Acculturative Stress, Cultural Values, and the Psychological Well-Being of Latino/a and Korean American Adolescents

Latinos and Latinas compromise the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States (Marotta &Garcia, 2003), and Asians compromise the second fastest growing ethnic minority group (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004; Kim & Omizo, 2003). In 2000, there were 32.8 million Latinos/Latinas residing in the United States, representing 12% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002), and there were more than 10.2 million Asians living in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004) of which 1.2 million were of Korean decent representing 11% of the total Asian population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004). A large proportion of Latinos/as are under the age of 18 (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2006), representing the fastest growing group of young people in the US (Chapa & Valencia, 1993). Latina adolescent girls make up 15.2 % of all the girls in the United States, constituting the largest minority group of girls in the U.S. (COSSMHO, 1999). As Latinos/as and Korean Americans become part of the U.S. society, there is a great need to understand how Latino and Korean American adolescents adapt to American culture.

Methodological Considerations

While Latino/a and Asian populations vary tremendously in terms of nationality, migration histories, language, cultural nuances, levels of experienced discrimination, class, socioeconomic status, skin color, reasons for immigration, and educational level, research conducted with these groups tend to generalize findings from one subgroup (e.g. Mexican American or Chinese American) to the larger group (e.g. Latinos/Latinas or Asian American) (Smith, 2004). However, generalizations that are often made across

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ethnic minority subgroups can be at times inaccurate and misleading (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2001). For example, while 36% of Mexican households are composed of five or more people, only 14% of Cuban households are composed of five or more people (Thierren & Ramirez, 2000). Despite these within-group differences, generalizations like the following are commonly made; "Hispanics live in family households that are larger than those of non-Hispanic Whites (Umaña-Taylor et. al., 2001)" providing misleading descriptions of Latino/a subgroups. There is a similar tendency to make brought generalizations in psychological research with cultural minorities. For example, in one study, Portes & Zady (2002) compared Colombian, Cuban in private schools, Cuban in public schools, Mexican, and Nicaraguan 8th and 9th graders in regard to self-esteem. They found that these groups differed significantly in their predictors of self-esteem suggesting that Latino adolescents adapt differently to different circumstances which warrants attention to within-group differences.

In addition to acknowledging demographic variations, special attention to within-group differences is needed in terms of measure development, norming, (Umaña et. al, 2001) and utilization. For example, measures that are developed for research with Mexican Americans may not necessarily be applicable with other Latino/a national groups, and measures developed for Chinese Americans may not be applicable for Korean Americans. Yet, many researchers conducting research with Latino and Asian populations utilize the same measure across subgroups because of the lack of culture or group specific measures rendering some research results questionable. This is particularly true when measuring cultural values. For example, in a study investigating the role of cultural values on the mental health of Korean adolescents, Hovey, Kim, & Seligman

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(2006) utilized the Asian Value Scale to measure adherence to Asian cultural values in general but not Korean cultural values specifically. Future research studies should aim at developing and testing standardized group or culture-specific measures for research with both Latinos/as and Korean Americans.

Research with Latino/as is just beginning to tease apart differences between various Latino/a subgroups (Epstein, Botvin, & Diaz, 2002; Erkut and Tracy, 2002) making it difficult to distinguish the implications of within-group differences on psychological phenomena, acculturation, as well as cultural values, traditions, and beliefs. While most research has been done with Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, and Puerto Ricans, little is known about other Latino/a subgroups. Thus, culture or group-specific research with other Latino subgroups is needed. While, the author acknowledges the importance of including and distinguishing between the various Latino/a subgroups, in this paper, the author follows the tradition of referring to the general category of "Latinos/as" when reviewing research findings and descriptions of Latino/a cultural values because doing otherwise would be difficult if not impossible.

While research with Latino/as has mainly included Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans, it seems that much of the research with Asian Americans was conducted with Japanese and Chinese populations. However, there is a sufficient number of studies that focuses on the experiences of Korean Americans exclusively, and there is enough written material about Korean cultural values that this paper can focus on Korean American adolescents.

Acculturative Stress and the Psychological Well-being of Latino/a and Korean American Adolescents

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Many Latino and Korean American immigrant adolescents seem to experience stress due to clashing values between their culture of origin and American culture (Portes et al., 2006; Thomas & Choi, 2006; Zayas et al., 2005). These adolescents may have to negotiate their space between two or more cultures and they may have to navigate between multiple cultures and languages in school and at home. Ethnic minority adolescents may feel pulled by American culture and may desire to fit in and identify with the benefits of belonging to mainstream US culture. At the same time, they may be aware that they are rejected by American society (e.g. discrimination), and they may be afraid of displeasing their parents who may want their children to maintain their cultural roots and values. In addition, acculturating adolescents may be afraid to displease their community and lose the social support they receive from their community (Portes et al., 2005; Thomas & Choi, 2006; Hovey et al., 2006). These negotiations can be challenging for immigrant children and take a heavy toll on their mental health (Hovey et al., 1996; Romero, Carvajal, Valle, & Orduña, 2007; Aldwin & Greenberg, 1987; Hovey et al., 2006).

Latino adolescents tend to report lower levels of psychological well-being compared to non-Hispanic white children. They suffer from depression and dysphoria more often than non-Latino white adolescents (Locke, Newcomb, Duclos, and Goodyear, 2007, Hovey & King, 1996). Compared to other ethnic minority and non-Latino white adolescents, Latinos tend to report lower rates of self-esteem (Portes et al., 2002). Overall, Latina girls tend to do worse on these outcomes than Latino boys (Hovey and King, 1996; Benjet & Hernandez-Guzman, 2001), and they tend to have higher rates of suicide attempt compared to other ethnic minority girls and non-Latina white girls

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(Razin, O'Dowd, Nathan, Rodriguez, Goldfield, Martin, Goulet, Scheftel, Mezan, & Mosca, 1991; Zayas, Lester, Cabassa, & Fortuna (2005). Researchers often link lower levels of psychological well-being among Latino adolescents to acculturative stress (Cuellar & Roberts, 1997; Portes et al., 2002; Hovey et al., 1996; Razin et al., 1991; Romero et al., 2007), and they posit that gender differences in psychological well-being among Latino adolescents exist because girls experience more family conflict, and thus, more acculturation related stress than boys (Gil & Vazquez, 1996; Zayas et al., 2005).

Little is known about the role of acculturative stress on the psychological well-being of acculturating Korean American adolescents. Researchers have found that Korean American adults experience more depression compared to Anglo and other Asian groups (Kuo, 1984); Hurh & Kim, 1990), and they link depression in Korean American adults to the influence of environmental stressors, many of which seem to be related to acculturative stress (Hovey et al., 2006; Aldwin et al., 1987). Researchers have found that greater levels of acculturative stress are related to increased depression in Korean American adults (Hovey et al., 2006). In regard to Korean youth, Thomas et al. (2006) found that Korean adolescents experience low to moderate levels of acculturative stress. These and other researchers propose that the challenge of coping with acculturative stress has led to family conflicts between adolescents and their parents (Yu & Kim, 1983; Hovey et al., 2006). These findings suggest that acculturation related stress might influence the psychological well-being of Korean adolescents.

Romero et al. (2007) compared Latino/a, Asian American, and European American 8th graders in regards to bicultural stress (i.e. stress due to everyday life stressors that result from pressure to adopt the majority culture as well as the pressure to

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adopt to minority cultures) and mental well-being and found that Latino/a and Asian American 8th graders experienced more stress related to immigration issues than their European American counterparts. They also found that acculturative stress significantly predicted depressive symptoms in both boys and girls and lower levels of optimism only in girls. Thus, it seems that both Latino/a and Korean American adolescents experience acculturation related stress, but it is not clear whether acculturation related stress is associated with poor psychological well-being in Korean adolescents.

Acculturative stress has been defined as the stress caused by the acculturation process (Berry and Kim, 1988; Williams and Berry, 1991). Acculturation entails the cultural, social, and psychological changes that occur in groups and individuals when they are in continuous contact and interaction with groups and individuals from another culture (Williams et al., 1991). Stressors include discrimination, negative stereotypes, intergenerational acculturation gaps, and the pressure to speak two languages (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Romero & Roberts, 2003). Acculturation related changes may result in feelings of depression, anxiety, feelings of alienation, and identity confusion. Berry refers to acculturation as a process of resocialization because it takes place after an individual or group of individuals has been socialized into their culture of origin (Williams et al., 1991). In order to understand the challenges of the resocialization process for ethnic minority immigrant children, researchers often examine how the cultural values, traditions, and expectations of the child's family clash with the cultural values, traditions, and expectations of the host culture (Zayas et al., 2005; Toamino et al., 1997; Aldwin et al., 1987).

Latino Cultural Values

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Cultural values depicted in the literature as influencing the socialization of the Latino child often include the values of "familismo", "marianismo", "machismo", and the interrelated value of "respeto" (Torres, 1998). ***Familismo*** reflects the cultural socialization of the family. It emphasizes the maintenance of family cohesion, obligations to relatives, strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, solidarity among family members, familial interconnectedness, and the role of the nuclear and extended family in an individual's self-identity and social world. Many Latino adolescents are socialized into the belief that the family comes before the individual. They may be expected to sacrifice their own needs and desires if they interfere with the needs of the family. Many Latino children may be expected to remain near their families in order to be involved in every day activities. Familismo includes deference and respect to parents' and the family's needs (Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003). ***Respeto*** governs all positive reciprocal interpersonal relations. It dictates appropriate deferential behavior towards older people, parents, and relatives (Torres, 1998)

In contrast to American culture, familismo emphasizes interdependence. American mainstream culture values individuality and autonomy and thus, researchers posit that more acculturated adolescents of low acculturated parents may experience greater conflict in the home due to the clashing values of the two cultures (Portes et al., 2002). This seems to be particularly true when Latino children acculturate to the host culture at a faster pace than their parents. This acculturation gap can lead to conflict between the parents and the child (Szapocnik, Scopetta, & King, 1978; Szapocznik & Williams, 2000).

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Researchers often propose that differences in gender role socialization and expectations are linked to gender differences in psychological well-being among Latino boys and Latina girls (Smith, 2004; Zayas et al., 2005; Gil et al.1996). While girls are being socialized into the ***marianismo*** belief, boys are being socialized into the ***machismo*** belief. Females are "socialized to be passive, demure, and hyper responsible for family obligations, unity and harmony" (Zayas et al., 2005; Gil & Vazques, 1996). They are expected to be passive, obedient, and homebound. They are perceived as defenseless and vulnerable and as needing protection from their fathers, brothers, husbands, and sons. The "marianismo" belief is rooted on the cult of the Virgin Mary. Women are considered spiritually superior to men and better capable than men to endure all suffering (Torres, 1998; Bracero, 1998). Furthermore, females are expected to self-sacrifice in favor of their mothers, fathers, brothers, children and husbands. Girls and women are expected to accept male authority (Ramos-McKay, Comas-Diaz, & Rivera, 1988; Torres, 1998). Latino boys, on the other hand, are socialized to perceive themselves as dominant of women. Boys are socialized into believing that they have authority over their sisters, wifes, and children. The machismo belief emphasizes self-respect and responsibility for protecting and providing for the family (Torres, 1998). Men and boys are expected to protect their family from dangers (Gil et al., 1996; p. 5) The machismo belief also teaches boys and men to be gentlemen. Men are taught to offer the best seat at the movies to their "dama", to stand up to give a woman his seat on the subway, to carry heavy packages, to always open the door for a lady, and to help with the heavy household chores.

Both boys and girls are socialized into the belief that boys have options and women have duties. They learn to believe that "a man's place is in the world, and a

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woman's place is in the home." For girls this means their brothers are praised for being ambitious and for going out on dates, while girls are discouraged for that same qualities and behaviors (Gil et al., 1996; p. 6)

Researchers posit that Latina girls experience more acculturative stress than Latino boys because of the greater dissonance between the expectation of American and Latino culture for girls. Latino culture allows and expects boys to be more independent than girls (Ho, 1987). Thus, girls may experience more conflict than boys in the home and greater emotional dissonance due to the bigger culture clash between the girl's family expectations and the demands of American culture (Zayas et al, 2006). The following excerpts from two interviews with Latina girls shows how gender role expectations can play out in the family context and create family conflict (, p. 52; Ayala, J. (2006) in Latina Girls, p.35).

> *"Chela (15 years): Because I would say, I would complain about my brother. I would complain that my brother didn't do nothing around the house, and he (dad) would say, "Oh, well, he goes to work and you guys have to clean." And one time I was, like, I go to work, I go to school, I clean, I babysit! I was, like, so what. And I guess he got mad at me for telling him, but I guess finally he (dad) realized that I was right. So I told him, "If it's my job to be here and to clean, why bother going to school, or going to work?" He was, like-I guess he realized, I guess he was mad, but he realized it. So that was the situation and that lasted for a while."(Gallegos-Castillo, A. (2006) in Latina Girls, p. 52)*

> *"Interviewer: Have you ever been treated unfairly because you're a girl?"*
> *Michelle (16 years): Only with my mother….She's always saying, like my brother can go out all the time, me, I have to tell her and I give the phone number of where I'm going, a list of things before I go out, beforehand, like I have to be home at a certain time and if I'm not there, she'll come out looking for me, only because I'm a girl."*
> *(Ayala, J. (2006) in Latina Girls, p.35)*

Many Hispanic families exert authoritarian parenting supported by cultural beliefs that emphasize deference and "respeto" to parents, restriction on adolescent autonomy, and family unity. Parents may wish that their children grow in understanding both cultures. They may not want to lose their children to American society or to allow their children to

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act in ways that conflict with the values of their culture of origin. They may want to protect their children from harm caused by the rejection from a discriminating host culture (Portes et al., 2002). The adolescent's desire for autonomy, to fit in, and the demands from the broader social-cultural environment about adolescent individuality and autonomy can create intense family conflict and emotional dissonance in the acculturating Latino/a child. The child may be worried about parental disapproval and feel that family unit is in danger (Zayas et al. 2005; Portes et al, 2001). The dissonance between a child's independent self and his or her related self may present an existential threat to the child (Zayas et al., 2005). The child's feelings of inadequacy in the presence of such stressors may promote depression (Rumbaut, 2001), low self-esteem, anxiety, and hopelessness. These conflicts may lead to alienation between parents and their adolescent daughters and sons (Portes et al., 2002; Cuellar et al., 1997; Zayas et al., 2005).

Many explanations to account for low levels of psychological well-being among Latino/a adolescents and gender differences have been posited. However, few studies address and examine these assumptions in research studies. Researchers suggest identifying and examining the precise aspect of culture that relate to acculturation and psychological well-being in ethnic minority adolescents. While cross-cultural studies compare groups on different measures and conclude that differences are due to differences in cultural values only few examine and unpack culture directly (Betancourt et al., 1993). While many studies have examined the role of familismo and family support in the lives of Latino/a children, no study has examined the role of marianismo and machismo in the lives of these children. Researchers propose to incorporate specific measures of culture-specific values (e.g. marianismo, familismo, collectivism when

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pertinent to the conceptual model) in order to examine and unpack the role of culture on psychological well-being (Hovey et al., 2006; Betancourt & Lopez, 1993). This is particularly important as traditional cultural values in immigrants may vary according to their acculturation level. Traditional cultural values are often reshaped and redefined (Thomas et al., 2006) as immigrants meet the challenges of their new cultural context (Bracero, 1998; Barry, Bernard, & Beitel, 2006) and as immigrants acculturate to their host culture. Therefore, future research studies should aim at examining and unpacking those cultural values linked in research to acculturative stress and psychological well-being in the lives of Latina/o adolescents.

Korean Cultural Values

Cultural values depicted in research as influencing the socialization of Korean children include the cultural tradition of collectivism, the philosophy of Confucius, and the importance placed on learning and academic achievement. Korean children are often socialized into the philosophy of Confucius, which emphasizes human dignity, which can only be achieved through relations to other human beings (Toamino et al., 1997). The importance of human relationships is often seen in the cultural value of collectivism. Collectivism emphasizes self-discipline and dedication by the individual. The family is at the center of the social unity and individuals are expected to sacrifice individual needs to maintain harmonious relations within the family (Toamino et al., 1997; Aldwin et al., 1987). The value of collectivism in Korean culture contradicts the American cultural value of individualism. While individualistic cultures consider ones self as an independent entity, collectivistic cultures consider the self as an extension of a particular group. In American culture it is acceptable to promote the self over the group. This is not

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socially acceptable in Korean culture, where individuals are expected to suppress individual over collective needs. While individual creativity is encouraged in American culture, Korean culture values conformity.

Researcher have found that Korean American college students living within the contradicting values of American and Korean culture report greater levels of stress and depressive symptoms (Aldwin et al., 1987). They found that Korean students, who had parents with higher academic standards than their own and who perceived their parents adhering to traditional values while they endorsed modern values, reported higher levels of depressive symptoms. They found that parents' adherence to traditional values was the variable most strongly associated with depression, and parental adherence to modern values was the only variable that was associated with decreased depression. Thus, researchers suggest that Korean youth who have to navigate American and Korean cultural values may experience greater levels of stress and depression than Caucasian youth. Furthermore, researchers propose that within "the context of traditional values the importance placed on learning and academic achievement in Asian cultures may have special relevance to the mental health status of Asian-American students."

In another study, Korean and Indian immigrant adolescents reported that the parents' tendency to compare them to other children in terms of their obedience, discipline and better manners was the most stressful situation (Thomas et al., 2006). Thomas et al. suggest that while parents want to instill the values of respect, obedience and good manners in their children, they also want to see their children succeed and realize the American dream. Korean and Indian immigrant adolescents, however, seem to find these expectations very stressful.

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While research shows that Korean adolescents experience acculturative stress, little is known how boys and girls differ in terms of acculturative stress and psychological well-being. Confucian philosophical teaching differentiates proper behavior and gender role expectations for both women and men (Hong, Yamamoto, Chang, & Lee, 1999). This suggests that Korean women and men, girls and boys may be exposed to different stressors and therefore, experience the acculturative process and its consequences in different ways. Future research studies, should aim at investigating gender differences in acculturative stress and well-being among Korean adolescent girls and boys.

Conclusion

Many Latino/a and Korean American adolescents live between two cultures and have to navigate the two cultures they live in. This process seems to be stressful to both Latino/a and Korean American adolescents. Acculturative stress seems to take a heavy toll on the psychological well-being of these adolescents. Latina girls do worse on these outcomes than Latino boys. Little is known about gender differences among Korean American adolescents. Future studies should examine gender differences in mental well-being among Korean American adolescent girls. While there's great variation among Latinos/as, researchers often fail to acknowledge within-group differences. Therefore, future studies should aim at teasing apart the different Latino/a subgroups. Many cultural explanations have been posited to account for lower levels of psychological well-being among immigrant children compared to non-immigrant white children, but few studies have examined and unpacked culture directly. Therefore, future studies should aim at examining and unpacking cultural concepts linked to psychological well-being in immigrant children.

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