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Entre Dos Mundos/Between Two Worlds: Bicultural Development in Context

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Abstract How do Mexican immigrant adolescents balance different, and often oppositional, cultural influences in the acculturation process? In this article, we explore how acculturating adolescents absorb cultural messages and go about creating their (multiple) identities. Guided by Alternation Theory, in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 12 undocumented Mexican adolescents and 14 of their parents who had immigrated to North Carolina within the past 7 years. All of the families had adolescent children who were born in Mexico. At least one parent and one adolescent from each family were interviewed. Interviewing multiple family members allowed us to examine how bicultural development progressed differently for various family members, and how the whole family balanced between cultural systems. Mexican parents and adolescents were acculturating while trying to resist assimilation pressures. They maintained strong Mexican identities that were preserved by practicing Mexican customs, values, and traditions in their homes and churches. Meeting U.S. cultural and linguistic demands at work and in school placed Mexican parents and adolescents between the two cultural systems. This prompted adolescents and parents to integrate some U.S. customs, language, or social behaviors into their daily lives, increasing bilingualism and, in some cases, biculturalism.

Keywords Adolescents · Mexicans · Family systems · Acculturation · Biculturalism

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> The mastery of different languages, the ability to cross racial and ethnic boundaries, and a general resiliency associated with the ability to endure hardships and overcome obstacles will clearly be recognized as a new cultural capital that will be crucial for success in a modern, diversified society, not a handicap. The hypothesis is that oppression and abuse can also generate precisely the opposite—resiliency and cultural capital to succeed. Often, these create the psychological flexibility necessary to assume different identities in order to survive. That is, the mechanisms that marginalize certain persons of color may turn into a cultural capital in other settings. (Trueba 2002, pp. 7–8)

In this article, we use Alternation Theory as a guide to explore cultural capital and the opportunities and challenges inherent in living between two cultures for immigrant Mexican families. Alternation theorists believe that there is great value in the individual maintaining her or his culture of origin while acquiring a second culture (Berry 1998; Feliciano 2001). This theory is in strong contrast to the linear, one-directional change emphasized in assimilation research (Bacallao and Smokowski in press). Alternation Theory highlights integration of divergent norms, traditions, customs, and languages rather than assimilating from one culture to another (Gonzales et al. 2002).

Theoretical Frameworks Concerning Acculturation

Acculturation was first defined as “phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield et al. 1936, p. 149). This original definition stressed continuous, long-term change and allowed for the process to be bi-directional. Both interacting cultures could make accommodations. Contact between members of different cultural groups would precipitate cultural changes, with neither of the cultures being lost or replaced by the other. Consequently, acculturation suggests cultural accommodation but does not assume assimilation.

According to Berry (1998), there are two criteria for acculturation—whether the acculturating individual or group maintains a positive relationship with the culture of origin and whether a positive relationship to the host culture is established. Assimilation Theory posits that a positive relationship to the dominant society is established without retention of ethnic identity. In Alternation Theory, by contrast, a moderate-to-strong positive relationship to the host culture is established while a moderate-to-strong positive relationship to one’s culture of origin is retained. Alternation Theory is aligned with the original Redfield et al. (1936) definition of acculturation that allows for dynamic bi-directional adaptations to occur in either or both cultures. Assimilation Theory is underpinned by subsequent modifications made to this definition, hypothesizing that the dominant group imposes unidirectional change onto the non-dominant group. The major assumptions that guide these theories are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1 Key assumptions underlying competing acculturation theories

Acculturation: cultural change results from contact between two autonomous and independent cultural groups	
Assimilation Theory	Alternation Theory
The individual forms a positive relationship with the host culture and *does not maintain* a positive relationship to her/his culture of origin	The individual forms a positive relationship with the host culture and *also maintains* a positive relationship with her/his culture of origin
Unidirectional change or adaptation	Bi-directional change or adaptation
Linear (movement from culture-of-origin to host culture)	Non-linear (movement between cultures in complex ways)
Non-reversible (culture-of-origin identity is gradually replaced)	Reversible (balancing multiple cultural identities)
Outcome-oriented (becoming a member of the host culture)	Process-oriented (maintaining membership in both cultures)
Typical Research Methodology: quantitative	Typical Research Methodology: qualitative

Quantitative researchers have provided a body of evidence showing that assimilation measures, such as immigrant generation status, time since immigration, and language ability, are related to negative health and mental health outcomes for Latino adolescents. Several decades of empirical research findings show that assimilation (i.e., replacing culture-of-origin behaviors with host culture norms and values) is an important risk factor associated with increases in negative health behaviors and mental health problems (see Fig. 1; Ebin et al. 2001; Gil and Vega 1996; Miranda et al. 2000). Research on Latino adolescents has illuminated a positive relationship between assimilation and aggressive behavior as well as a weaker, but significant, association between assimilation and depression (Gonzales et al. 2002; Smokowski et al. 2009). Although evidence on these relationships is important, an overemphasis on quantitative explorations of assimilation limits our understanding of the full complexity inherent in the acculturation process, provides little information on more positive mental health in Latino families, and sheds no light on processes Latino adolescents go through in forming their cultural identities.

In order to address these gaps left by assimilation-focused quantitative research, we used Alternation Theory to guide this qualitative exploration of bicultural identity development. Alternation theorists have found that maintaining moderate to high levels of participation in both the host culture and the culture of origin provides the acculturating individual with the least psychosocial problems and the best adjustment (LaFromboise et al. 1993). Their findings are summarized in Fig. 1. Alternation researchers suggest that biculturalism, or having the ability to navigate competently within two different cultures, is the optimal end point for the process of cultural acquisition (Berry 1998; Feliciano 2001; LaFromboise et al. 1993; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001). For the immigrant individual and her or his family, Alternation theorists support the *integration* of cognition, attitudes, and behaviors from both the culture-of-origin and the culture-of-acquisition. This integration may result in bilingualism, the development of multiple identities, and cognitive code-switching, which is the individual's ability to shift between cultural

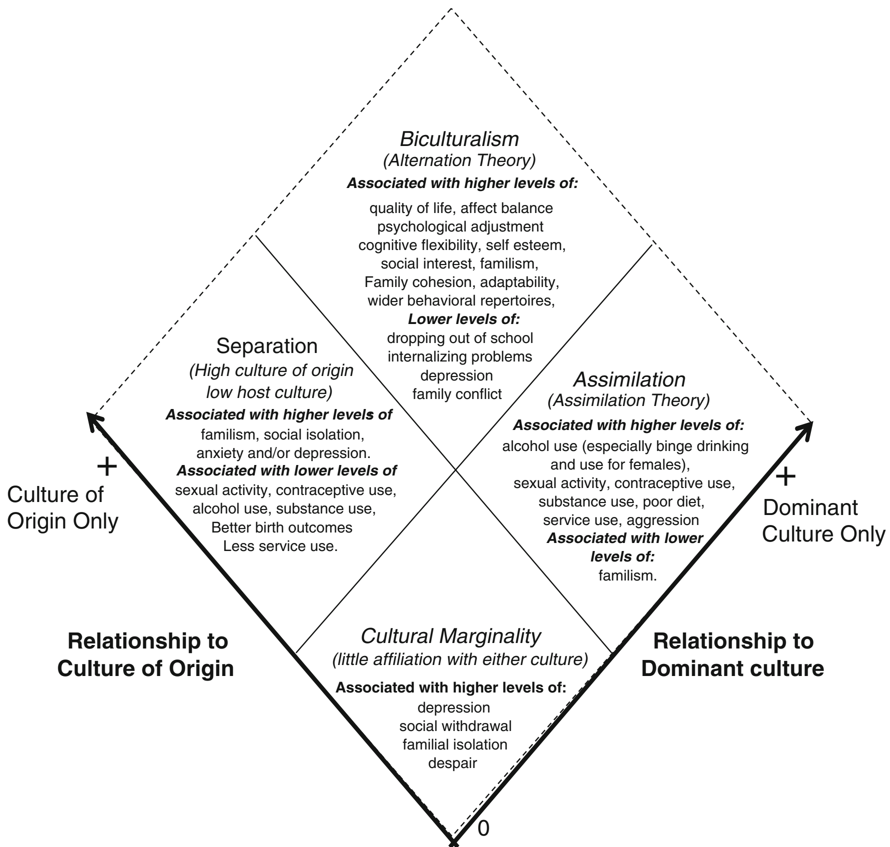

Fig. 1 Acculturation theories and knowledge development

scripts to match environmental demands—immigrant adolescents behaving “American” at school and “Latino” at home, for example (Dolby 2000; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001; Trueba 2002).

As shown in Fig. 1, researchers report that bicultural individuals display an array of positive qualities. Compared to low- or high-acculturated Latinos, Lang et al. (1982) found that bicultural Latinos obtained higher levels of quality of life, affect balance, and psychological adjustment. Miranda and Umhoefer (1998) reported bicultural individuals to have high levels of social interest and low levels of depression. In a sample of 252 Latina undergraduate students, Gomez and Fassinger (1994) found bicultural women to have wider repertoires of achievement styles in their educational pursuits than did their low- or high-acculturated peers. Gil et al. (1994) found bicultural adolescents to have the lowest levels of acculturation stress and to be less likely to report low family pride, compared to low- and high-acculturated Latino adolescents. For these bicultural adolescents, the acculturation process did not erode family pride—a dynamic that usually takes place as

adolescents become highly acculturated. Smokowski and Bacallao (2007) reported that biculturalism was a cultural asset associated with fewer internalizing problems and higher self-esteem in their sample of 323 Latino adolescents living in North Carolina. Similarly, Coatsworth et al. (2005) compared the acculturation patterns of 315 Latino youth and found that bicultural youth reported significantly higher levels of academic competence, peer competence, and parental monitoring.

Bicultural competencies are usually strongly associated with language use. Several studies have found youths fluent in both their culture-of-origin language and English report more achievements than youth who spoke only one language (e.g., English-alone or limited-English; Feliciano 2001; Rumberger and Larson 1998; Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch 1995). Moreover, bilingual youth have shown fewer emotional/behavioral problems, less delinquency, and less aggression (Toppleberg et al. 2002). For example, Feliciano (2001) used 1990 Census data to study the link between biculturalism and school dropout in more than 16,000 Mexican youth 18–21 years old. Using bilingualism as a proxy indicator of biculturalism, Feliciano's logistic regression analyses showed that bicultural Mexican youths were less likely to dropout of school than either limited-English or English-only speakers. Compared to bicultural participants, Mexican youths were more than twice as likely to dropout of school if they spoke limited English, and those who spoke only English were 29% more likely to leave school. Mexican youths in bilingual households were half as likely to dropout of school as those in homes with no bilingual speakers.

Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) discussed the construction of identity in immigrant adolescents. In one of the largest qualitative studies of immigrant families, these researchers tracked more than four hundred children of immigrants from a variety of Latin American and Asian cultures who resided in Boston and San Francisco. They identified three different adaptation styles that are similar to the three upper quadrants—assimilation, separation, and biculturalism—depicted in Fig. 1. The first is ethnic flight, which like assimilation, occurs when adolescents seek to align with the dominant culture and have cut themselves off from their cultures of origin. This strategy can help the adolescent "make it" in mainstream American society, but it often comes at a significant cost to the adolescent's social and emotional functioning. The second style, adversarial, is similar to separation and occurs when an immigrant adolescent creates an adversarial identity—adverse to host culture norms, behaviors, and attitudes. Being disparaged and disenfranchised can push immigrant adolescents into creating marginalized individual and group identities that reject mainstream norms and values. These adolescents may seek ethnic gang affiliation and protection and may pursue unconventional reward structures because other opportunities are blocked. The final adaptation style, which is seen as the most promising, is transcultural identity formation. This bicultural identity style fuses aspects of both cultures and serves as a bridge between the disparate cultural systems.

Bicultural individuals experience less stress and anxiety because they have skills to handle stressors and to access resources from both cultural systems (Rashid 1984). These individuals appear to benefit from the ability to shift their socio-cognitive perceptual schemas in order to fit situational demands. This ability, called

cultural frame-switching, is more highly developed in bicultural individuals than it is in their low- or highly-assimilated peers, allowing them to handle a wider range of culture-laden situations (Harritatos and Benet-Martinez 2002). When bicultural individuals perceive environmental stimuli connected to the host culture, such as a flag or a teacher they know who is from the U.S., these cues prompt a shift in their cognitions so that they begin to think in the appropriate cultural framework. When environmental cues from the culture of origin dominate, bicultural individuals shift back to their original way of thinking. For example, Yamada and Singelis (1999) compared 120 individuals who were segregated into four acculturation-based groups—bicultural, Western, traditional, and culturally alienated—that were similar to Berry's (1998, 2001) categories used in Fig. 1. The bicultural group members had significantly higher scores on both independent and interdependent self understanding, compared to members of the other groups. They were able to affiliate with values espoused by both the Western and the traditional groups.

Bicultural families also appear to be healthier. Miranda et al. (2000) reported that, compared to low- and high-acculturated families, bicultural families displayed significantly lower levels of conflict and demonstrated more commitment, help, and support among family members. Smokowski and Rose (2008) found that, according to both Latino adolescents and their parents, biculturalism was positively related to family cohesion, adaptability, and familism. In their intervention research, Szapocznik et al. (1986) also emphasized biculturalism as a family strength. These researchers found promoting biculturalism was effective in reducing conflict within troubled family systems.

These studies provide us with evidence that biculturalism is a cultural asset or a form of cultural capital that is linked to positive mental health and family dynamics. However, we still have little understanding of the processes Latino adolescents and parents go through in forming bicultural identities. In order to further primary prevention efforts to promote health and prevent problems, we need to increase our knowledge concerning how immigrant Latino adolescents balance different, and often oppositional, cultural influences in the acculturation process.

Qualitative research methods are ideal for exploring the complexities of biculturalism and acculturation experiences. Biculturalism is a fascinating concept for qualitative inquiry both because it is dynamic, nonlinear, and multidimensional and because it is so vitally connected to identity development. The positive effects of biculturalism center on the multiple cognitive and affective processes that help the individual withstand acculturation stress. It is ironic that qualitative research methods have rarely been used to study the process of becoming bicultural.

The Chicago School sociologists first conducted qualitative research on immigration, ethnicity, and social adaptation to new environments in the early part of the 20th century. These early ethnographic studies, which like all ethnography had deep roots in psychological anthropology, sociology, and philosophy, examined immigrant adjustment and the hardships associated with re-establishing families and livelihoods in U.S. urban and rural environments (Trueba and McLaren 2000). More recently, in contrast to quantitative researchers who have concentrated on the relationship between acculturation and mental health, qualitative researchers have focused on the process immigrants go through to fashion new identities. Qualitative

research on immigrant identity construction is particularly relevant to the study of biculturalism since the very concept of biculturalism is defined as the construction of multiple identities (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001; Trueba 2002).

We address this need for qualitative research on bicultural development by using Alternation Theory as a guide to organize the following sections of this paper. After describing our research methodology, we discuss Mexican families' relationships to their culture of origin. Next, we explore their relationship to the U.S. host culture. The combination of these two cultural forces leads to a detailed discussion of biculturalism. We consider benefits and challenges inherent in developing bicultural skills, paying special attention to the ways in which bilingualism and peer networks facilitate bicultural development.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Participants

The first author conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 undocumented Mexican immigrant families. Families were recruited from Latino communities in North Carolina as a part of a larger mixed-methods study (Bacallao and Smokowski 2007; Smokowski et al. 2008). In the larger mixed-methods study, in-depth interviews were conducted with a community-based sample of 100 Latino adolescents and at least one of their parents. Active consent to participate was obtained from parents and adolescents before the interviews took place. Interview questions focused on the acculturation process, bicultural adaptation, social network influences, parent–child relationships, discrimination experiences, school experiences, and friendship dynamics. Acculturation questions concerned culture of origin and host-culture involvement. Participants were asked to describe: (a) how they feel about their culture of origin and the host culture; (b) their process of adapting to the host culture; (c) how they feel about people in their lives and how these people have influenced them; and (d) how they view success and failure.

In the larger study, all of the adolescents interviewed were born outside of the United States. Sixty-three percent of the 100 adolescents were from Mexico, 14% were from Central America, 1% was from the Caribbean, and 22% were from South America. Adolescents had lived in the U.S. for an average of 4 years, with a range of 1 month to 10 years. Fifty-four percent were female; the average age was 15 (range 12–18). Seventy of the adolescents lived with two parents, and 91% currently attended school. Recruiting participants at community fiestas, as well as receiving referrals from social service and juvenile justice agencies, supplemented convenience sampling. In the later stage of data collection, interviewers tried to recruit adolescents who were manifesting problematic behaviors. This targeted sampling of Latino adolescents was done to maximize the range of risk levels in the sample.

Table 2 Study participants

Adolescents							Parents				
Name	Sex	Age	Hometown in Mexico	Year first arrived in U.S.	Grade	Grades in last 12 mos.	Parents in household	Name(s)	Highest level of education		Family's household income per year
									Mother	Father	
Manuel	M	16	Potosi	1997	11th	Mostly A's	Two	Guillermo & Diocelina	HS graduate	College graduate	28,080
Teresa	F	13	Potosi	1997	7th	Mostly D's	Two	Diocelina	HS graduate	College graduate	28,080
Yariela	F	12	El Puebla	2003	7th	Mostly A's	Two	Miguel & Ling	Elementary school	Some HS	26,000
Reyna	F	12	Oaxaca	1999	6th	Mostly A's	Two	Sulema	Elementary school	Elementary school	12,000
Juan	M	16	District Federal	2000	9th	Mostly B's	Two	Petrona & Luis	Some high school	HS graduate	22,000
Alfredo	M	13	District Federal	2000	7th	Mostly C's	Two	Petrona & Luis	Some high school	HS graduate	22,000
Eva	F	16	Michoacan	2002	12th	Mostly B's	Two	Zunilda	Elementary school	Elementary school	24,000
Nohemi	F	17	Oaxaca	1999	11th	Mostly C's	Two	Graciela	High school graduate	Elementary school	15,000
Maria Dolores	F	14	Puebla	2003	8th	Mostly B's	Two	Adolfo	Some high school	Some high school	24,000
Juana	F	13	Estado de Mexico	1999	7th	Mostly A's	Two	Adriana and Carmelo	Some high school	Some high school	25,200
Jorge	M	12	Veracruz	2000	7th	Mostly B's	Two	Ramon	Elementary school	Elementary school	19,200
Jaime	M	17	Veracruz	2001	9th	Mostly C's	Two, father and step-mother	Victor	Elementary school	Elementary school	22,000

Recruitment was conducted through churches, ESL programs, and at Latino community events. The 10 families in the current analyses consisted of undocumented Mexican immigrants with adolescents who were born in Mexico and had come to the United States in late childhood or adolescence. Within each of these 10 families, at least one adolescent and one parent were interviewed. In two of the families, two adolescent siblings were interviewed. Both parents were interviewed in four of the families, fathers only in three, and mothers only in the remaining three. Interviews provided qualitative data on 12 adolescents and 14 parents. Interviews were conducted with seven mothers and seven fathers, lasted 4–5 h, and were conducted in the participants' homes in Spanish, the participants' preferred language. Table 2 provides information about the adolescents and parents who participated in this study. Participants' names were changed to protect confidentiality.

On average, adolescents were 14 years of age and had been in the United States for 4 years when interviews were conducted in 2004. Forty percent (4 of 10) of the undocumented families had mothers and fathers who obtained only an elementary school education in Mexico, although 30% (3 of 10) of the families had at least one parent who had attended some high school in Mexico. The remaining 30% of families had at least one mother or father who had graduated from high school in Mexico. All of the families had two parents. The average annual family income was $21,000. The families lived in trailer parks or crowded apartment buildings.

Interview Protocol and Analyses

The semi-structured interview protocol contained open-ended questions that pertained to acculturation dynamics. To prompt participants to discuss acculturation, family members were asked the following questions: "In what ways are you Mexican? In what ways are you American?" To solicit information on coping and adaptation, family members were asked: "What have you overcome? What has it been like for you to adjust to life in the U.S.?" The following questions were asked to prompt participants to discuss personal and interpersonal relationship changes: "What is your relationship like with your parents (for parents: with your adolescent child) since you've been here? How have you (for parents: has your child) changed since coming to the U.S.?" These semi-structured interview questions were used to prompt participants to share their experiences and often generated lengthy narratives that were the focus of our analyses. These questions also provided overarching a priori codes for the analyses.

Parents were interviewed first, enabling them to hear the questions that their child would be asked. In every participating family, parents allowed the first author to privately interview their adolescent child. Consequently, all interviews occurred separately so that parents and adolescents did not influence one another's answers. All interviews were conducted in Spanish, audio taped, and translated into English during transcription by the first author.

This study used grounded theory methods (GTM) to analyze interview data (Charmaz 2000). We specifically sought to explain bicultural development in undocumented Mexican families after immigration, using GTM to build a

conceptual model from "concepts" and "indicators" that emerged from the data (LaRossa 2005). We used Atlas/ti version 4.1 for Windows to code text files. Following the stages of analyses in ground theory, we used open, axial, and selective coding to derive the concepts and indicators in the conceptual model (LaRossa 2005).

During open coding, the authors broke the text down into discrete parts or units of analyses called concepts. In vivo coding was similarly performed when participants' own words were used as a code or concept. For example, an adolescent saying "I just can't stop thinking about how my life was in Mexico" was coded "thinking about the past after immigration" during open coding; whereas a mother saying "family separations made us do things differently" initiated an in vivo code called "family separations". Open and in vivo codes were clustered into more abstract concepts or variables with multiple indicators theoretically saturating each concept (LaRossa 2005). Along with in vivo codes, the stems from the structured interview questions provided a priori codes (e.g., "Ways I am Mexican;" "Ways I am U.S.-American").

During axial coding, we examined relationships between and among concepts or variables (Charmaz 2000). Using the constant comparison method, we consistently compared codes, concepts, and categories from different adolescents, parents, and families to examine their universality and to identify cases where they did not fit. Code notes, theory notes, and process notes were kept in memos attached to the data files to record the potential relationships between concepts and indicators (Parra-Cardona et al. 2006). Finally, selective coding was used to craft the story line (LaRossa 2005). A conceptual model was finalized to describe post-immigration bicultural adjustment in undocumented Mexican families, and exemplars were identified to illustrate the concepts and indicators in the final model. The first and second authors coded the interview data separately and then in interactive discussions.

Trustworthiness of the Analysis

Qualitative researchers emphasize rigor in their studies by examining the trustworthiness of the results. Triangulation of methods, sources, analysts, and perspectives are strategies for enhancing credibility in qualitative research (Patton 2002). In this study, we used all of these triangulation methods. We triangulated information from multiple sources in the interviews with adolescents and their parents. Informal discussions with participating families after the interviews confirmed what was included in the formal interviews. With 7 of the 10 families, the first author talked with both parents when the interviews were completed, gaining multiple perspectives from the same family. She also spoke with five siblings. These conversations were documented in field notes, providing multiple perspectives from which we could view the data. We constantly compared codes across participants and subgroups (e.g., parents versus adolescents). We were also able to compare qualitative codes to quantitative data from the larger study. As part of a larger mixed-methods study, the authors discussed themes from the qualitative analyses with research staff who conducted quantitative assessments to confirm themes and integrate feedback. We shared our conceptual model with consultants and audiences

at local, state, and national conferences to gain insights from other professionals working with undocumented Mexican families.

Positionality

Qualitative researchers believe that it is critical to understand and make overt the positionality, or personal beliefs and biases, brought to the research endeavor (Patton 2002). The first author, who conducted the interviews and led the analyses, is a bicultural mental health social worker with an emphasis on the importance of family and social support: qualities that influenced her positionality. In every interview except for one, she went beyond the interview protocol to provide guidance, information, and links to local resources. We believe that this positionality enhanced the study by encouraging families to provide detailed information about their cultural experiences.

Findings

Figure 2 shows a bi-directional acculturation model of post-immigration adjustment processes for Mexican adolescents and their parents in this study. This model

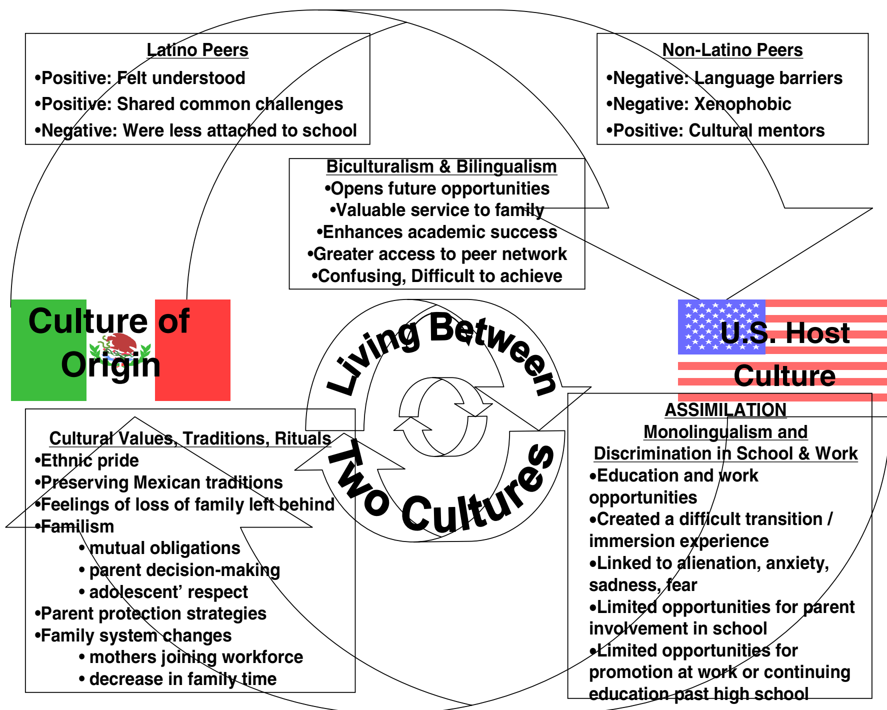

Fig. 2 Conceptual model for bicultural development

integrates themes from culture of origin influences such as the Mexican families and from U.S. host culture influences functioning in school and work settings outside of the participants' homes. We use these themes to frame our discussion of bicultural development in Mexican immigrant families.

Relationship to Culture of Origin

Mexican parents and adolescents took pride in their nationality and preserved their customs, traditions, values, and language. They were acculturating without assimilating. By acculturating, we specifically mean that they were coming into continuous first-hand contact with U.S. culture in schools and workplaces and cultural changes were occurring. Bacallao and Smokowski (in press) discussed assimilation pressures such as discrimination and monolingualism and how these mechanisms functioned in the acculturation process. Although these pressures certainly affected Mexican families, parents and adolescents did not respond to them by letting go of their Mexican customs, traditions, language, or behaviors.

> Nohemi (adolescent female): I believe that one never, when one lives with one's family here [in the U.S.], one never leaves one's culture behind in order to learn another culture. You either learn from the other culture, or you learn how to manage both cultures, but you don't leave your culture behind. I think that one can live a whole lifetime here [in the U.S.], and you will never ever let go of these [Mexican] customs. Even if sometimes you don't do them, they're always in your head. The customs are part of me.

> Adriana (mother): We reflect often on what we were, and what we are now. It bothers me a lot when some people who have been here for a long time no longer want to speak Spanish. It seems foolish to me. I tell my kids to do the opposite. They should be able to speak two languages, and speak them very well. People need to know where they come from, and it's necessary that they know how to live, know how to share, know how to talk. These are important things that one ought not to forget.

> Juan (adolescent male): My blood, my Mexican blood, my country's flag, my color [pointed to arm's skin color]—coffee—my language, my culture, our customs, the way we do things, all this makes me proud to be Mexican.

Culture of Origin Identity, Values, Traditions, and Rituals

All of the adolescents were born outside the U.S. and had important memories of customs, lifestyles, places, and people that they had left behind. It was a simple and obvious fact that they were Mexican and this needed little explanation. Several times, parents and adolescents described this sense of identity as being in their blood. Aside from this blood tie, the adolescents expressed feelings of ethnic pride and loyalty. They spoke Spanish, practiced family-oriented and communal values, prepared traditional foods, and tried to recreate holidays as they were celebrated in Mexico. Memories of their native land, and attachments with family members who

were left behind also served to help maintain culture of origin identities. Culture of origin identity appeared stable in all of the adolescents. They were not actively rejecting their culture of origin. At the same time, problems arose because parents saw American customs, behaviors, and attitudes gradually influencing their children. When they felt threatened by this increasing American influence, parents tried to strengthen the Mexican influence in their children's lives by invoking familism and parent protection strategies.

Familism and Parent Protection

Familism, an orientation to family as the center of one's world, was strongly emphasized in these families. All of the families had immigrated to increase the chances that their children would have a successful future. They believed that the long-term achievement of the family lineage was dependent upon the success of the children today. One parent's goal was to have his adolescent daughter graduate from an American university, holding a diploma in one hand and his hand in her other hand.

Although maintaining cultural traditions was a positive experience for most families, keeping a strong connection to the culture of origin did not occur without struggles. Many adolescents and parents expressed strong feelings of loss and grief for extended family members and friends who were left behind in Mexico. In the midst of struggles with discrimination experiences and overwhelming schoolwork that required English language competence, adolescents found solace in memories of happier times spent with grandparents and cousins in Mexico. These memories helped them cope with the present but also intensified the grief over the loss of these close relationships. Although parents were willing to make the sacrifices associated with immigration to help their children, they also felt lonely and isolated because they had left many of their extended family behind. This cut-off from their extended family may have prompted parents to be increasingly focused on invoking familism as a way to protect their adolescents from the dangers parents perceived to be in their U.S. environment.

Parents perceived their children to be in a dangerous environment. They thought that American adolescents were given too much freedom, and that recreation time was spent away from the family instead of with the family. One parent said, "I worry that my son will pick up the customs of the Americans here. You know…(said in a whisper, leaning towards interviewer) using drugs, becoming too independent. That is what most worries me." In the traditional Mexican family system, parents' decisions were sacrosanct, demanding respect from Mexican adolescents who were gradually seeing different ways of doing things. Furthermore, these Mexican families were experiencing rapid changes from mothers joining the workforce for the first time and time spent as a family dramatically decreasing. Lacking an extended family network for monitoring children that existed in Mexico, parents adopted authoritarian parenting styles, restricting their adolescent children's freedom because of the perceived dangers in the new cultural system.

In response to this perceived threat, parents invoked protective familism-oriented parenting strategies that restricted what their children were allowed to do. For

example, some Mexican adolescents had a strict curfew of 9 PM on weekdays and weekends. Another adolescent could only go out once on the weekend with her friends. Adolescents argued over the restrictions, noting that their American peers had more freedom. Parents wanted to be introduced to their adolescent's friends' parents in order to form a close supervision network. When visiting or having sleepovers, American friends often did not talk to, or even greet, these Latino parents. This might have been due to the language barrier or to lack of courtesy. In either case, this violated the Latino parents' values of familism and respect (respecto), making Latino parents perceive American friends as a particularly bad influence on their children. This prompted parents to become more protective and restrictive of their children's social lives outside of school. Adolescents reacted in different ways to these new restrictions; some respected their parents' decisions, some became quietly resentful, and others rebelled.

Parent Academic Support

Latino parent support for academic achievement was a difficult area. All of the parents wanted their children to do well, especially in school. At the same time, there was an important chasm between the immigrant parent and the school system. Mexican parents did not understand the U.S. school system and were generally too intimidated to go into their child's school. The language barrier was a serious setback. One adolescent was held back a year in school. This shocked and devastated her family members who believed that she was progressing in her classes and nothing was wrong. She provided the following explanation.

> Yariela (female adolescent): Before my dad didn't know anything about the system (school), he didn't set any goals. He didn't really know (said with a softer volume and lowered pitch of voice). The (Latino) parents can't really help us. If they did know about the school system, they'd set goals. Latino kids don't really care to study because their parents aren't there for them.
> Interviewer: What you do mean 'aren't there for them'?
> Yariela (female adolescent): They're not there telling them what to do, setting goals for them in school like the American parents. It's not that they (Latino parents) don't care. It's that they don't know. They don't know (voice lowered). They don't have parents to push them, help them, and they achieve less. It's pretty sad.

Her father agreed.

> Miguel (male parent): I didn't know how the school (system) functions here. It's very different in our country. And nobody, nobody at the school explained it to us, the parents. Less one knows if one doesn't speak English, which is my case. So, that has changed. I am getting to understand what the school tries to do, and not do. But before Ling (bicultural Korean-American stepmother) was with us, I felt lost trying to understand the school. And I would ask Yariela, but she didn't really understand. I would ask her what the teachers say, and they were telling her she was doing well, but in reality, she was not. They'd

> tell her not to worry, that she would pass high school, but with the grades she was getting, she would not be able to continue her studies in the university. We were worried. But they would tell her not to worry. I felt confused. But all that has changed, thanks to Ling (Korean-American wife of 1½ years).

Parent academic support was hampered by language difficulties, lack of understanding school expectations, and values that unquestioningly respect the authority of teachers. At the same time, parents felt a sense of frustration with an American system that they did not understand and may have sought more control over what they did understand—the family system.

Relationship to the U.S. Host Culture

Outside of their homes and churches, Mexican parents and adolescents came into contact with U.S. culture and experienced the assimilation pressures of discrimination and monolingualism (Bacallao and Smokowski in press). These pressures pushed them to learn English and take on American behaviors, customs, and values. Critics of acculturation research point out that many studies examine acculturation but few articulate actual differences between the culture of origin and the U.S. host culture (Hunt et al. 2004). Unless those differences are established, acculturation is meaningless. The families we interviewed described a host of differences between Mexican culture and U.S. culture; differences in traditions, customs, values, behaviors, laws, food, clothing, the physical environment, language, and climate.

> Marian Dolores (adolescent female): I feel Mexican because of the traditions that I have because there are different traditions there. I grew up in Mexico and it is very different from growing up here. It is very different in everything. In communication, the language, and because here, there is more money and more work than in Mexico. There is less there, and it is different. We played outside [in Mexico], with my friends, cousins. Here, we play inside, by ourselves. Here at home I speak Spanish and I am here with my parents and everything, and we have our foods, our customs, but when you go out, you have to change the language, and everything is different. I feel very different here [in the U.S.] with my Mexican culture because when I am at home, it is almost like being in Mexico for me, but when I leave my house, it is different. The people are different and they are not like me because here [in the U.S.], there are Hispanics, but they are not the majority. So, when I go out, I see that the people are not like me, they speak a different language, they look different and all. When I am here at home, I can communicate with my parents, with my sisters, and when I'm not [at home], I am more alone.

> Petrona (mother): Well [paused for about 5 seconds], it is strange to live between two cultures that are very different. For example, here [in the U.S.] it's very liberal. They [Americans] are liberal, the children and the parents. In Mexico, no. In Mexico, they respect each other a lot. But here, no. Here, the children, after a certain age, can do what they want. They even leave their homes because they are no longer minors. But in Mexico, no. You keep your

children at home because of the advice you give them. If I tell my son, “Look son, you must keep respect towards your parents regardless of your age, because this is our custom, and we will always be your parents.” And even if he comes here [to the U.S.], we have gotten him accustomed to this type of respect towards his parents. Even though, he will see other adolescents do things different here, they leave home or do anything they want after a certain age, no. One must stand firm in the ways one has been taught.

There were marked differences between the two cultures. The American influence in the adolescents’ lives centered on school experiences and American friends. Both of these factors strongly impacted the adolescents’ bicultural identity development by emphasizing American ways from an Assimilationist point of view. Both of these factors also had ties to racist or discriminatory experiences that the adolescents endured.

Tension between the Latino influence in the family and the American influence from friends was the root of struggles between parents and their children. Latino parents thought American adolescents had too much freedom and were a source of danger for their children, leading them to adopt restrictive parent protection strategies. Latino adolescents saw that their American friends had more freedom and thought they had more fun. This made them resent the restrictive parent protection strategies and yearn for more freedom.

School was another area of significant concern. Everyone agreed that U.S education was an important reason for immigration, and, through U.S. education, children have a “future”. At the same time, schools were strong agents of assimilation, making even low acculturated Mexican adolescents feel more American during school hours.

Jaun (adolescent): Yes. The school is pure American. The way they run the school. How things are done. How the classes are. The teachers, how they teach, what they teach. The language everybody speaks. How the other (American) students are.

Interviewer: When you’re at school, you feel more American?

Juan (adolescent): Yes. Speaking in English, being with Americans. Yes.

The language barrier was a serious impediment to parent involvement in school. Latino parents instructed their children to listen to their teachers because the parent’s ability to help was limited. This dependency on teachers, rather than parents, became problematic when tension occurred between adolescents and teachers. Below is an example that illustrates how this happened for one bicultural adolescent.

Eva (female adolescent): My ESL teacher last year, she wouldn’t let me get out of ESL. She would say, You need my help. You can’t get out of ESL because you need my help, and if you get out, I won’t help you anymore. You need to stay in ESL.’ I think that’s really discriminating against me. Being in her class didn’t let me know things or people at school really well. Just because I’m a Latina, they think I need a special thing, like if I say, ‘oh, I didn’t finish this homework’ they say (in an exaggerated slower, louder voice),

> 'oh, that's okay. You can do this whenever you want.' It's like because I'm Latina, I need more time to do things. I get this extra favor. For example, if some American person said that to a teacher, the teacher would say (in a stern voice), 'You had a lot of time to do that. Get it done by the end of the day.' I think teachers have to be fair with all the people. (Pause) They feel pity! (appeared to have made an insightful discovery) They feel sorry for us and they try to give us extra time to do things, or not even do them. I don't like that. We are not stupid. They have really low expectations of us (tone of voice expressed anger) Like if I'm making a C, and I go to the teacher, the teacher says, 'Oh, your grade is really good.' I say, 'What's my grade?' And she says a C. I think, what? A 'C'? That's not really a good grade. A 'B' is a good grade. But the teacher says, 'you are doing just fine'. And I say WHAAAT? And if that same teacher says a 'C' to an American person, they say, you have to work harder at it. They expect a better grade from them, a B or an A. They expect from us to get at least a D or a C, to pass the class. Well, I guess it's our fault that we Latinos have that reputation. But I get mad because I'm not like that. I work hard.

Other adolescents corroborated this dynamic where teachers had lower expectations for Latino students, and regularly gave them extra time (or the answers) for assignments. Interestingly, the bicultural female above considered this to be discrimination. A highly acculturated female, on the other hand, found it to be helpful. For this highly acculturated adolescent, school was a place to socialize with her American friends.

Parents agreed that this situation was problematic. Initially, they trusted the messages their adolescents reported from their teachers. At the same time, adolescents understood that their parents were vulnerable and may have tried to protect them from what was going on.

School could also be an important place where a mentor can emerge to greatly influence Latino students. The same bicultural adolescent who found teacher actions to be racist said that her principal (who previously taught her English) was a critical mentor. He made himself available to advise her, offered her extra resources, checked her report cards, encouraged her participation in an extra-curricular activity, and signed forms for her to enter an honors class in Spanish literature.

Overall, the process these Mexican families described corresponded with the original notion of acculturation; contact between two autonomous and independent cultural groups occurred and cultural changes were taking place. Parents and adolescents actively maintained their Mexican values, customs, and traditions while being involved in U.S. culture outside their homes. Following Alternation Theory, these moderate-to-intense relationships with both cultures suggested that adolescents were living between two cultures.

Biculturalism: Living Between Two Cultures

Notably, the parents and adolescents we interviewed did not use the word biculturalism. We stopped using it after the first interview to see how they would

describe the process of participating in two cultures. They called it living between two cultures or two worlds (dos mundos). In general, parents and adolescents were in favor of living between two cultures.

> Nohemi (adolescent female): I've always thought that living with two cultures is a very nice thing. If I could pick a lifestyle, I'd like to meet many people from other cultures. So I don't dislike it here. On the contrary, I'd like to know more about their [U.S.] culture, understand them more, communicate more with them, and be able to spend more time with them. I think it would be nice to be able to share in their culture, and then always be able to go home to your own culture. At home, I'm with my mom and dad in our culture, and just as soon as I go out with my friends or with my next-door neighbors, I'm already sharing in another culture. I think that's really cool.

> Miguel (father): The [American] kids are telling her this is how it is, and this is how we do this or that. And the language [English], she's really using the language now. But she is not losing the customs that she has brought with her. Those customs, because she remembers them, she holds on to them. Had she been little when we brought her here [to the U.S.], her customs would be erased by these new customs. She knows the life she had in our homeland, and that has helped her maintain her customs. But she has taken on all the customs from here, while keeping her customs from there [Mexico], and it is like she's in between the two. She's in between the two customs, and that appears to be fine with her. She's not forgetting what she's brought with her. If she were younger, I think she would forget. Her customs, she will never forget them. She knows her customs. They've become a part of her because she was older when she left [Mexico].

> Teresa (adolescent female): For me, no, [I do not live with two cultures] because I feel Mexican, and I will always be Mexican, even if I don't live in Mexico. Sometimes I have to live with two cultures. It isn't real hard, but it isn't easy, either. Since I'm learning English, I can go places and ask for what I need. I am not like them [gestured to her parents outside of her bedroom]. When I need to ask someone where something is, I don't get stuck with English like they do. I can ask, and they really can't. I've had to go through many [emphasized the word "many"] situations in my life where I had to learn it [English], and I had to say it well. And yes, that [emphasized the word "that"] is hard. I know lots of words in English, but I prefer being with other [female] Mexicans. I feel better being with other [female] Mexicans.

Benefits of Living Between Two Cultures

Overall, bicultural individuals maintained a positive relationship with both cultures without having to choose one or the other; they participated in the two different cultures by tailoring their behavior to the situation at hand. Adolescents gave examples of how they adjusted their behavior based on environmental cues.

Manuel (adolescent male): It just means, speaking one way to a group of people and then, going home, and speaking another way to your family. It means going to a football game and then, going to church. It means being different because at school, work [Burger King], it's all the American life. At home, church, they expect the Hispanic way of living. That's just the way it is. At first, I found that people looked at me funny sometimes, and I'd get home and wonder, "What happened?" And I found myself holding on to my mom like I'll do at home, but we weren't home. We were at the mall. [Paused for a few seconds.] I had a meeting at school. My mom came. People saw us, I was hugging her. That's normal to us. But I saw some people looking. Hispanics express more to their families, I think. But it was looked at funny because she was my mom, and these were my friends, and they were like thinking, "What are you doing?" And then, I started realizing what I was doing wrong, or what I was doing like a Hispanic but in an all-American place. And then you learn what not to do in school, and what you can do at home or at church. You learn how to act one way, and as soon as you step out, you turn it on the other way.

Eva (adolescent female): It is difficult for me, because at times you are part of one and also part of the other. You do both things of both cultures. Sometimes you like one thing about one culture better, and at other times you prefer to do something like the way the other culture does it. So, it is like half and half. That's difficult. Some things in one culture, I am in favor of, but other things [in that same culture], I am against. I like it that the [U.S.] schools give scholarships for studying, so you can keep studying. They [U.S. Americans] give you support like for food [at school]. In my culture, they give you help, but not economically. It is a different kind of help.

Bilingualism emerged as a key component of living between two cultures. Learning English was both the largest obstacle in the acculturation process and one of the greatest assets adolescents would gain from living in the U.S. Parents supported adolescents' development of bilingual skills in order to open future career opportunities in Mexico.

Adolfo (father): I see a better future for my children in Mexico because in Mexico they could be bilingual teachers. They could work at a school with good pay, because they will take the language back with them, the real thing from here in the United States. The language is what they will gain here. Since they know how to read and write Spanish perfectly, they have that opportunity to be bilingual teachers. In Mexico, they need bilingual teachers. The goal is to return in maybe five or six years.

Petrona (mother): I would like them to finish all of their schooling here. University, too.
Luis (father): They would be well prepared to start businesses over there [in Mexico].
Petrona: What happens is that because we come from the border, they will have better jobs in the United States because they will be able to work in the factories and the agencies that are run by Americans but are on the border.

They will have both languages. They will have more doors open to them if they finish their studies here.
Luis: Since it is a border, they would be able to find better work there because they speak the two languages, English and Spanish. They could live in Mexico and work in the U.S.

In addition to strengthening the prospects for future employment, there were other benefits for developing bilingual skills. Parents said that speaking two languages would increase the adolescents' social status in Mexico, signaling that they were educated in the U.S. Parents were proud of their adolescents' bilingual skills. Adolescents who spoke both languages were able to make a wider network of friends, develop diverse social skills, perform better in school, and navigate within U.S. environments. They also gained a new status within their families. Bilingual adolescents helped their parents with translation and interpretation and were valued by the family as cultural brokers.

Sulema (mother): Being bilingual is a very beautiful thing, and a very good thing. She [their daughter] helps us so much with the language [English] because if there is something from school that I don't understand, or if I take her to the doctor, she can tell the doctor what I say. When she is sick and I take her to the doctor, I tell her in Spanish what to tell the doctor, and she tells him what I say. She helps me with everything, with everything. She has never told me that she won't help me. Do you know what she says about speaking both Spanish and English? She says, "Mami, if I don't speak English, I won't be able to work anywhere. And if I don't speak Spanish, they won't give me the job as fast as someone who does".

Manuel (adolescent male): My parents didn't really [emphasized the word "really"] have to adapt because of us [pointed to himself with index and middle finger, emphasized the word "us"]. We are there as their mediator between the two cultures, and when they need something, they'll say, "Can you help us out?" We don't tell them that we need this or that. We go to the bank, the doctor, the store. We [the children] help them [the parents]. Like at the bank, they'll say, "Say this for us." So they really didn't need to adapt too much. They live their way here, and when they want something from the outside, they come to us, and that's just how it is. We help them out.

Becoming bilingual and living between two cultures also provided parents and adolescents with the opportunity to create something new—a mixture of features from both cultures and both languages.

Reyna (adolescent female): Living between cultures is entertaining because you learn your culture and you learn other cultures, and you mix the cultures, and you can make something new out of one and the other, or you can pick the way that you like how things are done.

Manuel (adolescent male): It's two different ways of living your life. If you live one way, you'll be greatly discriminated in one. You have to know how to change modes, like immediately. There's no way to live one lifestyle. It's

> really living two lives. You can't really live one life because if you do, then people look at you strangely for whichever one you're not living. You have to be able to look at a situation and see where you are at, what people you are with, what place are you at, what are the right ways of acting, what to say, what not to say, what language to say it in, how to say it. Yeah, sometimes it even gets as detailed as what you wear. In one culture, what you wear is not right for the other [culture]. Sometimes you have to even change opinions [emphasized the phrase "change opinions"]. I do it to stay out of trouble.

Adolescent females realized there were new options in the U.S. that were not as readily available in Mexico, where traditional values emphasized marrying and starting a family. Being able to choose from a wider range of religions or occupations entailed more decisions about how they wanted to live their lives.

> Nohemi (adolescent female): A woman, well especially in the place where I used to live [in Mexico], sometimes we don't aspire to anything, and we simply say: "I'll finish la prepa [high school]; I'll marry, have kids, and dedicate myself to the home." Whereas my ideas have changed here, because now I say, "I want to do this [waved one hand to one side and then her second hand to the other side], I want to do that before I marry [emphasized the word, "before"], before I start a family, or before I dedicate myself to the home." I don't necessarily want to be stuck somewhere taking care of kids, because in reality I think there's time for everything, but that's not the only thing I want for my life. Not anymore.

Challenges Inherent in Living Between Two Cultures

Along with these advantages, living between two cultures also caused challenges. Many options and multiple identities bring confusion and complexity. Maintaining strong ties with two cultural systems, for example, can cause contradiction, tension, and social strain (Harritatos and Benet-Martinez 2002). Parents and adolescents we interviewed expressed some social and emotional confusion from living between two worlds. At times, it was difficult to decide which language to speak or which cultural values to support. This difficult decision-making, often in the presence and under the pressure of their peers, was complicated by the fact that many of the adolescents missed Mexico and felt caught between the two cultures.

> Eva (adolescent female): I think it is difficult when you speak Spanish and every one stares at you, and those that speak English tell you not to speak Spanish. So you wonder whether to speak Spanish or not. You start to question your own language. It is complicated to decide which of the two languages to speak at school, and sometimes you decide to speak some words in Spanish but most in English so that everyone understands. My Hispanic friends have agreed to speak Spanish among ourselves, even though we know we have to practice English. If the majority [of people around me] is American, then we speak the English we know. If the majority are Hispanics, among ourselves, we speak Spanish, but if we are talking with them (the Americans), then

English. If they are with us, so as not to make them feel bad, then we must speak English so that they know what we are saying, so they do not think we are talking about them.

Diocelena (mother): There are times that we say, "Now, let's do something that they [the Americans] do to have fun." We do that every now and then. But we have our culture. More often [living with two cultures is difficult] when our children request more permission to go with their friends, more liberties. They'll say, "No, here, Mama, it's different." And they insist that it's different [in this culture], and that is when it's hard. We try to say, "But no, we have our culture, our way of thinking from our land, and we want to maintain that." But it is difficult living with two cultures.

Figure 3 shows Juana's cultural map, illustrating her conflict and confusion about living between cultures. On the left is a self-portrait showing her living in Mexico. On the right, she is depicted living in the United States.

Juana (adolescent female): For me, my drawing (see Fig. 3) represents how I feel sometimes. How I feel confused, and how I feel about living here. I feel confused about living here away from my family, but I try not to think too much about that. I live here, but in reality, I feel confused because I like it here, but I also need and miss my other country. The longer you're here the more confused you get, because you don't know if it's better to be here how we are now, or if it would be better to be over there. Sometimes it's more confusing. You sacrifice having family close because you can't have everything in both places [Mexico and the U.S.]. It's hard. It's very hard to be in one place but want to be in another. Difficult. Difficult. And… umm,

Fig. 3 Juana's cultural map

> very confusing, because it's something you can't choose. Your parents chose it. It's difficult when you remember what you did there when you were with your family. It's difficult when you think about being in Mexico, but you are here [in the U.S.]. It's difficult on holidays like Christmas and the month of festivities, and New Year's, and all that.

Peer Networks and Living Between Two Cultures

Few studies have explored the role that peer networks play in acculturation processes, even though peer influence is critical in facilitating or hindering cultural adaptation. In the families we interviewed, interactions with peers were arguably the most complex part of living between two cultures. Although it was clear to the adolescents that their family homes and churches represented their Mexican culture and that school and work represented U.S. culture, interactions with peers were more ambiguous. Latino and non-Latino American peer networks were often separated and each of these subsystems had different positive and negative nuances. Some adolescents chose their niche whereas others had no friends or floated between divergent groups.

Latino Peers

It was often harder for adolescents to make friends in the U.S. than it was in Mexico. In Mexico, extended family networks often included cousins of the same age. Coupled with shared language and town centers within walking distance, these factors often made for a dynamic social life. In the U.S., adolescents cited the need to be driven everywhere as a major obstacle to making and maintaining friendships. Most adolescents saw friends only at school—a place where speaking Spanish was sometimes discouraged—or spoke to them over the telephone.

Mexican adolescents joined Latino peer groups more readily than non-Latino peer groups. Difficulties speaking English limited opportunities for making friends within non-Latino American groups or with Latinos who did not speak Spanish. Experiences with Latino peers were mixed. Mexican adolescents said that Latino peers sometimes said ugly things, were bothersome, rebellious, and mean, teased them about being responsible in school, urged them to break family curfews, and did not believe in themselves. One female adolescent thought that her Latino peers who had been in the U.S. longer thought they were better than Latino newcomers. Another female adolescent reported having her life threatened by a U.S.-born Mexican boy who was asked to translate for her in school. One male adolescent was becoming involved with Mexican peers who were in a gang and who led him into risk-taking behaviors. He associated with them for protection from racist U.S.-American peers.

> Jaime (adolescent male): My [Latino] friends are probably a negative influence although they protect me from fights. At school, this black guy wanted to fight me. So, I fought him. Then the principal suspended me for three days. Aaugh. It was my first year. I had a lot to learn. Now, well, if someone wants to fight me,

> my friends will take care of him. They'll find him in town. They have cars. I don't. They tell me, "We'll take care of him." Ah, I could fight anyone, but I can't in school. And I don't have a car. They want me to go to some of their parties. They like to drive to abandoned houses. Then we party in there. These houses, you can't get to without a car. Some of them are farther back from the road, lots of woods around. The police found us once [head dropped slightly]. [Paused.] They must've heard talk of the party. They checked to see if we had marijuana. Each person, every one was checked. They drove me home, told the boss [his father] where they found me. I got in trouble [shook his head] with him. I told him I didn't have marijuana, and the police, they didn't find any on me. They brought me home and he [his father] understood enough [of what the police had told him]. They're not my friends. I do a few things with them. When they have parties, they invite me. That's how it is here. I don't do too much with them. They're not my friends [shook his head again].

At the same time, Mexican adolescents often had a positive relationship with Latino peers. Latino peers who became friends, especially bicultural peers, were valuable sources of support. They interpreted in class and explained English instructions when Mexican adolescents did not understand. These Latino friends understood the acculturation process and what it is like not to understand the language, the school system, or the curriculum. They provided emotional support and talked about common difficulties such as having conflicts with parents or being unable to continue their studies due to their documentation status.

> Maria Dolores (adolescent female): I don't have many [Latino friends]. I only have one because in my school, there are not many Hispanos. I have a friend who came here a year ago [from Honduras]. She speaks English, and she helps me a lot. I ask her how to say things in English, and she helps me because she knows. She tells me to go and ask the teacher, and the teacher gets happy because I am learning. My friend understands me very well.

> Jaime (adolescent male): When you are talking in English, and you don't pronounce one word correctly, that's it. You realize that you can't express yourself as a Mexican, as easily as you can in Spanish. When I'm with my [Latino] friends, we mix the two [languages] because when you can't say a word in one language, you can say it in the other.

> Reyna (adolescent female): Mexican friends supported me, supported me a lot in my studies. I can talk to them, and they'll tell me, "Don't feel sad, Reyna" [said in a slow, soothing tone]. They tell me that I shouldn't feel sad. I'm not the only one who has suffered. It helps. It was a little difficult because arriving here with no English, not knowing the schools. I couldn't do the homework. It was all very difficult. In the classroom, I could only ask a [female] friend. I would guess at the words the teacher was saying, and aaah, it was very difficult to adapt here. But God is good, and the other Mexican girls in my class helped me.

> Teresa (adolescent female): They've always been there at times when I've felt bad. They listen to me, help me with my problems. My friend. Her name is

> Inez. She's Mexican. Inez is the one who most listens to me, who doesn't get tired of me. She has patience with me. I see her at school everyday. Sometimes, I see her at church. Or sometimes, I invite her to my house. We'll sit here and do our homework together. Like that, we'll pass the time. She is always on my side. She always helps me. I trust her. She's the same age as me, fourteen. I hardly ever go to her house because I don't have a ride, and her father drinks and he's a cocaine addict. My father won't let me go there. She comes to my house.

One of the most striking observations occurred when adolescents compared their peer networks in Mexico to their new Latino peers in the U.S. For two of the adolescent males, Latino peers in the U.S were a much healthier influence than their prior peers in Mexico. One of these adolescents said he would probably be in jail with his friends if he were still living in Mexico.

> Juan (adolescent male): I think better here. I believe that I'll have a better future now than what I thought I had in Mexico. The school helped, but mostly, I think it's because I have [Latino] friends here. In Mexico, I didn't have many friends. And the friends I had, it was because we did bad things together. Here, I can have friends and not have to do bad things to keep those friends. I have a lot more friends here. That has helped me, and has changed how I think about my future. In Mexico, I went to school. The school started earlier (than here), ended at 2:30. I'd come home to spend time with my friends. We did some bad things like stealing, mostly stealing. Hub caps off cars, things like that. I had to do it because I'd be with them. [Paused about five-seconds.] The friends I have here are better. They're not bad. Because I'm fat, I had those friends [in Mexico]. Because the others, I couldn't be friends with them. They called me bad names. The bad friends accepted me as long as I did bad stuff with them.

Overall, Latino peers provided critical support, serving as cultural mentors who understood the difficulties and the benefits inherent in the acculturation process. There was a natural fit between Mexican parents and adolescents and Latino peers. In contrast, the fit with non-Latino American peers was much more problematic and difficult to establish.

Non-Latino American Peers

Few Mexican adolescents had non-Latino American peers as friends. Interactions with non-Latino American peers were often marked by racial discrimination against Mexican immigrants and hampered by language differences. In all of the ecological systems—family, churches, workplaces, schools—American peers were the most discriminatory, rejecting Mexicans and devaluing biculturalism. Non-Latino American peers had different customs, language, and behaviors that made Mexican adolescents feel like they did not belong with this group. Further, Mexican parents discouraged their children from befriending American adolescents because they perceived them as liberal role models for bad behavior.

> Teresa (adolescent female): The most difficult part of adapting is to have friends. We hardly have any American friends because they'll say, "You're Mexican, and you're invading our territory." For me, yes, it hurts a little, but it doesn't affect me too much.

> Nohemi (adolescent female): It's that I don't really spend time with American friends. I don't really have American friends. Just people I work with. All of the friends that we have that are American, they're very different. Their customs are very different. And I think that no matter how much I hang out with them, I think that in my head there will always be that concept that their behavior is wrong, and even if in that environment, what they do is good, it's never going to be good to me because I have different customs, and these are my customs.

> Alfredo (adolescent male): I was playing American football, and someone was right here [gestured to his side], and if I tried to tackle him, he'd start hitting me, but hitting hard. It happened more than once. I left him alone. I'd let him run. I did that because I didn't want him to hit me. This other time, we were at the football field, playing American football, and this guy started fighting with me. He joined the game. He usually doesn't play with us. And as the game was going on, he started punching me. I hit him back. The police came. It had turned into a fight. The others there had called the police… He was fighting me because I didn't know English. Yes. That's what he told the police. He told me to go back to Mexico.

> Maria Dolores (adolescent female): Some [American peers] are bad, some are good. The bad ones, when I first got here, would talk to me, and I did not understand them. Maybe they were making fun of me. The good ones are not like that, they would tell me words in Spanish and I felt fine because I knew they were not calling me things. They were trying to talk to me.

As Maria Dolores indicated in the quotation above, not all interactions with American peers were bad. A few of the Mexican adolescents were able to press through these negative experiences to build friendships with non-Latino Americans. When these friendships occurred, they were helpful to the Mexican adolescents. American peers helped Mexican adolescents find their way around school, showed them how things were done, explained the different customs in the U.S., and provided English language assistance. These friendships were reciprocal with non-Latino American peers displaying interest in learning Spanish and understanding Mexican culture. In this way, some American peers were cultural emissaries.

> Juan (adolescent male): I have one [American] friend. Walker is his name. He lives around here [in the large apartment complex]. He looks more Mexican than American. He knows a lot of Spanish words but he doesn't speak it. But he wants to practice [speaking Spanish]. He's always asking me how do you say this, how do you say that. He likes to talk with me in Spanish, the words he knows. He's learning it. One day, we were here, talking, listening to music, and my mother came in. Walker stood up, said, "Buenas tardes." [The mother

laughed saying, "I remember that! First time I heard him speak in Spanish!"] He likes our language, wants to learn it.

Eva (adolescent female): American friends have supported me by taking me into their group and learning from them, and explaining to me how to do things here, and why they behave the way they do, things like that. Like for St. Patrick's Day, they (American friends) tell me what they are going to do, what it is, what to say. They tell me to dress in green, and I learn from them how to behave, what they do.

One of the benefits of being bilingual and bicultural was being able to interact with a diverse array of social groups. Having this cultural capital and enhanced social network—being able to navigate successfully within the new cultural system—tended to decrease adolescents' feelings of isolation and increase their sense of well-being.

Manuel (adolescent male): I'm here and there. I never hang out in one place, one group. I have friends everywhere. I don't feel like I can, uhm, like I can fit in the way they do, like in a certain group. I feel like I can't agree with how just one group thinks. I really feel like I have to do what's right for me. I have something to say to them, and we talk [shrugged]. I move on. I don't dislike any of the groups. I don't. It's just that I don't fit into any one group. That's how I get to know the groups. It doesn't matter if they speak Spanish or English.

Eva (adolescent female): If I had a problem, I would listen to advice from both Mexican and American friends, and see which is better for me because my Mexican friends would handle the problem differently, less liberal than the American friends. But I would want to hear advice from American friends, even though I probably wouldn't do it.

Interestingly, Mexican parents made no mention of having American friends. They described American co-workers, ministers, or members of their church congregations as being helpful and kind. However, Mexican parents did not gain the benefits, such as English language assistance, that came with having American friends. This, along with being older when they arrived to the U.S., may partially explain why parents were generally less bicultural than their adolescents. Through their friendships with American peers, some adolescents gained experience, practice, and guidance with English language skills and knowledge concerning host culture customs. These friendships with American peers were key elements in promoting bilingual and bicultural development.

To summarize, Latino and non-Latino American peer social networks were sources of both negativity and discrimination on the one hand and support and cultural mentoring on the other. Mexican parents and adolescents found a comfortable match with Latino peers who knew their customs, values, language, and acculturation challenges and benefits. Although some Latino peers were considered to be mean and poor role models, generally they were positive sources of understanding, emotional support, assistance, and guidance for Mexican adolescents

and their parents. Non-Latino American peers were less available because of language barriers and xenophobic attitudes. Making friendships with U.S.-American, however, was an important component for Mexican adolescents' bilingual and bicultural skills development.

Discussion

Bicultural identity development appears to be influenced by factors posited by alternation theorists (Berry 1998; Feliciano 2001; Gonzales et al. 2002). Our interviews demonstrated that Mexican parents and adolescents were acculturating without assimilating. They maintained strong Mexican identities that were strengthened by nationalistic pride and preserved by practicing their Mexican customs, values, and traditions in their homes and churches.

At the same time, meeting U.S. cultural and linguistic demands at work and in school placed Mexican parents and adolescents between the two cultural systems. As Alternation theorists suggest, this prompted adolescents and parents to integrate some U.S. customs, language, or social behaviors into their daily lives, increasing bilingualism and, in some cases, biculturalism. Unsupportive Latino and non-Latino American peers made the process more difficult by discriminating against new immigrants and serving as role models for risk-taking behavior. Supportive Latino and non-Latino American peer networks served as essential sources of guidance, offering cultural mentoring and English language assistance.

Biculturalism was a cultural asset or a form of cultural capital that was linked to positive mental health and family dynamics. This finding is in line with previous studies on biculturalism (Berry 1998; Coatsworth et al. 2005; Feliciano 2001; LaFromboise et al. 1993; Lang et al. 1982; Miranda and Umhoefer 1998; Smokowski and Bacallao 2007; Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco 2001). However, we make a significant contribution to this literature by sketching out the processes involved in bicultural identity development. Our qualitative process findings fill important gaps left in our understanding of biculturalism by quantitative studies. For instance, bicultural adolescents became cultural brokers within their families, helping parents navigate within the new cultural system. Parents and adolescents valued bilingualism and biculturalism to facilitate adjustment within the new environment and prepare adolescents for a range of opportunities when they returned to Mexico. These and other findings articulated above create a process-oriented framework for a more comprehensive articulation of Alternation Theory.

Implications for Prevention and Intervention

Prevention programmers can help Latino adolescents adjust by lowering the intensity of the assimilation pressures in the school environment. Dual-language programs, rather than English-only approaches, would soften the adjustment process. Support groups for Latino students could provide a forum for them to discuss important issues and address concerns related to school achievement. Integrating parents in these groups would be useful, decreasing parent intimidation

and helping parents understand the school system in order to increase their capacities to support and direct their child's educational efforts.

Interventions should also target Latino family system problems. Family-oriented program facilitators should work with family members to try to find common ground between acculturating adolescents and their parents, thus lowering the intensity of parent-adolescent conflicts. Acculturation processes and messages from American friends exacerbated normative parent-adolescent disagreements (e.g., concerning sleepovers, curfews, dating). These intra-familial culture conflicts were an intervention target for structural family therapists who developed bicultural skills training interventions (Bacallao and Smokowski 2005; Szapocznik et al. 1986), but these efforts have not been widely disseminated. Primary prevention practitioners would benefit from exploring and extending bicultural skills training approaches.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

More research is needed on adolescent bicultural identity development. Because biculturalism has been shown to be a protective factor in the acculturation process, we need to understand the adolescent's process for becoming bicultural so that we can fashion appropriate primary prevention programs and social policies. Researchers should examine how adolescents make decisions to pursue bicultural identity, how internal and environmental factors promote or inhibit this identity development, and why some adolescents are able to maintain biculturalism while others are not. The current study provided a beginning glimpse into these issues, but they must be explored in closer detail. In addressing the limitations of the current study, future research efforts should integrate a variety of data from multiple reporters beyond simply adolescents and parents. Observational and longitudinal data is always helpful in strengthening the conclusions that can be made. Further, acculturation trajectories are likely to differ by country of origin. Future studies should be large enough to compare acculturation processes for Latino subgroups from different countries of origin.

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