

Breaking the Mold: Promoting a Refined Pluralistic Logic for Understanding Assimilation Among Mexican Women in the U.S.

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“Well, how *does* a nation of no one culture, no one language, no one race, no one history, no one ethnic stock continue to exist as one, while encouraging diversity?” –Andrew M. Greeley

Assimilation, acculturation, integration, and adaptation reflect the process by which the characteristics of members of immigrant groups and host countries come to resemble one another or fuse into a single identity. This process, comprising both economic and cultural dimensions, begins with the immigrant generation, otherwise known as the first generation, and continues through the second generation and so forth. Accordingly, a model of assimilation was formulated in the U.S. during the early 20th century in the face of an influx of European immigration in order to pinpoint the traits most immigrants exhibit during the adaptation process. Mainstream attitudes in American society have internalized this model and its expectations in the course of normalizing the condition of other migrant groups from various geographical and cultural backgrounds.

In current American society, the continuously increasing rate of Mexican immigration has resulted in a growing interest, or more appropriately, a growing *concern* regarding its effects on the future of the population at large. Mexican Americans as of now constitute the largest minority group in the U.S. by comprising 64% of the total Hispanic population according the U.S. Bureau of the Census, and of this number, Mexican American women account for over half of the total Mexican population in the U.S. In view of this demographic reality, the trend in the rapidly increasing population of all groups encompassing the Hispanic population has been coined the term *latinization*. Not surprisingly, as more immigrants permeate American society, the

assimilation model employed at the turn of the last century has established expectations of minority groups in general that American society has internalized in order to evaluate the “progress” these later groups are making in comparison to the White Europeans for whom the model was initially created. Recently developing immigration patterns, however, have created a disadvantageous situation for Mexican Americans because the classical assimilation model neglects a major issue that this minority group deals with constantly: that of the significance of ethnic identity as well as the social construction of race. This classical framework ignores the impact that *ethnoracial* identity can have on the adaptation process because the *White* Europeans that inspired this model did not have to face the obstacles that arise with this issue. It is impossible for this group to advance collectively according to the American standards established by the assimilation model because the adaptation process involves not only the immigrant’s acceptance of the host country, but also the host country’s acceptance of the immigrant.

This problem is especially magnified in the experiences of Mexican American women because they not only do they encounter obstacles due to their race, but they are also discriminated against because of their gender, particularly within Mexican culture because of its strong adherence to the traditional guidelines for gender roles. Therefore, the research questions posited in this study are: (1) To what extent are Mexican American women deviating from the classical assimilation model and (2) What measures

can be taken to alleviate the dilemma of this group, which is created by both this framework as well as the currently recognized models. Considering these inquiries, the purpose of this qualitative case study is to describe the reality of the process of assimilation for Mexican women in the U.S., specifically within the Central Valley. In addition, this research strives to delineate the manner in which the assimilation models set in place, the Anglo-conformist expectations of U.S. society, and the patriarchal gender roles of Mexican culture work together to complicate the adaptation process for Mexican women. Furthermore, this study is meant to be used as a vehicle to convey the message that the current assimilation measures are ill-fitted for all minority groups in that they marginalize all groups to a certain extent, because the diversity among immigrant experiences attributed to the multiple variables that account for the progression of assimilation are largely overlooked. The complexity of the relationship between Mexican American women and the dictates of the assimilation model has resulted in a rich abundance of literature that pinpoints the central issues that deserve further consideration.

Literature Review

The body of literature gathered for this study has been divided into two domains in order to provide a more detailed and multidimensional account of the condition of Mexican women in the U.S. The first portion deals with the theories formulated regarding the expected behaviors and attitudes of Mexican women based on the dictates of their culture, particularly in reference to gender roles. The latter portion relates to the manner in which assimilation is currently measured and the accuracy of the instruments to produce such measures, as well as proposals for new types of measurements and models. In order to understand the factors that are taken into

consideration when developing assimilation measurements, it is essential to first become familiar with preconceived ideas relating to Mexican American women and their attempts to balance two distinct cultures and value systems.

Traditionally, Mexican culture has supported the notion that women should relate to men in submissive and passive terms, thus allowing men to dominate. This relationship is manifested by the woman serving as the central figure in the home through the care given to her children as well as by maintenance of her home as a product of her emotional responsiveness to the needs of the family. Men, conversely, exercise their dominance by functioning as the voice of authority as well as providing financially for their families. In reference to the relationship between Mexican men and women in the U.S., it is expected that men continue to exert the power bestowed upon them by Mexican culture regardless of the socioeconomic status of women because the patriarchal dictates established by Mexican culture are transferred to gender relations in the U.S. According to Gil and Vazquez (1996), this typical situation in the U.S. as the adaptation process begins, serves as a source of conflict because women feel a sense of guilt regarding lacking a feeling of satisfaction towards the notion of being housewives or not having the economic means to solely care for their children as much as they would prefer. Gil and Vazquez elaborate on this notion: "To many Latinas who are pursuing careers outside of homemaking, *el triunfo en el trabajo*, success at work, is a mixed blessing. The more successful they become in the North American world of work, the less successful they feel as Hispanic women" (1996, Pp. 100). In this situation, the assimilation process plays a pivotal role in gender relations according to Flores, Tschann, Marin, and Pantoja (2004) because there is a clash between the expectations of both men and

women within Mexican culture and the increase in communication that is expected to arise with assimilation. Flores et al. performed a quantitative investigation of 153 families to measure the relationship between increased assimilation and marital conflict among Mexican Americans. Utilizing several scales of assimilation, the researchers concluded that those couples that were measured as being more assimilated were involved in more direct verbal conflicts and struggles for power from both genders than those couples that were considered to be less assimilated. The researchers, however, offered an interesting notion as to the cause of these unexpected results:

In general, the results of this study [show] that more acculturated husbands and wives experience more direct marital conflicts than less acculturated husbands and wives, either because they are more willing to openly express problems in their marriage or because they are involved in more direct struggles for power. These results provide some insight regarding the limited literature on marital distress and acculturation, which has speculated that acculturation may relate to marital difficulties due to differences in cultural expectations between husbands and wives and to the changing nature of gender roles as individuals become more acculturated to American customs. (2004, Pp. 51)

Thus, the results may be due to the fact that assimilated women are more willing to voice their concerns than less assimilated women, not that the former group has more issues than the latter.

Another cultural expectation relating to Mexican women is that they all desire to marry and have children. Indeed, this belief is fueled by the perceptions of single or divorced women throughout Mexican society, not to mention Latin American culture at large. Within this culture, a “good woman” is defined as not only one who is virtuous, but also as one who places the needs of her husband and children before her own. In

other words, a self-sacrificing woman is the most respectable type of woman. In this sense, if a woman decided to delay or exempt herself from this lifestyle, she is judged in a critical fashion for not adhering to the values of her culture. Gil and Vazquez argue that this condition is an example of the propagation of female dependency on men in Latin American culture: “...*la mujer sola*, whether she’s single, divorced, or widowed, has no valid place in Latin American society because a woman’s role is to be a wife and mother. Too often, women who choose to be alone are regarded as outcasts (1996, Pp. 61).

One final preconception about Mexican women in the U.S. worth noting for the purposes of this study pertains to sexuality; specifically, the notion that they believe enjoying sexual relations is inappropriate, based on the patriarchy prevalent in Mexican culture and teachings within the Catholic Church. Research on Mexican culture has shown that women are expected to retain their virginity until they are married if they are to be deemed respectable. Men, however, are expected to be sexually experienced, thus further exerting their dominance. As Gil and Vazquez explain:

[I]n Latin America, men are often taken to prostitutes to learn sexual skills, while women are utterly forbidden sexual practice and subsequently acquire no skills at all. That’s culturally intentional, since according to machismo, a man is 100 percent responsible for teaching his woman what to do in bed. Indeed, the strong element of repression running through Hispanic tradition helps women ignore their own erotic impulses before and after marriage (1996, Pp. 129-30).

Given how these core ideologies pertain to Mexican women in the U.S., it is time to review the techniques used to measure degrees of assimilation. However, before delving into this body of knowledge, it is important to recognize the stages of assimilation outlined in the classical model.

In the 1960s, Robert E. Park developed a model of the assimilation experience, which he believed could be applied to all immigrant groups. This instrument, now referred to as the “cycle of race relations,” begins with the *contact* stage, in which immigrant groups first interact with members of the host society through migration. The next stage, known as the *competition* stage, involves both groups vying for resources needed for survival, which usually gives way to violent conflict that eventually subsides as one group establishes itself as the authoritative party. After this overt conflict disappears, both groups learn how to live together, a stage Park refers to as *accommodation*. Finally, as time progresses, the smaller or immigrant groups gradually merge into the larger group, and into society as a whole. The minority groups begin to adopt the language and customs of the dominant group, eventually resulting in complete *assimilation*. (McLemore, 1980). This classical model, unfortunately, provides a rigid one-dimensional perspective, ignoring the impact of elements such as the historical background and culture of the country of origin, geographical proximity of the home and host countries, and most importantly, the obstacle of social constructions of race and the racism that comes as a result.

Cabassa (2003) has written an explanatory article examining the more prominent theoretical models and assumptions currently in use to measure assimilation. He focuses primarily on the strengths and limitations of *uni-dimensional* and *bi-dimensional* models, while offering suggestions for improving assimilation measures in general. According to Cabassa, uni-dimensional models presume that adaptation progresses in a linear fashion, beginning with a commitment to the immigrant’s country of origin and gradually transferring this immersion to the host country and its culture. As Cabassa notes,

Both of these processes, adherence to the culture of origin and immersion in the

dominant culture, are considered to be part of the same phenomenon. This process is considered to affect only the acculturating group. In other words, this unidimensional process assumes that the culture of the acculturating group has no influence on modifying the dominant culture. This theoretical perspective also assumes that the acculturation process is a zero-sum phenomenon. (2003, Pp. 135)

The measures that tend to utilize this framework are the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans and the Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics. The major criticisms of this theoretical model, according to Cabassa, are that measuring assimilation along a single continuum forces the subjects evaluated to affiliate with either Mexican or Anglo culture, thus deemphasizing the reality of the minority experience that involves balancing both cultures. In addition, measuring the process of assimilation in a linear fashion suggests that in order for assimilation to occur, there has to be a reduction in the influence of one of the two cultures.

The bi-dimensional model, conversely, takes into account the important elements that the unidimensional model overlooks by stressing the fact that assimilation involves both maintaining a connection to the native culture and adhering to the norms of the host country. Although this model provides a clearer understanding of the complexity of the adaptation process, it too has its limitations. For example, this model does not focus on the geographical proximity of the immigrant’s country of origin as a factor in the progression of assimilation. Particularly in the case of Mexican American women, the fact that their native country is so physically close to their host country will probably make the adaptation process more confusing because it is difficult for them to abandon their native values and culture if they are geographically close to one another. Another limitation that applies not only to the bidimensional model

but also to all others is that once a fixed measure is established for assimilation, the unpredictable nature of individual immigrant experiences is disregarded. Cabassa offers this note regarding the limitations of assimilation models: "Another limitation of the bi-dimensional model that is also observed in the uni-dimensional model is that the dynamic nature of the acculturation process can be lost when this theory is translated into a measurement instrument and/or applied in cross-sectional research designs. Acculturation and its strategies can be viewed as a developmental process that varies through time." (2003, Pp. 136-7). In other words, every type of model will succeed in marginalizing certain experiences because there are various overt and discrete factors that affect assimilation. Cabassa's article is significant for the purpose of this study because his analyses offer valid suggestions for improving assimilation measures, including using more qualitative approaches towards data collection and analysis as well as focusing on contextual variables in each case to better understand how each assimilation experience takes form and evolves.

Dawson, Crano, and Burgoon (1996) performed a study involving 790 Mexican American parents of elementary parochial school children in the southwestern U.S. to measure the limitations of The Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans (ARMSA). Their study argued that although this scale produces high reliability due to its internal consistency, it ignores the various factors that contribute to the adaptation process in order to produce a single summed score as calculated by adding all the items together. Dawson et al. proposed a new alternative for measuring assimilation that yielded the same consistency rates as the ARMSA but simultaneously utilizes analytical approaches to understanding data. In addition, one important variable emphasized in their study is that of

communication. The researchers proposed that the access an individual has to the communication resources in the host society would play a pivotal role in the progression towards assimilation:

In summary, we recommend the use of the analytic approach described in this work, and the underlying view of acculturation as intimately related to the facility with which the individual can avail him-or herself of the communication resources of society. ...we suggest that communications resources play an important role in acculturation, and that researchers could benefit by incorporating such items in their theory-building, measurement, and analysis. (1996, Pp. 107).

This proves to be a valuable argument, especially when dealing with mainstream American media because of the fact that the mass media are a pervasive cultural force in this country in their ability to simultaneously entertain, inform, and influence the general audience. In reference to the immigrant generation, the media serve as a convenient vehicle by which to learn about the preconceived values and norms of mainstream American society as well as the perceptions of American society regarding minority groups.

In connection to the importance of accessibility to communication media as emphasized by Dawson et al., a study by Hurtado et al. (1994) supports the notion that the construction of social identities among Mexican Americans has a positive relationship to a mastery of the English language, an understanding of the communication sources such as the media, and simple social interaction. This study is based on the standard survey conducted in 1979 of persons of Mexican descent under the sponsorship of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. The purpose of the study was to measure the differences in identity formation based on generation status as well as socioeconomic status. An argument within the investigation

that deserves further inquiry is the notion that Mexico's close proximity to the U.S. magnifies the assimilation gap between the first generation and subsequent generations because the immigrants can maintain a stronger connection to the culture and teaching of their country of origin. Hurtado and associates offer their explanation of this statement: "Geographical proximity promotes the ease with which first-generation immigrants from Mexico can renew the psychological meaning of Mexico through visits, returning to Mexico to live, reentering the United States but often with the aspiration of a permanent return to Mexico; and maintaining bonds with family members residing in Mexico." (1994, Pp. 130). However, the findings in this study serve to support a counter argument that posits that Mexico's proximity is not only capable of retarding the assimilation process for the immigrant generation, but for future generations as well, considering that the first generation's values will be passed on and play a vital role in the formation of future social identities. Furthermore, if one were to argue that Mexico's proximity will not affect the assimilation process for subsequent generations, the claim must also be made that there is the possibility that it will not affect the first generation either.

The importance of generation status as a determinant for identity formation is also an issue in Valentine's (2001) study of the effects of self-esteem, cultural identity, and generation status on assimilation. Valentine issued questionnaire booklets to Hispanic students from four institutes of higher education in the southern and southwestern U.S. to measure their beliefs regarding society, health, employment, cultural values and characteristics. This study indicated that there is a strong correlation between high levels of self-esteem and high levels of assimilation into mainstream American culture. In addition, Valentine suggested that

assimilation increased across generations and that a strong affiliation with the native culture of the students negatively affects assimilation. The results in this study, however, serve to oppose Valentine's findings because the interviews performed for this research demonstrate that generational status is at most a predisposition factor (meaning that it acts as a liability or tendency towards certain behavior) for ethnic identity, not a determinant (a factor that definitively influences something; that is, it creates a causal relationship between the two variables). To state that assimilation follows a linear path is to circumvent the many cases that do not follow this distinct model. Valentine also makes an interesting observation about the possible causal relationship between generation status and ethnic identity formation, suggesting that minority group members may sacrifice their cultural identity in order to increase the likelihood of success in mainstream American society. As Valentine explains, "The negative relationship between cultural assimilation and Hispanic identity supports the notion that the acculturation process functions in part as a trade-off between traditional Latino tendencies and mainstream Anglo American practices." (2001, Pp. 465). This notion implies that the assimilation process is a choice rather than a subconscious and gradual transformation, as other theorists have stated. The body of literature presented here portrays the complexity of the Mexican American female condition by emphasizing intersections between cultural expectations and the legitimacy these expectations receive once they are transformed into instruments for measuring subjective progress.

Methodology. In order to measure the degree to which the attitudes and personal opinions of Mexican women in the U.S. correspond to the expectations set forth by the classical assimilation model, a sample of Mexican women residing in the Central Valley of

California was gathered to participate in case study interviews between the months of September 2007 and November 2007. The sample size selected consisted of four women from two families. These particular subjects were selected due to their accessibility based on geographical location. Prior to the commencement of the interviews, informed consent was secured from the respondents, ensuring that each was aware of the purpose and measures of the study as well as of their right to refuse participation at any time. (Refer to Appendices A-1 through A-3 for samples of the consent forms drafted for this study.) The first two subjects interviewed accounted for two generations of one family, beginning from the immigrant generation and progressing to the second generation. An additional factor that contributed to the subject selection (except for the focus group) was that of marital status among the first generation upon first arriving to the U.S. The purpose of considering this variable was to decipher the effects of the value systems and personal identity of the first generation Mexican women and her teachings on future generations based on whether she arrived to the host country married or single.

During the research process, each subject was interviewed independently to reduce the likelihood of bias or contamination in the results. The interviews involved a series of questions regarding the personal values, beliefs, and opinions of the respondents considering issues such as gender roles within and outside of marriage, the importance of educational and occupational goals, as well as the impact of religion in Mexican culture. Each interview was recorded with a cassette recorder in order to increase the accuracy of the data collection process. Although all interviewees were asked several of the same questions in order to more accurately measure the evolution of ideology across generations, the questionnaires also included individual sets of questions that pertained to the

conditions of each specific generation. (Refer to Appendices B-1 through B-3 for samples of the questionnaires for both the individual interviews in both Spanish and English as well as the outline questionnaire used during the focus group.) Furthermore, the interviews were expected to last approximately one hour; however, considering that the questions asked were primarily open-ended and that the questionnaires themselves were merely guidelines for the interview, most of the interviews deviated from this preset time limit.

My study has adopted a qualitative approach towards data collection and analysis for several reasons. First, the study seeks to focus on the attitudes and values of Mexican American women, and in order to achieve this, the data collected must be in the form of words so that quotations may be utilized. This study is also intended to stimulate understanding of the condition of Mexican American women, a goal that cannot be reached in-depth using statistical analysis. The use of only a few cases in this study is intentional because, as qualitative research, this investigation is focused on the personal experiences of a few individuals as well as the social constructs that influence these experiences. As an example of explanatory research, this investigation builds on studies previously conducted regarding Mexican women in the U.S.. The dominant approach in these studies is to focus on assimilation models (including classical, racial/ethnic disadvantage, and the segmented assimilation models) and the adaptation process. Based on this well-established body of research, my study aims to provide reasons for the rigidity of the classical assimilation model and the rigidity of the patriarchal gender roles within Mexican culture, and to explore how these forms of rigidity has created both an internal and external dilemma for Mexican women in the U.S. who often must form their personal

identity while dealing with two distinct cultures.

The theoretical framework shaping my research concerning the social position of Mexican American women in the U.S. blends *symbolic interactionism*, as explained in the work of George Herbert Mead, with *conflict theory*, drawn primarily from theoretical writings of Karl Marx. (Other classical theorists such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman and W.E.B. Du Bois have also inspired this study). For instance, one of the key premises of symbolic interactionism is that the individual's perceptions of himself/herself and of others are based on social interaction. This notion is greatly manifested in Mexican American women, particularly those belonging to the immigrant generation, who are often forced to see themselves as "The Other" in this country when they interact with the dominant group. This realization of "otherness" consequently results in a feeling of inferiority, which sets the groundwork for not only how the dominant and minority groups perceive one another but, more importantly, how these two groups act on their perceptions. Unfortunately, this relationship fosters a condition reflected in the central premises of conflict theory. Once a minority group comes to be viewed by the dominant group as "Other," and once the minority group itself comes to recognize this identifying marker, the position and interests of each group are manifested in the social structure. For example, the primary interest of the dominant group is to maintain social status and prestige, which is usually guaranteed through economic means. Conversely, the interests of the minority groups are to gain equal opportunity for acquiring the resources necessary to survive and flourish in the host country. However, in order to achieve its goals in modern society, the dominant group resorts to the marginalization of the minority groups, thus creating a constant struggle over inequalities.

The sense of inferiority experienced by minority group members is further reinforced in this struggle as opportunities for educational growth and upward mobility become stifled.

These two theoretical frameworks can also be applied to relations between Mexican American women and men. A case in point relevant to this research: in Mexican culture the traditional roles for both men and women are readily enforced, in which men dominate by providing for their families financially, while women are expected to concern themselves primarily with childcare and home maintenance. If women are constantly viewed and treated by men and social institutions as inferior, they will to a large extent feel obligated to act correspondingly, which usually results in a sense of discontent. However, when a woman reaches a point of frustration from her unequal condition, in which her labor is degraded by being regarded as "women's work" and her potential to be a valuable asset to society is not reached, she will resist sexist ideologies and struggle to gain equality. Symbolic interactionism and conflict theory work together to reveal the complexity characterizing the social condition of Mexican women living in the U.S. The findings from this investigation reveal an interesting dichotomy between the dominant preconceptions established by the classical assimilation model and the capricious nature of the actual assimilation experience.

Findings. The results produced from my interviews revealed interesting themes regarding the diversity of the assimilation process among Mexican American women. For example, when both respondents from the immigrant generation were asked about their feelings regarding the increase of women working full time outside of the home as opposed to caring for their children and home, both felt it was a positive phenomenon because it not only helped them to develop intellectually, but it made them more

equipped to survive in current society, particularly those that were unmarried. The issue of the responsibilities a woman as a wife and mother should have also provided results that did not coincide with those found in the literature regarding this topic. When asked how they would define a “good woman,” both interviewees said that a good woman is one who prepares herself intellectually to perform capably in the workforce, in the hope of providing a better life for her husband and children. Religiosity proved to be a convoluted topic among the first generation because although both women identified themselves as being religious, they did not agree with all of the teachings of the church; for instance, they both believed that abortion and divorce were necessary in certain circumstances. One of these women, interestingly, continuously mentioned that she considered herself liberal in comparison to other Mexican women of her generation, yet she utilized the teachings of her religion (Catholicism) to justify her beliefs, regardless of the topic at hand.

Contrary to popular belief, the motivations behind the migration of the first generations and their feelings regarding their transition from one culture to another varied greatly across both respondents. For instance, one woman migrated to the U.S. for economic reasons, that is, to find more opportunities for upward economic mobility, and felt that she had learned a great deal from American culture through her exposure to various lifestyles. The other respondent, conversely, was distraught when her family decided to relocate to the U.S. because she had established her life in Mexico and felt a sense of loss and displacement that she confessed she continued to feel today. When asked to speculate as to why these feelings have not subsided despite her prolonged stay in the U.S., the respondent said that she attributed this to the fact that she did not migrate until the age of 22, an age at which she was

looking forward to establishing a life immersed in her Mexican culture. Other issues in which the two respondents defied the stereotypes based on their culture and generation status were their opinions regarding interracial relationships and homosexuality, believing that both lifestyle choices should not be judged as inappropriate. Finally, when asked whether they believed the process of assimilation to be difficult, one respondent stated that she believed that for the generations after her it was not an issue, since it is easy for them to adapt to both cultures because of their exposure to both through family and peer socialization. The other respondent, however, believed that assimilation is a problem, especially for subsequent generations because they are not fully integrated in either culture and so are in a state of “drifting.”

In regards to the two interviewees from the second generation, there was a great deal of diversity in the responses. A case in point was that although both women admitted that they maintained close ties to their families, one respondent confessed that she would not place family unity as a top priority in her life, especially when dealing with her personal goals. The other respondent, on the other hand, believed that family unity was extremely important because she felt that as a member of a minority group who is not appreciated nor accepted in this country, she must remain close to those that share her cultural heritage. While one respondent affiliated herself more with American culture because it was the culture in which she was raised and socialized, the other woman rejected American culture because she associated it with Whites, believing that it fosters racism and hatred. When these two women were also asked about their opinions regarding the process of assimilation, both admitted that they experienced problems as a result, although one attributed her struggle to the generation gap between her parents and

herself, while the other attributed it to the racism that pervades the U.S. and the feelings of “Otherness” that emerge among minority groups.

The one interviewee who belonged to the third generation admitted that she related more to American culture for lack of exposure to her Mexican heritage, however, she also believed that it is important for future generations of Mexican Americans to maintain a strong connection to their native culture, as she wishes to learn more about her family’s history in Mexico. This respondent deviated from the expectations set forth by the assimilation models by adhering to the cultural stereotype of Mexican women serving as the central figure of the home by caring for the family while maintaining family unity. The topics of sexuality and nursing homes, however, provided an interesting middle ground among all respondents. A case in point was that all the subjects stated that women should remain virgins until marriage for religious and cultural issues, since according to them Mexican men take pride in marrying “pure” women. However, when asked about their opinions concerning the existence of nursing homes, the responses differed between families. All three generations of the first family interviewed believed that nursing homes were necessary because it is not always possible for the children of the elderly to care for them properly. The second family, conversely, believed that sending their elders to nursing homes was a sign of ingratitude and disrespect, comparing it to “throwing aside a pair of old shoes when they are no longer appealing.” Overall, the responses to the questionnaire produced wide-ranging results that may be attributed to a variety of factors.

Discussion. The results from the interviews demonstrate the impact that multiple factors have in contributing not only to ideology but also to the progression of assimilation and

ethnic identity. For example, both women in the first generation obtained a greater degree of education that is normally expected from Mexican immigrants, especially when dealing with those within the working class. This higher degree of education, as hypothesized in this study, is found to have a causal relationship to the acceptance of the “liberal” ideals that define American culture. Although both immigrant women affiliate more with Mexican culture, they are far more accepting of the norms in the U.S. than would be expected by American society, an expectation that has been internalized as a result of a classical assimilation model.

The differences between the second-generation women in regards to their reasoning behind the struggle attributed to assimilation are another example of the complexities that this process entails. Although both women were raised in similar socioeconomic conditions as well as in locations that are geographically in proximity to one another, one woman credited her struggles to the lack of understanding between her parents and herself, while the other placed a great deal of emphasis on racism as the cause of her struggle. This fact demonstrates that peer socialization may also play a pivotal role in assimilation, since the racism experienced by the second respondent caused her to embrace her Mexican heritage more while simultaneously rejecting Anglo-American culture, a response not expected from this generation. As a whole, the results demonstrate a good degree of overlapping in beliefs as well as deviations from American stereotypes, indicating that assimilation is an intricate process involving a great degree of intersection between a multitude of factors that cannot be explained through quantitative measurements or assimilation to a linear continuum.

Conclusion. This explanatory study utilizing qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis has stated the research question

involving the extent to which Mexican women in the U.S. assimilate in accordance to the standardized assimilation model and its effects on the future of race relations in the population at large. A detailed account of the methods implemented to measure the research questions was offered as well as a brief synopsis of the body of literature available regarding this issue. The interview findings were utilized to support the argument that the classical assimilation model is obsolete due to its rigidity in the description of the evolution of the adaptation process. Moreover, this study deviates from the majority of the studies regarding this condition because this investigation proposes that regardless of the manner in which the current assimilation measures are refined, the existence of a fixed model will continue to generalize and marginalize the assimilation experience by overlooking the unpredictable nature of this process. This study is also intended to promote further investigation about the effects of the current knowledge and beliefs about the assimilation of Mexican women in the U.S., particularly for the third generation and beyond.

Implications. To end by expanding on that note, human beings, particularly sociologists, have a compulsive need to categorize every element in society, and this compulsion is particularly magnified in American society as cultural diversity continues to expand. The central message of this study is that this tendency needs to be counteracted insofar as

is possible in regards to the assimilation process if any true progress is to be made in the future of race and ethnic relations. It is essential to continue studying the issue of assimilation as the political climate of this society continues to change. Because policymakers and the public often inquire regarding the condition of particular minority groups in terms of education and employment, it is critical to examine the extent to which discrimination affects these areas so that a path towards social reform may be paved.

Accordingly, this issue is of extreme relevance in American society because it speaks volumes about the manner in which American ideology contradicts American action. This country prides itself on promoting the concepts of individualism, equality, and perseverance. However, it neglects to consider that success is largely determined by not only an individual's acceptance of the culture, but more importantly of the culture and society's acceptance of the individual. This topic also deals with the enveloping influence of cultural heritage and gender identity, all determinants of the "progress" that an individual is capable of exercising. More importantly, the condition of Mexican women in the U.S. today, particularly their struggle to adapt and be accepted, demonstrates the struggle immigrants have experienced throughout history and that immigrants may expect in the future.

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Appendix A-1

FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO PARA ENTREVISTA

Mi nombre es Rocío García. Soy una estudiante universitaria no licenciada en el programa de sociología en la Universidad del estado de California en Stanislaus. Estoy trabajando en una tesis como requisito para el Programa Avanzado en la universidad. El propósito de la investigación es examinar cómo ha cambiado el sistema de valores morales de las mujeres en la cultura mexicana a través de las generaciones viviendo en los EE.UU.

Me gustaría obtener su permiso para entrevistarla y utilizar sus comentarios en mi estudio. La entrevista duraría aproximadamente una hora. Su nombre no sería usado en ninguna parte del estudio. Toda la información colectada se mantendría confidencial. No sería obligada a responder a cual quieres preguntas que le causen un sentido de incomodidad. En cualquier momento durante la entrevista tendría el derecho de abstenerse de continuar su participación sin preguntas ni objeciones de mi parte. *{Con su permiso, preferiría usar una grabadora durante la entrevista para tener la oportunidad de estudiar sus respuestas después cuando formule mis conclusiones. Le aseguro que las cintas serán destruidas cuando complete mis estudios.}*

Es importante mencionar que este estudio incluye investigación sobre algunos temas delicados, como por ejemplo, la sexualidad femenina y su relación con la Iglesia Católica. Si se siente incómoda con algunas de las preguntas durante la entrevista, tiene el derecho de parar su participación a cualquier momento sin objeciones de mi parte.

Si tiene preguntas sobre este estudio o su participación, se puede poner en contacto conmigo al número de teléfono (209) 233-1672. También puede hablar con mi consejero, Dr. Ángel Sánchez, al número telefónico (209) 664-6831. Si tiene preguntas sobre sus derechos y participación como asignatura, por favor de ponerse en contacto con Lauren Gee, la oficial de acatamiento en la Universidad del Estado de California en Stanislaus, al número telefónico (209) 667-3747.

Notar: No hay compensación financiera por participar en este estudio.

Declaración de Consentimiento:

He leído y entiendo este formulario de consentimiento, y he decido ser voluntaria en este estudio. Entiendo que recibiré una copia de este formulario. He decido voluntariamente participar, pero entiendo que mi consentimiento no me quita mis derechos legales en caso de negligencia o cualquier otra falta legal de todos involucrados en este estudio. También reconozco que nada en este formulario de consentimiento pretende reemplazar cual quieres leyes federales, del estado, o locales.

Firma _____

Nombre en letra de imprenta _____

Fecha _____

Appendix A-2

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

My name is Rocio Garcia. I am an undergraduate student in the Sociology Program at California State University, Stanislaus. I am performing research for a thesis project I am writing as a requirement for the University Honors Program. The study looks at value maintenance among women within Mexican American culture across generations.

I would like your permission to interview you and use your comments in my study. The interview will last approximately one hour. Your name will not be used in the study. All information collected will remain confidential. You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable in any fashion. You may stop participating at any time during the interview with no objections from me. *{With your permission, I would like to use a cassette recorder to have the opportunity to better study your responses. I assure you that the tapes will be destroyed after completing my study.}*

This study involves inquiry about certain sensitive topics, including, for instance, sexuality and its relationship to the Catholic Church. If you feel any degree of discomfort by certain questions, you are free to refrain from participation.

If you have questions regarding the study or your participation, you may contact me at (209) 233-1672). You may also contact my adviser, Dr. Angel Sanchez, at (209) 664-6831. If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact Lauren Gee, Campus Compliance, California State University, Stanislaus at (209) 667-3747.

Note: There is no financial compensation for your participation in this research.

Consent Statement:

I have read and understood this consent form, and I volunteer to participate in this research study. I understand that I will receive a copy of this form. I voluntarily choose to participate, but I understand that my consent does not take away any legal rights in the case of negligence or other legal fault of anyone who is involved in this study. I further understand that nothing in this consent form is intended to replace any applicable Federal, state, or local laws.

Signature _____

Printed name _____

Date _____

Appendix B-1

First Generation Guideline Questionnaire

1. ¿Qué edad tiene?
2. ¿Habla inglés?
3. ¿En qué año emigro a los Estados Unidos?
4. ¿De que parte de México es usted?
5. ¿Cuántos hijos tuvo y a qué edad empezó a tenerlos? (Si tienen hijos de los dos géneros, preguntar si los trata diferentes basado en su género)
6. ¿A qué edad se casó? ¿Cree que se caso a una buena edad?
7. ¿Cuáles fueron sus responsabilidades como esposa o como mujer soltera cuando vivió en México?
8. ¿Cuánta educación recibió en México antes de venir aquí? ¿Estudió en este país también?
9. ¿Qué carrera le hubiera gustado tener en este país?
10. ¿Cuáles fueron sus responsabilidades como esposa o como mujer soltera cuando empezó a vivir en los Estados Unidos?
11. ¿Si trabajo aquí, cuál fue su ocupación?
12. ¿Estuvo de acuerdo su esposo con el hecho de que trabajara?
13. ¿Qué opina sobre el hecho de que muchas más mujeres estén trabajando tiempo completo en vez de quedarse en casa cuidando sus familias?
14. ¿Cree que está bien que el esposo se quede en casa y la esposa salga a trabajar?
15. Existe controversia entre la comunidad mexicana sobre el machismo y marianismo.
¿Cree que la cultura mexicana esta estructurada en una manera que oprime a las mujeres?
¿Cree que las mujeres ayudan a mantener el machismo?
16. ¿Cómo compararía las relaciones entre los hombres y las mujeres en México contra los Estados Unidos?
17. ¿Cree que las mujeres mexicanas han progresado en este país en los últimos cuarenta años?
18. ¿Cómo define usted a una “buena mujer?”
19. ¿Qué opina sobre el hecho de que mas mujeres avancen con sus educaciones y al mismo tiempo ponga menos importancia en comenzar una familia?
20. ¿Qué opina sobre las mujeres que decides no casarse y no tener hijos porque sólo se quieren enfocan en sus carreras?
21. ¿Se considera ser religiosa? Si lo es, ¿a cual religión pertenece? ¿Cree completamente en todas las enseñanzas de su religión? ¿Por qué sí o por qué no?
22. ¿Qué opina sobre el divorcio?
23. ¿Qué opina sobre la homosexualidad?
24. ¿Qué opina sobre el aborto?
25. ¿Cree que las enseñanzas de su religión ayudan a oprimir a las mujeres?
26. ¿Cree que los hombres y las mujeres deben de ser vírgenes cuando se casan? ¿Por qué?
27. ¿Es apropiado que las mujeres disfruten las relaciones sexuales al igual que los hombres?

28. ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre gente de diferentes razas que deciden casarse? ¿Cree que esto afecta a la cultura mexicana en alguna manera?
29. ¿Para quién cree que es más difícil vivir en este país, los hombres o las mujeres? ¿Es igual de difícil para los dos géneros?
30. ¿Cree que es mejor para las futuras generaciones mantener una conexión con sus raíces como mexicanos o es mejor adaptar a las costumbres americanas?
31. ¿Mira televisión en español? ¿Le gusta?
32. ¿Qué tan importante cree que es mantener la familia unida?
33. ¿Qué opina sobre la existencia de clínicas de reposo para los ancianos?
34. ¿Esta de acuerdo con las costumbres americanas que usted reconoce? ¿Si hay algunas, cuáles son? ¿Cree que la cultura americana le da mas oportunidades para igualdad a las mujeres en comparación con México o es igual?
35. ¿Cree que la cultura mexicana previene a las mujeres de avanzar en sus metas?
36. ¿Cree que es difícil para las generaciones después de usted balancearse entre dos culturas tan distintas? ¿Considera esta situación un problema?

Appendix B-2

Second Generation Guideline Questionnaire

1. How old are you?
2. Where in the U.S. were you born?
3. When asked what race/ethnicity you are, how do you answer? Why do you choose that particular term?
4. Are you or have you ever been married? If so, at what age did you get or would want to get married? Do you think this is/was a good age to engage in such a commitment?
5. Do you have children? If so, how many? If not, would you want to have children some day? At what age would you want to begin having children? How many would you want and why?
6. Do you have siblings? If so, do you think your mother treats you differently based on your gender?
7. What do you think should be the roles of a man and a woman in a marriage?
8. What are your academic accomplishments thus far and what are your future goals?
9. What is your current occupation? Was this your ultimate goal?
10. Do you speak Spanish?
11. How do you feel about more women having full-time careers instead of staying at home full-time caring for their families? Did you mom teach you anything about the importance of education or having a family? If so, what?
12. How do you feel about women being the sole breadwinners while men stay at home caring for the home and children?
13. Do you consider it okay for a woman to ever have to face a decision between career advancement and family responsibilities?
14. Do you think Mexican American women have progressed in the last forty years? How so?
15. Generally speaking, how do you define a “good woman”? Do you think your definition is influenced by or clashes with that of your mothers’?

16. There is a lot of controversy regarding machismo in Mexican culture. Do you think this culture is structured in a way that oppresses women? If so, do women enable this oppression?
17. How much value do you think women should place on obtaining an education? What about in starting a family? How much value should males place on these issues?
18. Do you think it is acceptable for a woman to decide not to marry and focus on her career instead? How do you feel about a man making this same decision? How do you think both American and Mexican culture would view both situations?
19. Do you think maintaining family unity should be a priority? Is there a difference between how Mexican and American cultures approach this issue?
20. Do you feel it is more difficult for Mexican American women to live and succeed in the U.S. or is it equally difficult for both genders?
21. Do you think Mexican culture prevents women from advancing in certain fields?
22. How do you feel about interracial dating? Do you think it affects the future of Mexican American culture?
23. Do you consider yourself religious? If so, what religion are you affiliated with? How accurate do you consider the teachings of your religion in regards to applying them to real life?
24. How do you feel about divorce?
25. How do you feel about homosexuality?
26. How do you feel about abortion?
27. Do you believe that your religion's teachings are sexist towards women in any way?
28. Do you think that both men and women should be virgins until marriage?
29. Do you think it is acceptable for a woman to enjoy sex as much as a man and still be considered a "lady"?
30. Do you think it is important for future generations to maintain their cultural heritage or is it better to adapt to U.S. culture since they will be living here?
31. How do you feel about the existence of nursing homes?
32. What are some of the most important lessons your mom taught you about being Mexican or being a woman? Do you think her teachings have influenced what you believe in?
33. Do you agree with American customs? Which ones? Do you think American culture provides Mexican American women with more equality than Mexican culture?
34. Do you watch ethnic media? Do you like it? Why or why not?
35. Do you think it is difficult for your generation and future generations to balance both Mexican and American cultures considering how contradictory their value systems are?