and incidents) based on their similarities, consistencies, and differences in order to help us advance our preliminary understanding of study findings. Next, we also developed connections between core concepts and formulated a theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of our interest (see Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2007). Any discrepancies in coding and categorizing were discussed among research team members until they were resolved. To protect the participants' privacy, all participants were identified using pseudonyms throughout this article.

## **Demographic Characteristics of Our Participants**

### *Adult children*

Approximately 60% of our adult child participants were male. The average age of the participants was 27.3 years old (range: 19-43 years), while approximately 66.7% of them held a college degree. Only 26.7% of the participants were married, and 20% of them had at least one child. With the exception of four participants, all of them were born in the U.S. Approximately four in 10 participants spoke solely Spanish at home growing up, while approximately 26.7% of them believed that life in the U.S. is better for them than elsewhere. Furthermore, all of them felt proud of their ethnicity, with 60% expressing an interest to remain in the U.S. for the remainder of their life.

### *Parents*

Approximately 20% of the participants were male, with the average age of the parent participants being 56.1 years old (range: 39-69 years). With respect to their educational attainment, 46.7% of them held a college degree. At the time of the interview, 73.3% of the participants were married. Growing up, all of the participants spoke Spanish at home, with 86.7% of them considering themselves to be fluent in the language. Moreover, all of them took pride in their Mexican ethnic identity, with approximately 93.3% believing that American life is better for them. Additionally, all shared their intention to remain in the U.S.; all but one (93.3%) continued to maintain ties with Mexico.

## **Findings**

In sum, we found several themes associated with Mexican immigrant families' perceptions of their family socialization and acculturation: 1) 'Respeto' (respect); 2) family cohesion and familism; 3) a strong work ethic; 4) gender role ideologies and socialization; 5) parenting challenges and generational/cultural clashes; and 6) independence and individualism. Below, we used CP to refer to adult child participants and PP to indicate parent participants.

### *'Respeto' (Respect)*

We found in our study that parents of Mexican origin proactively adopted varied strategies to instill core family values essential to the preservation of family peace. Among all, the value of respect (*'respeto'*), which stresses courtesy, obedience, and

a high regard for family members, was perceived as a vehicle in sustaining a harmonious family, as illustrated by 21-year-old U.S.-born Gabriel (CP), whose mother was raised in Mexico, 'When we would...[visit]...my family like my aunts, my grandparents,...they (my parents) taught me...“Whenever you walk into a room, you always say hi...Go around, say hi to everybody.”’ Furthermore, grateful living and humility were among important virtues that José’s mother sought to impart to him, and raised him to be a respectful child. José (20-year-old, U.S.-born, CP) shared the critical teachings he received from his Mexican mother who raised him single-handedly: 'Being grateful for what you have...Being humble for the things you have.'

Nevertheless, there were notable discrepancies on how the two generations operationalized family expectations of respect, with the parent cohort being held to a higher standard of conduct in their own upbringing as Gabriel shared his perspective:

My parents grew up in households where no matter what their parents said,...they had no say in it. And when I was growing up,...I started to...challenge those ideas and said, 'Well look. It's not that I don't respect you, it's that you're wrong. I know more than you in this aspect.' And that was very difficult for them to accept because...when they were growing up...they weren't able to voice them (their opinion) out.

Violeta (43-year-old, U.S.-born, CP), second generation Mexican immigrant, also echoed Gabriel’s view on the customary codes of communication in their parents’ generation, 'In the Mexican culture,...[if] you need something, you don't ask directly. You kind of give a side question or a problem and then expect the other person to get the hint...In the American culture,...you're more direct.' Indeed, raised based on the family tenet of 'You do as I say,' in which talking back or questioning family authority was frowned upon, 46-year-old Alma (U.S.-born, PP), who grew up in Mexico, spoke on how she passed the same value to her child, 'I think respect is one of the things that has always stayed in me...You respect your people (parents) and that's what I passed on to my children as well.' But despite her childhood experience with strict parenting, Alma shared her slightly different parenting approach in raising her son, 'It's ok to ask why...As I was growing up, I could never do that, otherwise I would get...a spanking or something worse than that...To me...as long as you're respectful,...you can always question anything...Respect is very, very important.'

### *Family Cohesion and Familism*

As illustrated in our study, the importance of family was deeply ingrained in traditional Mexican culture. Despite their residence in the U.S., and being socialized into the U.S. culture, family cohesion (i.e. a close emotional bond, unity, and a sense of connectedness) in Mexican culture was conveyed through their collective participation in regular family visits, holidays, and events such as quinceñeras (celebration on attainment of adulthood), birthdays, folklore dances, family reunions, festival celebrations, and religious services (e.g. Easter, Christmas, Mother's Day, the Day of the Dead, and baptisms) actively organized by the Mexican-born or raised parents. Accordingly, cultural values were also imparted through an active learning of cultural roots (e.g. ethnic-related books, children's stories, and mythologies), cultural immersion (visits to Mexico), food consumption, and language practices, which the children were expected to fully embrace at home. As illustrated by the second generation of Mexican immigrants, Michelle (19-year-old, U.S.-born, CP), 'We went to Juárez (located in Mexico) a lot...Food was the biggest indicator...[They were] trying to make me just speak Spanish when we were over there, instead of English.'

Familism (i.e. '*familismo*' or familial responsibilities and obligations to family well-being) was intimately embedded in the rich Mexican cultural tradition, which the parent participants took pride in. Raised in Mexico, Diana (39-year-old, PP), who was used to witnessing her father's altruistic acts toward his family of origin, shared the life principles that she intended to pass on to her son, 'They...always made it very important...family was always first...made sure we cared about each other.' Family members were also expected to make sacrifices for the benefit and welfare of the family. Currently returning home to stay with his family of origin as he was pursuing his graduate degree, Caesar (28-year-old, U.S.-born, CP) revealed the help he received from home after spending a few years in another state due to employment reasons:

I'm blessed enough to have family to support me and said, 'Well ok. You can stay here in your house, in this house where my parents live...Just do what you have to do and we'll help you.'...We're not perfect, everybody fights...Sometimes, we get mad at petty things...but I've realized the importance...of family within my life.

### *A Strong Work Ethic*

Through the use of storytelling, adult child participants were taught to internalize a strong work ethic (e.g. hard work, perseverance, self-discipline, and motivation) as

part of their Mexican American identity. Parents also attempted to inspire their children by setting a good example and using the fruit of their hard labour as evidence of success. One of the second generation of Mexican immigrants, Elizabeth (24-year-old, CP) shared her experience:

They would tell me...how they grew up,...hard work pays off [those] kinds of things...They always mentioned that they tried their best to do something and no matter how much they tried, they would succeed some way...They still landed somewhere.

Working hard also brought honor to the family, increased perceived worthiness, and expanded social mobility, as 27-year-old Raul (U.S.-born, CP) described the work morale that he was expected to uphold, 'My dad always told me that he and my grandpa were...strong proponents of working hard...That's what's gonna [*sic*] move you forward.' Raul spoke of the tireless advice he received from his father, who was the first generation in his family to attend school, 'My father used to tell us, 'If you want something good...you have to work hard...You can be whatever you want to be as long as you set your mind to it and work hard.'

Reminiscing on memories of going to work with her parents as newspaper carriers, Olivia (24-year-old, U.S.-born, CP), whose parents grew up in a poverty stricken area in Mexico but migrated to the U.S. to start a new life, shared the story of her recently retired parents:

They (my parents) would wake up in the middle of the night, and then they would go pick up the newspapers and distribute [them] throughout the city...That was the only job that my mom could get when she came over here as an immigrant. So they did that for 30 years.

Proud of her parents who were able to 'build something out of nothing' in order to care for her family, Olivia detailed her parents' accomplishments, 'I've literally seen...my family grow [*sic*]...We came from this really...crammed little house, like on the corner of the street and then now we are in this two-story house that is...very spacious.' Although hard work had been deemed as the key to building financial security and supporting family welfare from the perspective of both the parent and the adult child participants, its materialization is contextually based. More specifically, most parent participants believed that young Americans face fewer hindrances to progression in the U.S. as compared to in their birth country (Mexico), where opportunities were perceived to be rare. For the most part, adult child participants were grateful for their parents' hard work, as related by José, 'My mom has

always...kept her Mexican heritage in our roots...We all know where we came from and we're grateful to be here...If it wasn't for her hard work, we will...still be in Mexico.'

### *Gender Role Ideologies and Socialization*

Variation in the practices of gender role ideologies was evident across the two generations and the two cultures (Mexican and American), who hold distinct beliefs on gender role equality and power distribution. In particular, female children were reminded of the inherent differences between the two genders, and the patriarchal gender norms that have permeated the traditional Mexican culture. Some believed that they were afforded different degrees of freedom by their protective parents. As noted in Michelle's observation, 'I've noticed that the females in the family aren't supposed to leave the house of their parents until they're married...One of my cousins...she has a job, and it's a salaried job...She is still living with her parents because she's not married.' Some female adult child participants made references to the unequal treatment they received at home, as in the case of Amanda (40-year-old, Mexico-born, CP), who disagreed with her parents' notions of gender differences and social roles:

I think that some of the more transcendental things were gender roles...My dad would say I couldn't play soccer because that's a men's sport...I felt like I was really good at kicking the ball...I thought I could be a good soccer player...There were things like...he would tell me to make my brother's bed and...I would resist that...I would say, 'What's wrong with my brother? Is he sick?'...I think he can make his own bed, so I would protest a lot of the gendered things...I think that there was some anger built up.

Raised in the U.S., which holds many gender equalitarian beliefs, Elizabeth, who was living with her parents at the time of the interview, pointed out the hierarchical family relationships that she struggled to become enmeshed in:

Women have become so independent in the United States...Getting the notions of feminism, it was really hard for me to grow up...'Oh there's such a thing as feminism! There's equality of the sexes!' But growing up in a family where the men are very glorified,...you can't serve yourself first, you have to serve your dad and then yourself, or your brother has to be served first before you, and I'm just like, 'Well it's not the way you do it in the States. Everybody is equal.' And that's when they kind of like, 'Oh well, you live in a Mexican household so that doesn't flow here!'

But the adult children cohort was not alone. Immigrant parents such as Delfina (51-year-old, Mexico-born, PP), who resided in the U.S. for a decade and regularly made visits to her birth country, also noted the gender discrepancies in domestic task

division, 'When I see my American friends, how their husbands help at home...I can see the difference on the way they do things.' She shared her point of view on American men, 'They are less *machista*, a lot less *machista*. The husband usually helps a lot at home.'

### *Parenting Challenges and Generational/Cultural Clashes*

At times, child rearing practices were challenging for parents and children not coming from the same part of the world. Parents' attempts to socialize their children based on their 'acceptable' Mexican standards could increase tension with their U.S.-born or -raised children who were attempting to assert independence and autonomy. Vanessa (33-year-old, U.S.-born, CP) spoke of the clashes she faced at home growing up: 'I think my mom has that Mexican idea that...parents are always right...When you start having your own opinion, it's kind of hard.' To construct a positive family atmosphere in the foreign land, parents, in turn, learned to understand and address the complex needs of their children, who were learning to navigate the two cultural worlds.

Kimberly (50-year-old, PP), who grew up in Mexico, recalled her son's defiance in his adolescence:

I heard that it's the millennials' time...He's [*sic*] very strong with his ideas and his beliefs...He defends [*sic*] what he thinks [*sic*]...I'm trying to accept that...When I was growing up, if I wasn't [*sic*] agree, I don't [*sic*] say it...but...he always says [*sic*] what he thinks [*sic*]...I'm trying to understand that.

Immigrant parents' experiences and interactions with other American parents consequently helped them become more culturally competent in American society.

Elena (55-year-old, Mexico-born, PP), who relocated to the U.S. to marry her American husband, shared how she tried to grasp the cultural differences in parenting and integrate new parenting ideas:

In the United States, they are really used to doing sleepovers...In Mexico,...we are not used to that...What we would do was get to know...the parents of the little girls that would invite her to spend the night at their house...When I trusted them...I would let her go. If we did not know the family, we would not let her go.

Parental expectations of Spanish language use and its frequency were also cited as common causes of cultural clashes. To preserve cultural and linguistic proficiency, Spanish was to be used as the household's primary language of communication. Nevertheless, uses of the language declined in families, in which both parents shared different immigration backgrounds (e.g. one parent was a first generation immigrant,

the other was not) or ethnicity (e.g. one parent was Mexican, the other was not). In some cases, parents subsequently learned to set or reset realistic expectations in order to keep up with their U.S.-born and/or -raised children's language development, especially upon realizing the inability of their children to attain their desired level of proficiency in Spanish. When asked if his parents worried about him becoming too 'Americanized,' Luis (19-year-old, Mexico-born, CP) responded:

At some point, they didn't like my brother and I speaking English to each other cause [*sic*] they thought we were being exclusive...but once they caught [up] on more with the language and they got more used to it...they were ok with it.

Indeed, despite the reinforcement in their children's formative years to avert the potential loss of language (Spanish) skills, Violeta, for example, disclosed how her family resolved their differing pace in language acquisition, 'We basically... meshed...We figured out...how to live with... different languages and we adapted...Basically, she speaks Spanish, I speak English, together we speak Spanglish!' Yet, from the perspective of the adult child participants, parents in general were not worried about their children becoming so 'Americanized' that they forgot about their heritage/roots. Instead, children were encouraged to adopt varied American customs (so long as they did not let go of their Mexican culture), given the perceived benefits of attaining integration in the mainstream society, and the perceived discrimination of immigrants who are not well integrated. As Raul put it, 'They wanted to [help] me [become] more Americanized, just because they didn't want me to be looked down on for being [a] Mexican.' Additionally, biculturalism was perceived to come with other added benefits, such as being bilingual (i.e. able to converse in their parents' native language, but were also fluent in the mainstream language, which is English), and having the ability to navigate two cultural worlds.

### *Independence and Individualism*

Adult children attesting to the ideals/practices of individualism, which gives priority to personal freedom, self-sufficiency and self-centredness in the attainment of individual goals, sometimes clashed with their parents' customs that endorsed collectivistic cultural norms, such as conformity, inter-dependability, and group harmony. Children of Mexican origin were expected to follow a family-inclusive life path as observed by Gabriel, who tried to defy his parents' wishes upon reaching adulthood:

There is a big difference...from the way my parents grew up. It was very family based. For example, you stayed at your parent's house...until you finished school...I guess

the American way was [*sic*]...as soon as you turn 18, you can leave your parent's house, do whatever you want...When I was 19, I didn't want to live at home anymore and my parents were shocked by that...They both stayed at their parents' house until they finished school, until they had their careers, and everything...I was like, 'No. I have enough money to...live on my own'...so I did my own thing.

Likewise, Olivia also shared her parents' attempts to stop her from moving out of their family house like they did with her older sisters, 'Right now, I'm...trying to move out, and they take it very personally.' They're like, 'Why do you want to leave us?...What are we doing to you...you want to leave us?' She added, 'It's hard...they don't understand independence...My mom still makes comments like, 'Oh! One day you're going to find a guy,...get married, and move out!'

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Growing cultural diversity and changing demographic trends in the U.S. have called for the need to strengthen immigrant families, but the debate of whether dissonant acculturation across generations leads to family strain and discord is multi-faceted (Aumann & Tizmann, 2018). This study examines the perceptions of family socialization among adult children of Mexican origin and their parents in the U.S. Several core values and family practices, such as respect to family authority, family interdependence, retention/preservation of cultural heritage (e.g. language, customs, and identity), a strong work ethic, patriarchal gender norms, Mexican versus American parenting styles, and adult children striving for more freedom from traditional customs (e.g. conventional gender roles and living arrangements), were emphasized in Mexican immigrant family socialization in our study. In sum, despite variations in the pace of acculturation, our study shows that both adult children and their parents proactively adopted compromising strategies (e.g. mutual respect, acceptance, openness, and realistic expectations) to bridge the differences in acculturation, and reach common ground in family communication. In contrast to the postulation of the acculturation gap-distress model, our study found that discrepancies in acculturation between immigrant parents and their children were not necessarily associated with poorer family functioning and adjustment. Despite the need to adjust to cultural and linguistic changes/challenges, the parent cohort showed resilience to thrive in the changing environment, plausibly owing to the phenomenon known as the immigration paradox, in which immigrants often positively self-selected to the migration flow to better their lives.

Our study findings share some similarities with a study conducted by Nieri and Bermudez-Parsai (2014) of immigrant parents and adolescents from Phoenix, Arizona in the U.S. Although immigrant parents were aware of the discrepancies in cultural orientations, most did not perceive these differences as problematic; rather, they attributed their inevitable acculturation dissonance to their generational and upbringing differences from their children's experience (Nieri & Bermudez-Parsai, 2014). Some scholars have suggested that Mexican families' shared loyalty and close-knit relations help maintain family solidarity and reciprocity (Rivera et al., 2008; Telzer, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2014). Despite their differences in belief systems and ideologies, our study shows that family communication between the adult child-parent dyads was built on a set of implicit expectations that focused on minimizing family conflicts, yet provide a 'culturally instrumental' and supportive/caring context. Bacallao and Smokowski's (2007) acknowledged that cultural diversity was perceived as an asset, rather than a deficit for some families of Mexican origin. Indeed, immigrant family acculturation is a complex phenomenon that warrants in-depth examination. Using birthplace to assess the differing pace of acculturation among immigrant families can prove challenging in today's cultural context, in which worldwide physical mobility is increasingly prevalent. In the case of our study, the acculturation pace of parents born in the U.S., but raised in Mexico, differed markedly from their American-born children. Additionally, marital acculturation might complicate family acculturation when both parents came from a different migration background (e.g. migrating to the U.S. at different developmental stages).

Family provides a critical context for fostering a healthy psycho-emotional development and adjustment among immigrant children (Telzer, 2011; Telzer, Yuen, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2016). Clinical services can be extended to assist immigrant families in navigating the new culture, adjusting to new roles, and becoming familiar with resources/channels available to attain optimal level of functioning. More efforts can be directed toward facilitating immigrants' acculturation process through immersion programmes, language classes, and mentoring programmes to help immigrant children gain trust, form companionships, build self-esteem, and receive guidance/advice on how to adapt and resolve differences/challenges in family communication. There is evidence that children of Mexican origin who demonstrate

higher cultural orientations (e.g. higher Spanish proficiency) and hold more family values face greater adjustment and functioning (Telzer, Yuen, Gonzales, & Fuligni, 2016), a protective effect that can be used to combat the adverse effects resulting from discrimination faced in U.S. mainstream society (Perreira, Fuligni, & Potochnick, 2010). Through therapeutic counseling and intervention, social work clinicians can help construct a safe space for an open discussion of issues related to acculturative stress, race, and ethnicity, as well as an effective way for immigrants to cope, promote healthy mental health, and refrain from using self-destructive behaviors, including substance use (e.g. Park, Anastas, Shibusawa, & Nguyen, 2014). Most importantly, as indicated by some of our participants, rather than undermining either one of the cultures, the U.S. society, in particular, needs to be educated on the many benefits associated with biculturalism. These benefits included but were not limited to increasing family coherence, reducing distress, and minimizing conflicts. A meta-analysis study from Nguyen and Benet-Martínez (2013) found a significant, strong, and positive association between biculturalism and both psychological and sociocultural adjustment, attesting to the benefits of biculturalism. It is imperative to eliminate the negative connotations that the deviation of Mexican culture from U.S. mainstream culture is inferior (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994).

Our study has shown unique family dynamics among adult child-parent dyads, which has rarely been studied in immigrant family literature. Several limitations are worth noting. Due to our small sample size and sampling strategies, our study findings are not generalizable. Because our study sample came from the U.S.-Mexico border region, cultural differences among adult children and their parents might be less apparent compared with Mexican families from a predominantly White state in the U.S., as it has been indicated in past literature that the acculturation process of immigrant families in Latino enclaves may differ (Marsiglia, Nagoshi, Parsai, & Castro, 2012). Because we only collected data at one time point, our study cannot establish causation. Nevertheless, our study has merits, as we were able to collect rich data to offer a comparative perspective from these two generational cohorts on immigrant family socialization, which is much needed in the current immigrant family literature.

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